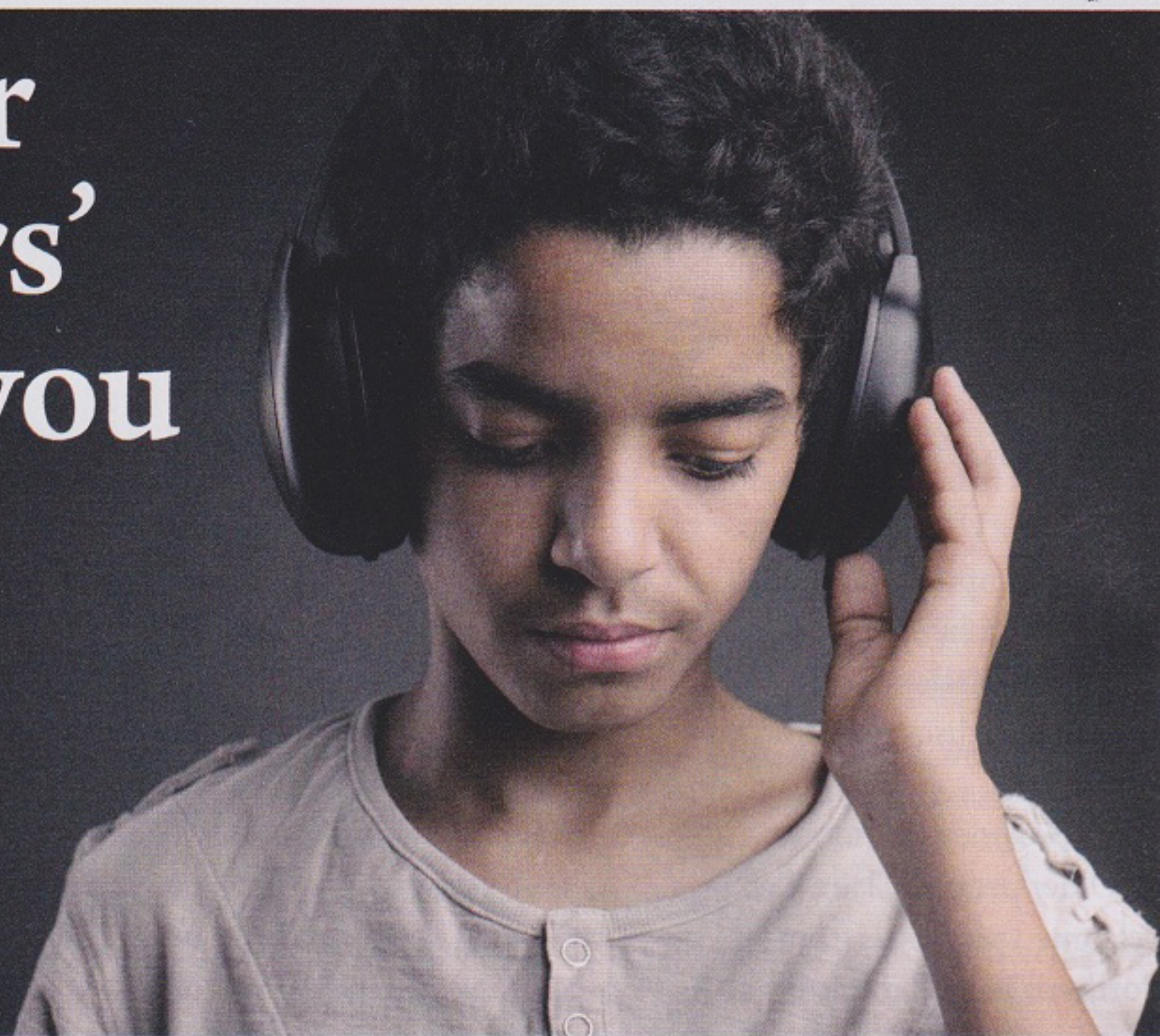


You can't hear your ancestors' stories – but you can tell yours

Radio producer **Claire Peyton Jones** runs **Portraits in Sound**, one of several companies that help people to record their voices for future generations



WE ARE surrounded by loved ones in pictures and objects around our homes – but one thing that brings them rushing into focus is their voice in person, on the phone, or in a recording.

On my desk I have my grandmother's ivory letter opener. When I use it I remember her with pleasure – cycling round to her house after school when I knew she was having a bridge afternoon so I could soak up the approbation of her friends and eat quantities of cake.

The carved elephant at the end of the letter opener brings to mind the tales of her childhood in India. I can remember some, and can pass on these stories to my grandchildren one day. But what a marvellous thing it would be if I had a recording of her telling these stories herself.

Now a small number of businesses specialise in just this, appreciating what a vital thing the voice is in carrying the personality. For a reasonable fee they will record someone talking about their life and create a lasting record of that person's life history.

Many of these businesses are run by people with a background in radio and work to broadcast standards.

They argue that audio is as much a visual medium as film is because it encourages you to see pictures in your mind. It is much easier to imagine an elderly person as a child if you are not looking at them as they are now.

Another advantage of being interviewed using just a microphone is that it is easier for an inexperienced interviewee to relax and unfold if they are not worrying about what they look like.

There are several companies and they have different styles. Portraits In Sound specialises in making a lively listen by cutting out the voice of the interviewer so all the focus is on the subject, editing the interview to sharpen and structure it and illustrate it with music and sound effects.

Lives on Record and Lifetime-stories provide the interview edited as a two-way conversation.

Spoken Memoirs has an oral history perspective – the

interview forms the basis of writing a memoir, so the interview itself is largely unedited and the attention goes into making the text more fluent.

I suggest you browse their websites, listen to examples, decide which you like the sound of most, and discuss it with them to make your choice.

So who should consider it? One company I spoke to suggested it was not just for the over-seventies with a dramatic story to tell – but ordinary people of any age with a family they love.

One woman who had a portrait in sound made to give to her grandchildren was pleased to see that they loved it. But she was astonished by the dramatic effect the recording had in reconciling her to her estranged sister. Memories of a shared childhood possibly healed the breach.

Exploring our ancestry is an increasingly popular pastime. Imagine being able to hear your great-great grandfather talking about his life. Now you can ensure that will be easy for the generations to come.

www.
portraitsinsound.
co.uk
(based in London
and Chichester)

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