



LOOKING FORWARD: Peter and Kay Bales go through their family albums with Lisa Chait. The family is one of a growing number of people keen to document their history for their descendents. PICTURE: THOMAS HOLDER

Bringing the past towards the future

LYNNETTE JOHNS
Business Writer

A FORMER radio personality has turned her hobby of recording family histories into a business.

Lisa Chait and her team spend weeks turning a family's oral and document history into memoirs for descendents. The work, which ends up as a documentary divided into chapters, is burnt on to a DVD and also posted online so that descendents for generations to come will be able to watch and hear their ancestors talking across decades.

Chait started the business last year after documenting her grandfather's life for the benefit of her family.

"I really enjoyed doing it and then I saw a gap in the market for people who wanted to leave a legacy but would not write a book, an opportunity for people to talk across time and geography. Many people wish they knew something about their grandparents."

Chait said since starting the business she had learnt to be clear about costing and the budget and not to be shy to ask people for an upfront deposit.

"Even though this is my

passion, Life Stories is a business and I contract a number of people from camera operators to editors and they all have to be paid."

Peter Bales and his family recently employed Chait and her team to document their life stories. Bales is chairman of the Cape Long Distance Swimming Association. He was also the first South African to swim the English channel. His daughter Kim Bowen encouraged her parents to allow Chait into their home and history.

Family photographs and meticulously kept documents augment the oral history of the

family as far back as they can remember.

Bales and his wife wanted to leave their descendents a legacy so that they could tap into lessons learnt, words of wisdom, where their ancestors come from and some family skeletons. One of Bales's grandfathers was Len Neame, a former Cape Argus editor and author of a number of books.

Bales said they were pleased that the family history would be available for decades because he and his wife did not know enough about their own ancestors.

Lynnette.johns@inl.co.za