

TIPS FOR COLLECTING YOUR FAMILY ORAL HISTORY

1. Interview your parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents and your parents' first cousins.
2. If you have an elderly relative, don't wait to talk until next year. Even when people are healthy, memories fade.
3. For in-person interviews, make sure your relative is comfortable.
4. Be prepared to take notes or record your interviews. Be aware that video cameras make some feel people self-conscious.
5. Ask open-ended questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no.
6. Pay attention to small details, like names of places and distant cousins.
7. If the person you are interviewing starts to become defensive or upset, do not press them – change the subject to more comfortable territory.
8. After your interview, type out a detailed summary of what you learned. Do this right away while the interview is fresh in your mind—there may be portions of the notes or recording which are unclear.
9. Be aware that it is unusual to get the best stories from your first interview. Reflect on what you learn, discuss with other family members, and then set up a follow-up conversation!

Childhood

- » What is your full name? Why did your parents pick that name?
- » Do you have brothers & sisters?
- » When and where were you born? How did your family come to live in that town?
- » What is your earliest memory?
- » Tell me about the house you grew up in.
- » What did you do for fun when you were young? Did you have a favorite toy?
- » What chores did you have? Which chore was worst?
- » Did your family attend church? How did religion affect your family? What do you believe now?
- » Where did you go to school? What was it like?
- » Was there a graduation ceremony?

Relatives

- » Tell me a story about your mother/father that shows what kind of person they were.
- » What was your mother's maiden name?
- » What kinds of work did your parents do?
- » How did your parents die? How old were you when it happened? Is there a family cemetery?
- » What did your grandparents look like?
- » Did your grandmother tell you any special stories?
- » Do you know anything about your great-grandparents?
- » Can you tell about any "black sheep" in the family?
- » Can you describe the personalities of your aunts and uncles?
- » Who was your favorite cousin, and why?

Adulthood

- » What was your first job?
- » How did you choose your line of work?
- » Did you serve in the military?
- » How did you meet your spouse?
- » Where did you go on dates?
- » Tell me about your wedding day?
- » How were you affected by large historical events (WWII, civil rights movement, 1960s counterculture)?
- » What is the greatest challenge you have faced?
- » What has been the best day of your life so far?
- » Are there any family letters, photos, recipes, or other heirlooms that have been handed down to you?