

ENTREPRENEURS

A business takes flight with memory and desire

By Sherry Wade
Staff Writer

Audrey Galeax and Sara Ghitis have rejected the regular business routine of suits, pantyhose, traffic and noise, and chosen the excitement of founding a business they care about. Roots & Wings LifeStories opened officially Jan. 1, 1992, but opening day was preceded by many months of prac-

DEKALB

ticing, taking videography courses, writing, experimenting and sitting in front of editing equipment, garbed in nightgowns and drinking coffee on sleepless nights.

Roots & Wings creates oral histories on video for people who want to preserve and pass down memories, family stories and a sense of tradition and heritage. Their customers are either parents and grandparents who want to give a "soul gift" of themselves to their children, or children who want to honor an older family member.

The oral history almost always focuses on a videotaped interview with one person which the two women prepare for by talking and reminiscing with family members, looking through family memorabilia and conducting a practice interview with the person. Life stories are never dull, but Galeax and Ghitis say they

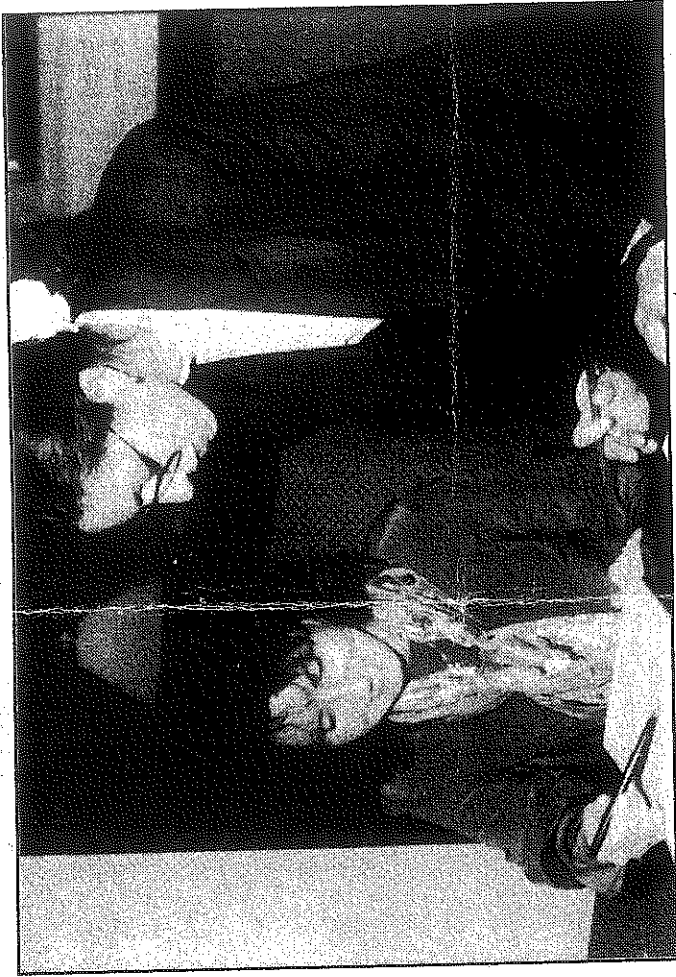
are haunted by the emotion and the experiences that surface in the interviews. Galeax didn't deny it when a son once complained that she knew his mom better than he did.

The videotapes can also include the person's treasures: artwork, dishes, a brooch, a piece of music, a letter or a favorite activity like working in the garden or playing an instrument.

Galeax and Ghitis have even been approached about doing a video on parents who have already died. This oral history would involve letters, photos, possibly an audio tape and the children sharing memories of their parents with each other.

Galeax and Ghitis both worked at CNN — Ghitis as a researcher while Galeax started as a news writer and later became a correspondent. They do have video experience, but they still hire a professional videographer and editor for the oral histories.

Galeax is a Jewish-American and Ghitis grew up in Peru. Both women have a strong sense of their own traditions and families and an interest in others' histories. Galeax persuaded one of her grandmothers to write her memoirs. She was inspired and touched as she watched her grandmother write and remember and go back later to read what she had written to refresh her failing memory. "My daughter — I want to make sure she has these life-stories," Galeax says.



Oral historians: Ghitis (left) and Galeax of Roots & Wings

As a news reporter, Galeax would find herself asking her interviewees, "Where did your name come from?" as well as researching her story. "All of a sudden it kind of clicked," Galeax says, and she knew what she wanted to do.

Ghitis was a psychological counselor before she worked at CNN. She made an audio tape of her mother before she died and it became a family treasure. For a long time, she had kept the idea of doing oral histories commercially in the back of her mind. Then she met Galeax.

