

Family History Fair - 2024

Oral History – Presented by Glen Heiney

Introduction:

Oral Histories can provide a great treasure of knowledge that we can leave for our posterity. My first experience with this was with my father. I had heard many of his life stories over the years and decided that I needed to have him record these for me. At that time, a cassette recorder was all that I had. I flew from California to Florida to meet with him. The result was a 2 ½ hour recording of his life. It is now a family treasure. This class is to discuss the process of having a great interview.

The setting:

To get a good recording, you need to be in a quiet place, free from barking dogs, phone calls, etc. I would suggest that cell phone be put in airplane mode. The setting should be comfortable. Tell the person to be interviewed what is going to happen and if there are topics that the person is not comfortable with, just have them tell you.

Equipment:

I would strongly suggest that you have two recording devices just in case. I have used a high-end digital recorder and my cell phone. The cell phone actually provided a better recording. I would make each segment about 30 minutes long.

The questions:

In general, you need to ask questions that are not yes or no questions. Also, as the process unfolds, make some notes about areas that need more detail. It may take 4 – 6 hours to cover all of the topics, you just need to not be in a rush. As the interview proceeds, avoid inserting your own experiences or commenting. The focus needs to be on the interviewee.

Here are some questions you can use:

1. How many siblings do you have? And where in the age order are you?
2. What are their names? - take notes so you can go back to each of their siblings.
3. Where were you born?
4. Tell me about the first house that you lived in.
5. What is your earliest childhood memory?
6. What was the first school that you attended?
7. What did you like to do in your free time?
8. What was your favorite thing about those early years in school that you enjoyed the most?
9. Did your family take vacations together? Where did you go?
10. How did you get along with your siblings?
11. Any stories that you would like to share about that?
12. What kind of car did the family have?
13. Tell us about your mother, what was she like?
14. Share experiences with your mom.
15. Tell us about your father, what was he like?

16. Share experiences with your father.
17. What do you remember about your mother's parents?
18. What do you remember about your father's parents?
19. Where did you attend high school?
20. Did you participate in sports or other school activities, if so what?
21. Tell us about your first date?
22. What are some of the things you liked about high school?
23. Did you attend college, if so where ?, Major?
24. When did you get your first car? What was it.
25. What was your first job?
26. Tell us about the first time you met your future spouse?
27. What attracted him/her to you?
28. How long was it until you were married?
29. Tell me about your honeymoon.
30. How were the first few years of marriage?
31. How many children do you have?, names?
32. Tell me about each of them
33. What are your hobbies?
34. What would you like your posterity to know about you that we haven't talked about yet?
35. What do you consider your most important accomplishment in your life?
36. Discuss your major regret in this life.

There are endless things to discuss and you need to be flexible as the interview goes on.

When you are done, tell them if they think of more things they would like to add, additional recording can be done.

Provide the person with a copy of the recordings on a thumb drive and ask them to share a copy with their children.

Note: There are services and software that can transcribe this to a text file.

Other thoughts:

There are many sources for oral history suggestions – This is from the Smithsonian Institution.

<https://siarchives.si.edu/history/how-do-oral-history>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVv_QAFhm1A

