

Tell Me Your Stories

In 2003 Ellie Kahn of Living Legacies Family Histories created a course for middle and high school students to learn how to conduct interviews with their grandparents, and/or with residents in local assisted living facilities.

The curriculum is at www.tellmeyourstories.org

The six week class included the teens working together to create a list of questions that they would use in their interviews.

The following is their list of Interview Questions.

Ancestors/Grandparents

What do you know about your ancestors on your father's side? (where they lived, work they did)

Can you describe your grandparents?

What were their names, and what did they do for a living?

What do you know about their life and lifestyle?

Describe your relationship with your grandparents.

What do you know about the origin of your family's last name?

What do you know about your ancestors on your mother's side? (where they lived, work they did)

Can you describe your grandparents on your mother's side?

What were their names, and what did they do for a living?

What do you know about their life and lifestyle?

Describe your relationship with your grandparents. What did you learn from them?

In what ways are you proud of your ancestry?

If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would it be and what would you say?

Parents' Lives

What was your father's name? What do you know about his childhood?

What can you tell me about his siblings and parents, and his relationship with them? His role in the family?

What kind of education did your father have?

What kind of work did he do? Hobbies?

Tell me about your relationship with him?

What was your mother's name? What do you know about her childhood?
What can you tell me about her siblings and parents and her relationship with them?
What kind of education did your mother have?
Tell me about your relationship with her?
What kind of work did she do? Hobbies?
Can you tell me how your parents met?
What do you know about their courtship or early relationship?
What were their politics?

The Early Years

When and where were you born?
Who were you named after?
Have you heard any stories about the circumstances of your birth? (in hospital or at home with midwife)
Describe your parents' personalities.
What was your relationship like with your parents?
What are your earliest memories as a child?
Describe your siblings and your relationship with them.
As a child, what responsibilities or chores did you have around the house?
Can you describe where you grew up as a child, as far as the environments, the city, the neighborhood?
What religion were you and how involved were you and your family with your religion?
Describe any traditions the family had.
Describe the family's economic status. What impact did that have on you growing up?
What kinds of recreational activities did you participate in as a child?
Describe your social life, in terms of friends and activities.
What did you want to be when you grew up?
How were you disciplined as a child? Were you spanked, grounded, etc?
Tell me about your schooling.
What did you like most about school? What did you like least? Why?
Who were your role models? What did you learn from them?
What are the valuable and useful morals your parents taught you as a child, which somehow affected you in the future?

Teen Years

How would you describe your family and relationships during your teen years?
What kind of person were you as a teenager?

What did kids do for fun then?
Were there things you did as a teenager that you now regard as pretty horrible?
How were you disciplined at home? At school?
As a teen what were the biggest problems that you were faced with?
How would you compare the problems for teens then with the problems today?
What did you like best about school during your adolescence? What did you like least?
Describe the fashions and fads of your time.
What was the popular music?
Who did you look up to?
What did your parents worry about in relation to their children in those days?
What was the most valuable thing you owned during your teen years? Why?
If you graduated high school, when was it, and what did you do after that?
Would you describe your first romance?

Adulthood

How did you meet your spouse and what attracted you to them?
If you went to college, what sort of experiences did you have? (events, sororities, etc.)
How did society influence you then?
As a young adult, how did you feel about where your life was going?
Describe your first job and any career changes during your life.
Please tell me about each of your children.
What kinds of things did you do for recreation?
Were there major changes when you turned any particular age, such as 30 or 40? How did you feel?
Did you serve in any war? Tell me about that experience and how it impacted you and your life.

Describe the members of your family now, and your relationships with them.

Historical Events

What historical events affected your life the most? How has your life changed from that experience?
What is the most disturbing event in your time?
What natural disasters happened during your lifetime? How did that affect your life and where you lived?
How was your family affected by the Great Depression?

Were you involved in World War II? Korean War? Vietnam War? Describe your experiences?

How did World War II affect the way your family lived?

What are your memories of the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King?

How do you feel about politics today?

Technology

What inventions or changes had the most impact on you and your life?

How did you feel about man going to space the first time?

What have you been the most excited about in terms of changes?

Are there things that you've felt afraid of, in terms of inventions or technology?

What is most important now in terms of technology.

Reflections

What is most important in your life now?

Looking back at your life, would you change anything?

Looking back at your life, what is your greatest achievement and what are you most proud of?

What advice or words of wisdom could you offer your descendants about life?

How do you think your past experiences have molded you into the person you are today?

Describe your greatest joy during your lifetime.

What's your opinion about the state of the world?

Is anything else you want to say about your life or the years you've lived that we haven't talked about?

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