Galeax and Ghitis feel thrust into a foreign business world which has them shopping for wires and lights instead of clothes and food, talking

to bankers and accountants and considering marketing strategies. They have invested a lot of money in equipment and set a price of \$400 per project. Galeax claims she has developed a new attitude toward her father, a business owner, and often calls him for advice.

The two are open to others' ideas and are constantly changing their product. They have even switched their name, which stems from a Chinese proverb, to Roots & Wings LifeStories instead of the more academic Roots & Wings Oral Histories. But they drew the line when an aunt of Galeax's said, "You know, it would make a lot more sense if you called it 'Roots & Branches.'"

Business gets families' life stories on video

By Leslie Scurry
STAFF WRITER

When Harry Shumsky arrived from New York for his grandson's graduation, he had no idea what was in store for him.

Before he left Georgia, his daughter Judy Ayal had persuaded him to be the star of a two-hour video documentary about his life.

"It's a very unique way of getting a portrait of my father," Mrs. Ayal said of 84-year-old Mr. Shumsky. "He in many ways is a mystical man to me. . . . It's hard for him to talk about himself. This tape gives a unique and fresh perspective."

The video was produced by Audrey Galex and Sara Ghitis, owners of Roots and Wings Life Stories in Decatur, a company that specializes in recording individual histories for families or groups on video and audio tapes.

"I did this for my mother years ago," Mrs. Ghitis said. "Since then she became incapacitated. It hit me that the stories and memories would have been lost. I was so moved by it that I had to do it professionally."

Mrs. Galex, who has an extensive media background, and Mrs. Ghitis, whose background includes psychology and research, met while working at Ca-

When commissioned to produce a video, Roots and Wings conducts a preliminary interview in the subject's home to find out background information, family history and personal history.

ble News Network. When they had lunch one day to catch up on old times, they found they both had the same idea.

"It was as if it had been planned beyond us," Mrs. Ghitis said about starting the business, which they opened in January 1992.

The name comes from what is believed to be an ancient Chinese proverb that says two important things to give your children are roots and wings, which alludes to the importance of knowing the past and having the freedom to freely explore the future.

When commissioned to produce a video, Roots and Wings conducts a preliminary interview in the subject's home to find out background information, family history and personal history, working from memory or getting assistance from old photographs or other memorabilia, such as family heirlooms. They compile a questionnaire

tailored to the information given and decide with the person which questions could be asked to trigger the memory.

Roots and Wings then goes to the person's home, office or other desired location and talks about the past, either using video or audio equipment to preserve what is said. The videos may include music, documents and family films into the finished product, which has an average cost of \$600.

"It's not just about setting up a camera," Mrs. Galex said. "Someone who has no children said to me, 'Who would care about my stories?' Even if you don't do it with us, do it with

someone. Each person deserves to have his or her story told." If family members would rather record living history themselves, Roots and Wings will teach them how to do it.

"It's something to pass down to future generations," said Sheryl Bleich, who recently assembled 15 of her older relatives to record their stories about the past. "I'm lucky enough to have a lot of relatives that are older and still living. It was special to capture them on tape."

Archie Solomon, 74, said his age made him decide to reminisce on camera.

"I'm getting up in years," he said. "It seems to me the family is not interested in knowing much about the parents until the parents are gone. And then they wonder why they didn't get the information."



LESIE SCURRY / Staff
Sara Ghitis (left) and Audrey Galex own Roots and Wings Life Stories in Decatur, which records individual histories.

'World's Largest Publishing Co.' Is Project Of Decatur's Gallopade

Gallopade Publishing Group, a Decatur publishing company, is will start "The World's Largest Publishing Co." (TWLPC) this week.

The outgrowth of Gallopade's Carole Marsh Books Series will "symbolize the new direction the book and information industry is headed in this customer service oriented society," said a spokesman.

TWLPC will be a program that allows teachers and others to order a book on a specified subject for a particular age group, the spokesman said.

Once an order is placed, the book will be written, bound and shipped within 48 hours, said Michele Yother, president of TWLPC.

"We even customize the book cover and title page for the years," she said.

"We believe this instant custom creation of titles is the wave of the future. Teachers can now order a book about any subject with specific emphasis and details relevant to their classes."

"Most of our titles came from the suggestions of teachers, li-

brarians, parents and kids anyway, so we just decided to take the next logical step and let them order the book they want, with specific suggestions regarding age level and activities and the format they want it bound in, then just do it."

"Obviously, the title will be come part of our permanent book list, offered to all schools, libraries and homes," she said.

Gallopade Publishing Group has been producing books for 13 years and now has 3,000 titles,

said a spokesman.

