

The Stories in Our Roots

A FAMILY HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE



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When we look at a family tree, it's easy to focus on names and dates. But what we're really chasing, what we're really trying to hold onto, are the stories.

The way someone laughed.

The songs they sang in the kitchen.

The risks they took when no one was watching.

The dreams they carried even when the world told them no.

At *Embracing Your History*, we believe every family deserves more than a collection of facts. They deserve to know the heart behind the history. We made "The Stories in Our Roots" because we know it can be hard to start those conversations. Sometimes the stories are tangled. Sometimes they're hard to tell. Sometimes they're so beautiful you wonder how they were ever almost lost.

This guide isn't here to make you a perfect interviewer. It's here to make sure the voices that matter most are heard. It's here to help you listen a little deeper, ask a little kinder, and remember a little more than you thought you could.

These questions are just a starting point. The real magic happens in the spaces in between — the laughter, the tears, the long pauses where memory lives. We hope you use this guide to capture the small things and the big ones. We hope you hear old stories in new ways. We hope you walk away knowing — really knowing — that every branch has a story, and that because of you, it won't be forgotten.

May you always find yourself in the stories of those who came before you,

Jessica and Lisa

The Family Tree Huggers at Embracing Your History



Every person carries a library of stories inside them—filled with joy, heartache, resilience, laughter, and legacy. At Embracing Your History, we believe that asking someone to share their story isn't just about collecting facts for a tree. It's an act of love. Of respect. Of making sure the people we care about are remembered in their own words.

This guide isn't a script. It's a starting point. A spark. A way to help you uncover the threads that have shaped a life. It gives you structure, but the best parts often happen when you follow the conversation wherever it leads—into memories that matter.

Oral history is about more than names and dates. It's about preserving the voice, personality, and culture of the people who made you who you are. It's about capturing the soul of a family--so future generations can feel where they came from.

How to Use This Guide

This guide flows through the seasons of life, both chronologically and thematically. You don't need to ask every question, and you can certainly add your own questions. Use what fits! Follow the energy of the moment. Good interviews don't feel like interviews--they feel like sitting on a porch, swapping stories over iced tea and enjoying a sunny day. Good interviews are warm, full of personality, and they're memorable.

You can record (with permission), take notes, or just listen closely. What matters most is showing up with care and curiosity.

Tips for a Great Interview

- **Build trust first.** Don't dive in too quickly. Take time to connect, explain what you're doing, and why it matters. Let them know their story is important.
- **Ask for consent.** If you plan to record or write things down, get permission.
- **Create a calm space.** Choose a quiet, cozy spot with minimal distractions.
- **Pause and breathe.** Let silence do its work. Some stories take a moment to rise to the surface. Try not to feel like you need to fill the silences.
- **Use open-ended prompts.** Aim for questions that begin with "how", "why", or "tell me about..."
 - "Can you tell me more about that?"
 - "What do you remember most about that day?"
 - "How did that moment shape you?"
- **Be flexible.** Let the conversation shift naturally. If something meaningful comes up, follow it.
- **Ask for the senses.** Smells, sounds, textures--these bring stories to life.
- **Use objects and photos** if you have them. Old letters, heirlooms, recipes, and pictures are memory gold. Bring them into the conversation when you can.

When Things Get Tough

Not every story is easy. That's okay. You might come across grief, regret, or things left unsaid. Here's how to hold that space:

- **Let them set the pace.** If someone hesitates, respect that. "We don't have to go there if you'd rather not."
- **Hold emotion gently.** If they cry, sit with them. You don't have to fix it. Just be present.
- **Know when to shift.** If the weight feels too heavy, it's okay to take a break or change topics.

If They Don't Want to Talk

Some people aren't ready--or they may never be ready--to talk about certain things. Try:

- Starting with light or fun memories.
- Sharing one of your own first.
- Letting them lead the way.
- Trying again another time. Timing can make all the difference.



How to End Well

When you close the interview, thank them sincerely. Let them know what a gift they've given you in sharing their time and their stories with you.

- "This means more than you know."
- "Your story is a part of our family."
- "You made today really special."

Then take care of what they shared. Back up recordings, write down reflections, and consider turning the stories into something tangible--a booklet, a scrapbook, a recording for others to hear. Be creative and give these stories a life of their own.

You are doing sacred work in collecting the stories of your family. This isn't just story collecting--it's preserving people. You are showing your loved ones that they matter. You are creating something that future generations will be grateful for, even if they never meet you.