The books are held in database and updated according to news headlines each day, as appropriate. Only when a specific title is ordered is it printed out and bound as either a paperback or hardcover. The books are also available on computer disks, audio tapes and loose pages at the customer's request.

Gallopade is located in downtown Decatur and has more than 43 books about Georgia.

Bookstore a source for African-American community

By Holly Crenshaw
STAFF WRITER
6/1/84
EXTRA

It's a good place to browse — a good place to linger and listen to quiet jazz and enjoy the laid-back atmosphere.

But Regenna Williams, co-owner of The Source Bookstore, also hopes her comfortable new Decatur shop will become a consciousness-raising hangout, where readers can come and learn more about African culture and African-American heritage.

"We don't just carry black authors, but all kinds of books — if they're relevant to black history or black experience," Williams said. "We try to stock whatever we can on the history of Africa, the Caribbean and African Americans."

It's hard to understand how broadly Williams stocks her shelves until you look around the bookstore, which she and her husband, Doug, opened three

months ago.

Sure, there are scholarly volumes on the civil rights movement and other historical issues. But The Source also sells poetry, fiction, religious writings, health books and cookbooks, children's books — even comic books and romance novels.

"You know," Williams said, "people will sit and read a million of these Harlequin romances, but at some point you want to read something that you can relate to more closely."

The same, she said, holds true for The Baby-sitter's Club series, Judy Blume books and other popular juvenile fiction she carries. "If young girls can pick up one of these books off our shelves

and see a black character, it just makes them feel so much more a part of it — instead of always being on the outside looking in."

"But," she added, "we also want people of all races to feel comfortable coming in and examining these materials."

The book shop, across the street from The Freight Room restaurant, also sells a small selection of jewelry, handmade greeting cards and stationery. The walls display paintings and prints by several local artists.

Every Saturday at 2 p.m., the store holds a free children's book reading, often featuring African folk tales or other books from its shelves. "We're always looking for volunteers to come in and do

readings," Williams said.

The Source also hosts a history book discussion club, which meets the second Sunday of the month at 4 p.m. Already, the group has become so popular that plans are under way to start a second meeting.

And on June 16, Berman E. Johnson, a vice president of DeKalb Tech, will stop by at 6:30 p.m. to sign his book, "The Dream Deferred: A Survey of Black America, 1840-1896."

The Williamses, who live in Lithonia and both write themselves, work split shifts at the bookstore — with Doug covering the first half of the day and Regenna taking over in early afternoon. Both are juggling part-time jobs while trying to get the bookstore off the ground.

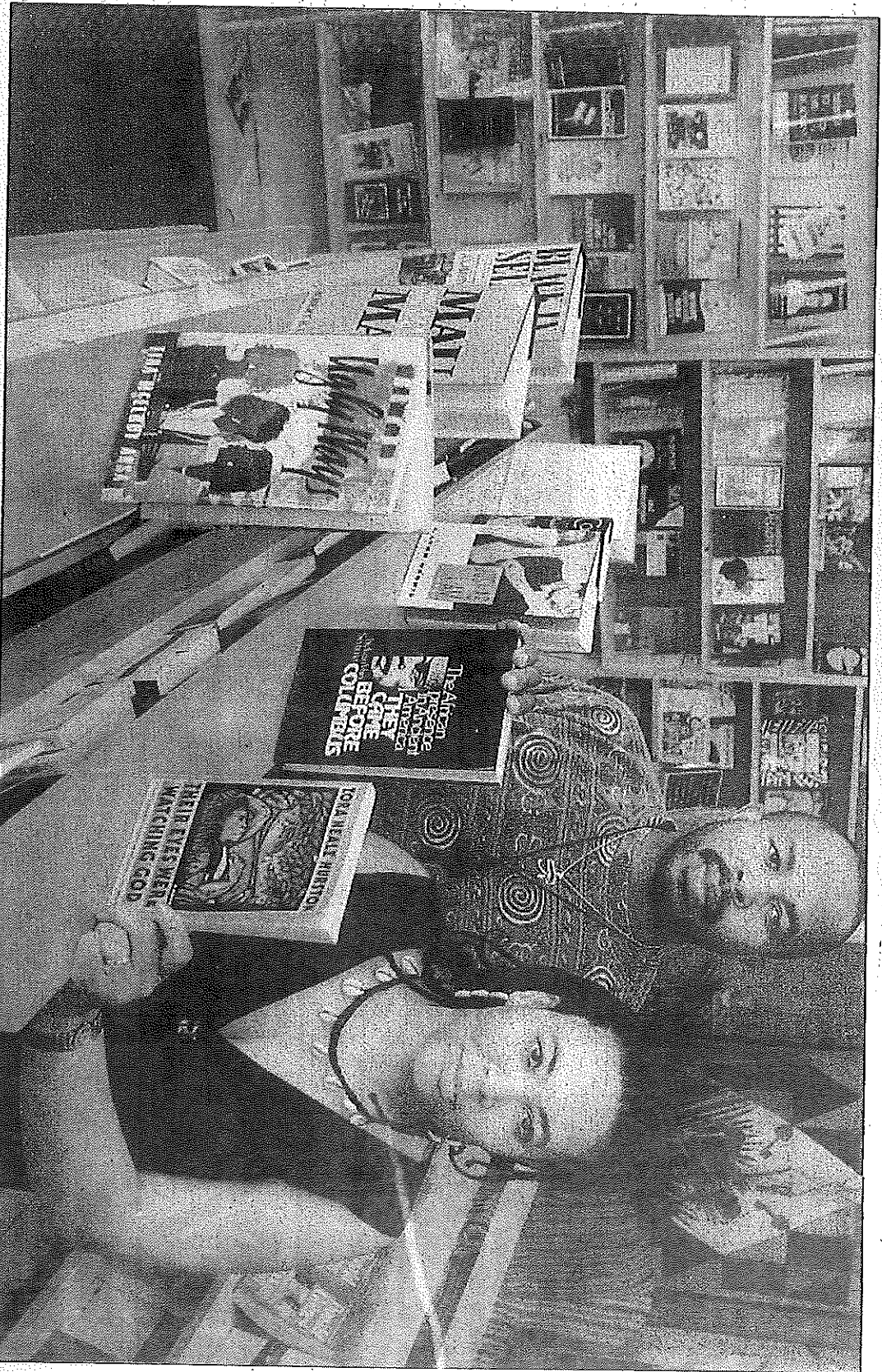
"It's been a sacrifice, and it's hard sometimes," she said. "But this is what we want to do, so we're trying really hard to make it work."

The Source Bookstore

302 E. Howard Ave., Decatur

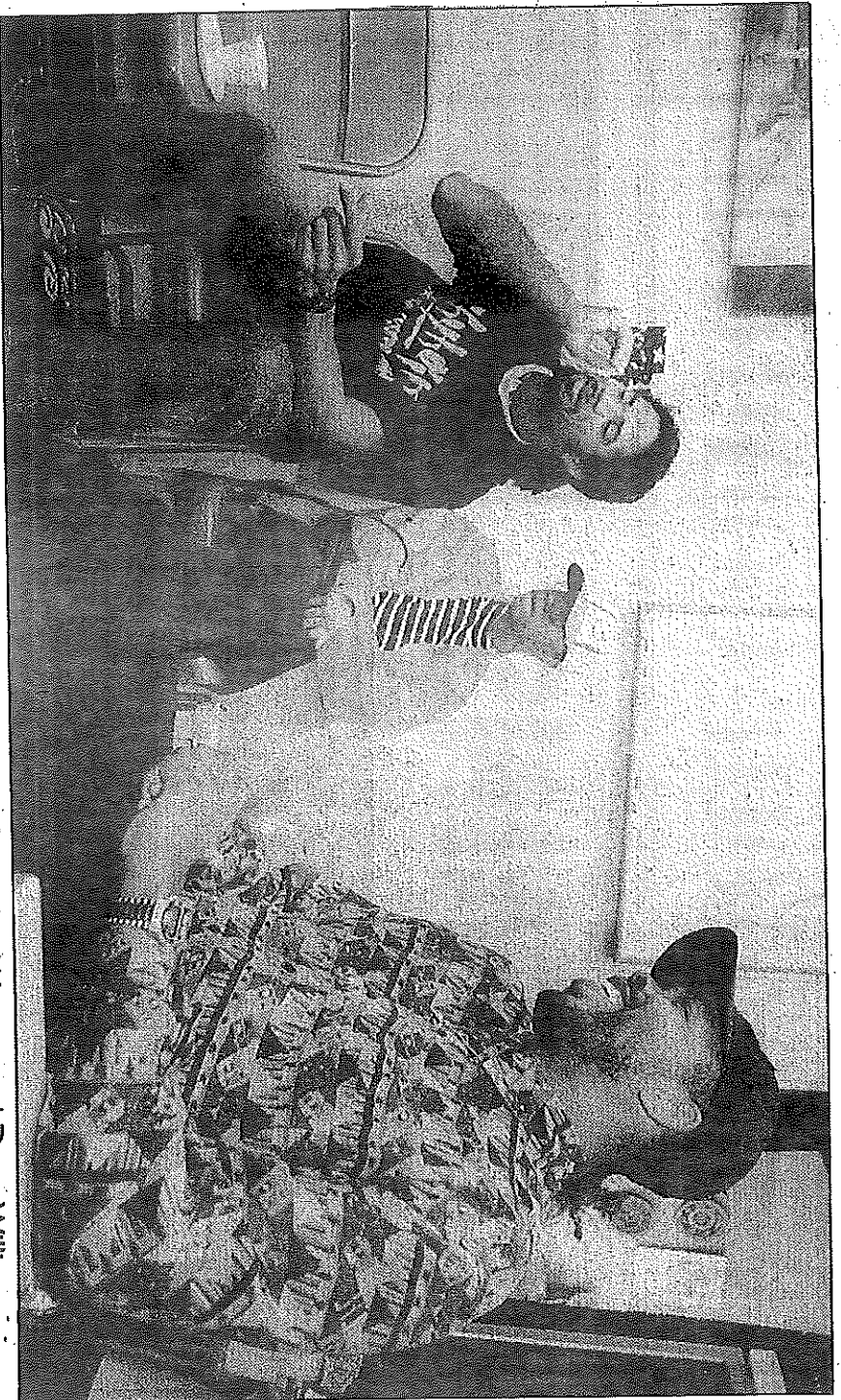
► Hours: Monday through Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.