Take a breath, press record, and begin.



Early Childhood (Birth to 12 Years Old)

Basic Information

- What is your full name? Were you named after anyone or a place?
- Is there a significance to your name? Why did your parents choose your name?
- When and where were you born? (City, state, country?) Were you born in a hospital (which one) or at home?
- What do you know about the day you were born? (Weather, events, anything memorable?) Were you early, on your due date, or late?
- Do you have any siblings? If so, what are their names and birth order?
- Where did your family live when you were born? Can you describe the home or neighborhood?

Siblings

- Do you have any siblings? If so, what are their names and birth order?
- Do you remember their birthdays? If they are no longer living, do you remember what day they passed away?
- Did your siblings marry? Do you remember their spouses names and birthdays?
- Did your siblings have children? Do you remember their names?
- Is there anything significant you know about their names and why they were given those names?
- If you were old enough to remember, what do you remember about when they were born?
- Is there any significance to the birth order? For instance, if there is an age gap did something happen in that gap?

Family Life

- What do you remember about your parents when you were little? What were they like?
- Did you have grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins nearby growing up? What are your earliest or most special memories of them?
- What family traditions or routines did your family have when you were young?
- What were your favorite family meals or treats as a child? What were your least favorite?
- Was your home a “clean plate club” home or were you allowed to say “no thank you” to things you didn’t care to eat?
- Was there a special family heirloom, photograph, or object you loved when you were little? (Prompt for a story or memory tied to an item.) Do you or someone else still have it? Do you have pictures of it?
- What did the adults you lived with do for a living? What do you remember about those experiences?

Home and Neighborhood

- Did you live in the same home as you grew older or did you move around often? If you moved around often, did you have a favorite place? Least favorite? What do you remember about those places?
- What was your childhood home like? (Inside and outside.)
- What was your bedroom like? Did you share it with anyone?
- Were there any chores you were responsible for? How was that experience for you?
- Who were your childhood friends? Where did you meet them?
- What games or activities did you play together?
- Are you still in touch with any of them? How long were you friends?



- Was there a favorite place you liked to visit as a child? (Park, relative's home, special getaway?)
- What was your relationship with your neighbors? Was it a close-knit community?
- Was there an adult in your life outside of your family that you had a special relationship with? Perhaps a friend's parent, a teacher, a coach, etc.

School and Early Learning

- Did you attend Kindergarten or grade/elementary school? Do you remember the name of the school? What city/town was your school in?
- How far away was your home from school? How did you get to school each day? (Walk, bus, driven?)
- What are your earliest memories of school?
- Did you have a favorite teacher or subject? What made it special?
- What did you want to be when you grew up at that age?
- Who was your first early age crush? Did they know?
- Do you remember any special awards, report cards, or school performances?

Holidays and Celebrations

- Did your family celebrate birthdays when you were a child?
- What holidays did your family observe? How were they celebrated?
- Were there any cultural or religious traditions your family practiced during holidays?
- Do you remember any memorable gifts you received as a child? Do you remember who it was from? Do you still have it or a photo of it?
- Were there gift giving traditions? Ties for Father's Day, Flowers for Mother's Day, a funny gag gift that was passed around for years?
- If your family chose to celebrate things like Santa, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, etc. how old were you when you stopped believing. Do you remember how you found out?
- Was there a family storyteller or tradition-keeper when you were little?

The World Around You

- What music, movies, or TV shows were popular when you were growing up—and which ones did *you* love?
- Do you remember any major world events or news stories that had a big impact on you?
- Who was a celebrity, performer, or public figure you looked up to or had a crush on?
- What kind of clothes, hairstyles, or trends were in style during this time?
- What inventions or changes in technology do you remember being new or exciting around this time?



Grandparents and Extended Family

Basic Information

- What were the full names of each of your grandparents?
- Do you know when and where they were born?
- What were their parents' names (your great-grandparents)?
- Did your grandparents have siblings? What were their names, and what do you know about them?
- How many children did each grandparent have, and what were their names and birth order?
- Do you know when and where your grandparents died? Where are they buried?
- Were there any aunts, uncles, or cousins you were especially close with?

Where and How They Lived

- Where did your grandparents live throughout their lives? (List cities, towns, or farms if known.)
- What kind of home did they live in — a house, an apartment, a farm, a tenement?
- Did they rent or own their home? Who lived with them?
- What do you remember most vividly about their home? The smell, the layout, the garden?
- Was there a room or item in the house that felt especially "them"?