► Phone: 377-0042



Taking off: Doug Williams and his wife, Regenna, have been running The Source Bookstore in Decatur for three months.

KIMBERLY SMITH / Staff



Sessions with youth include adults, such as (from left) J. Warren, Kim Weaver and Doug Williams.



Photos by NK ARROYO / Staff

Youths talking about issues and heritage in a recent session at the Source Bookstore include (below, from left) Kerri Davis, be Johnson and Amelia Powell and above) Natalia Williams.

You have to be part of the village to raise a child

to help kids learn to deal with issues in their lives

By Rebecca Poyner Burns
SPECIAL TO CITYLIFE

Doug and Regenna Williams have no children, but they've dedicated themselves to bringing a message of hope to the children in their Decatur community, especially African-American youths.

At their business, the Source Bookstore, the Williams host informal weekly meetings for kids to discuss issues they face. The couple also helps recruit adults to come and listen as part of the sessions.

"People today always want kids to listen, but they don't listen themselves. I want to help make that change," said Doug Williams.

The Youth Forum, initiated by the Decatur Cluster, also is designed to explore issues related to teens' heritage, said acting Cluster Coordinator David Neuwirth, who helped organize the program.

The Williamses' bookstore specializes in African and African-American materials — resources the couple is happy to share with the youths.

"Kids need to know that they can do more, learning about their heritage gives them a vision," said Doug Williams. "Your potential is in your past."

Planned topics include a conversation with rapper Tupac Shakur's mother (the former Black Panther Ignae Thomas); a talk with Charlayne Hunter-Gault, the first African-American woman student at the University of Georgia; and a look at the history of hip-hop.

"My feeling is that any program who tries to dialogue with kids and help them to be more analytical about what they consume — media and



products — is important," said J. Warren, owner of the Decatur business Vibes: Music and More, who also has signed up to participate in the program.

"I sometimes have a dim view of the younger generation, and I want to find out that I'm wrong," said Warren, explaining why he agreed to be part of the TAP program.

Neuwirth hopes that bringing teens together with entrepreneurs like Warren and Doug and Regenna Williams will provide youngsters with positive examples of the business world.

The Williamses have dedicated

themselves to bringing a message of hope to their community, using the bookstore as a vehicle to communicate. They host weekly story times for young children, sponsor Junior Black Writers' meetings, and are closely involved with TAP's efforts to reach Decatur's youth. They both moonlight to keep the bookstore going (she's a technical support operator for a computing company, he's a printer).

"People talk about that African proverb, 'It takes a whole village to raise a child,' but they need to realize that you have to be there," and be that village, said Regenna Williams.

"There's got to be a big change, back to

emphasizing kids. There have been so many advances in terms of technology in our society, but has it really enhanced our lives?" she said.

"It's difficult stuff, to be a mentor," said Doug Williams. "There is a fire in youth. But if that heat and fire is unattended, it will burn you up. The mentor's role is to tend that fire."

GET TALKIN

TAP Decatur Cluster Youth Forum will be 3-4:30 p.m. on Saturday and on Nov. 19 and Dec. 3 at The Source Bookstore, 302 E. Howard Avenue, Decatur. For more information, call the Decatur Cluster office at 371-2389.