Work and Daily Life

- What kind of work did each grandparent do throughout their life?
- Did they enjoy their work, or was it a means of survival?
- Did they run a family business, work a trade, farm land, or raise children full-time?
- Were they involved in unions, guilds, religious work, or community leadership?
- How did your grandparents spend their time outside of work?
- Did they retire? What did retirement look like for them?

Immigration and Ancestral Origins

- Did any of your grandparents immigrate to a new country? If so, from where, and when?
- What do you know about their immigration journey — how and why they came?
- Were any stories passed down about the boat ride, border crossing, or arrival?
- Did they speak English when they arrived? Did they keep their native language at home?
- Were there challenges your grandparents faced as immigrants or first-generation citizens?
- Did they change their names, traditions, or identity to adapt?

Food, Culture, and Traditions

- What were your grandparents' favorite meals or recipes?
- Did they cook, bake, garden, or preserve food?
- Are there traditional dishes passed down from them?
- Did they observe cultural or religious holidays? What did those look like?
- Were there big family gatherings, reunions, or holiday traditions?
- What music, dances, or art forms were part of their life?
- Were there "grandparent rules" — ways of doing things passed down that you still follow?



Personality and Relationships

- What kind of people were they? Stern, funny, generous, quiet?
- How did they show love — with words, food, service, stories?
- Were they affectionate or reserved? Public or private?
- How did they get along with their spouse? Their children?
- Did they have friendships or community ties that shaped them?
- Was there a grandparent who played a bigger role in raising you or your parents?

Storytelling and Memory

- Did your grandparents tell stories about “the old country,” childhood, or earlier generations?
- Were they known as the storyteller, the historian, or the keeper of memories?
- Did they keep journals, letters, family Bibles, or documents?
- Were there family sayings, idioms, or quotes they repeated?
- What do you wish you’d asked them when you had the chance?

Legacy and Reflection

- What do you think your grandparents valued most in life?
- Are there traditions, recipes, or values you still honor because of them?
- What parts of your personality, values, or worldview do you think came from them?
- Are there things you’ve passed down to your children or community that started with your grandparents?
- What’s the most important thing people should remember about your grandparents?
- How were your grandparents remembered after they passed? (Obituaries, funerals, stories told about them?)
- Are there any family stories, sayings, or inside jokes that began with your grandparents?
- Do you think your grandparents’ lives shaped who you are today? How?
- What do you wish you knew more about when it comes to your grandparents?
- If you could spend one more day with any of your grandparents, what would you want to ask or say?



Teenage Years (13–19 Years Old)

School and Education

- What was the highest grade you completed?
- Where did you go to junior high and high school? What city/town was your school located?
- What were those schools like?
- What subjects did you enjoy most — and which ones did you dislike?
- Were you involved in any clubs, sports, or extracurricular activities?
- Did you have a favorite teacher or mentor during your teenage years?
- What were your plans or dreams for after high school?
- Did you have a first job during your teenage years? What was it like?
- How did you usually spend your weekends as a teenager?
- Were there particular subjects you excelled in or struggled with?
- Were you involved in sports, music, student government, the arts, etc.? What clubs were you in?
- Did you ever win any awards, scholarships, or recognitions in high school?
- Did you attend prom, homecoming, or other school dances? What do you remember about them?
- Did you ever skip school? If so, what were the circumstances?
- Do you have any special memories from your teenage years?
- Do you have photos or yearbooks from your teenage years?

Friends and Social Life

- Who were your closest friends during your teenage years? Are you still in touch with them? How long did you remain friends?
- What kinds of things did you and your friends do for fun?
- What kind of transportation was used, if any? Did anyone drive or have a car? If so, what kind was it?
- Was there a particular trend, fashion, or hobby that you loved during your teen years?
- Did you have a first crush, first date, or first love during this time?
- Who was your first kiss? First heartbreak? How old were you?
- How long were you with that person? If not still with that person, do you remember how it ended?
- What books, music, movies, or TV shows were important to you as a teenager? Do you still watch, listen to, or read those things?
- Do you remember any major world events or news stories that had a big impact on you?
- Who was a celebrity, performer, or public figure you looked up to or had a crush on?
- What kind of clothes, hairstyles, or trends were in style during this time?
- What inventions or changes in technology do you remember being new or exciting around this time?
- Did you ever travel with school or with friends? Where did you go?



Family and Home Life

- What was your relationship like with your parents and siblings during your teens?
- What was your relationship like with your grandparents or extended family? How often did you see them?
- Were there major events or changes in your family while you were growing up (moves, job changes, hardships)?
- Did your family continue any cultural traditions during your teenage years? Any changes to traditions?
- Were there family expectations about college, work, marriage, or other milestones?
- If you worked while still living at home, were you expected to help pay any expenses or was your money your own?
- Did your family have any special trips, vacations, or traditions while you were a teen? What was your favorite? What was your least favorite?
- Did you have family meals together?
- Did your parent/caregiver cook? From scratch or convenience?
- What, if any, chores were you responsible for?
- Were you a rule follower or a rule breaker? What were the consequences for your actions as a teenager? Do you remember a time you got in big trouble and what it was for?

Personal Growth and Identity

- What values or lessons were most important to you as a teenager? Who taught you those lessons? Are those lessons still important to you today?
- Were there people or events that strongly shaped who you were becoming?
- Did you belong to any religious, spiritual, or community groups? Do you still belong to those groups? If not, what changed for you?
- How would you describe yourself as a teenager in three words?
- If you could tell your teenage self one thing now, what would it be?
- If a time machine existed, would you change anything about your growing up years?



Early Adulthood (20s–30s)

Education and Independence

- Did you go to college, trade school, the military, or start working right after high school? Tell me about that decision.
- If you attended college or training, where did you go and what did you study?
- Did you graduate? Did you (or do you still) work in that field of study?
- What were your first few jobs as an adult? What do you remember about them?
- When and where did you first live on your own? What was that experience like? Did you have a roommate or live alone?
- What challenges did you face in becoming independent?
- How did your goals or dreams change from what you wanted as a teenager?
- Did you travel anywhere significant during your 20s or 30s?
- Who were your mentors or biggest influences during these years? Are they still in your life? What did they teach you and does that still apply today?
- Was there a major event (world event, economic event, etc.) that affected your life path at this time?
- Looking back, what advice would you give someone starting their adulthood?

Relationships and Friendships

- Who were your closest friends during your 20s and 30s? What did those relationships look like? How did you meet?
- How did friendships change from your school years to adulthood?
- Did you meet a significant other or build a long-term relationship during this time? How did you meet? How long were you together, if you're not still together?
- How did that relationship change you?
- How did your relationship with your family evolve as you became an adult?
- What qualities did you look for in a friend or partner?
- What were your favorite ways to socialize? Where could you be found on a Friday/Saturday night?
- What was easy about this time in your life? What was difficult? What brought you joy?

Family and Major Life Decisions

- Did you marry or form a partnership during this time? If so, with whom? When and how did you decide?
- Did you move to a new city or country during this stage? Where to? Why did you move? Who came with you?
- What traditions or lessons from your family did you carry into your adult life?
- Did you inherit or receive any heirlooms, documents, or treasures from earlier generations during these years? (Prompt: Tell me their stories.)



Marriage, Partnerships, and Family Life

Courtship and Marriage

- How did you meet your spouse or partner? What attracted you to them?
- Did you have more than one spouse? Where did you meet? Were you married? When was your wedding? When did you meet? If you broke up, when and why?
- What was your courtship or dating life like? How long did you date before making it a long term commitment?
- How did you decide it was time to marry or commit?
- Did you live together before you committed to each other or wait until you were engaged or married/committed?
- How did living together, whenever that began, change your relationship?
- Can you tell me about your engagement story (if applicable)?
- When and where did you get married? Describe the wedding day.
- Who were the witnesses for your marriage?
- What city/county/state/country were you married in?
- Who attended your wedding or ceremony? Were there any special family traditions or cultural customs observed?
- Did you go on a honeymoon? If so, where? What was your favorite memory from your honeymoon?
- What was your first home together like? Where was it? Did you live with anyone else or near family/friends?
- What advice would you give newlyweds or new partners starting out?
- How did marriage or partnership change you?

Family Home and Daily Life

- Where did you raise your family? Can you describe your home, neighborhood, and community?
- What was a typical weekday like in your family home? How about weekends?
- Did your family attend religious services or belong to community groups together?
- Were there family heirlooms, traditions, or recipes passed down to your children?
- Are there any physical items (photos, quilts, furniture, jewelry, etc.) from your home that hold important family stories?



Children and Parenthood

Basic Information

- When did you decide to have children, if you did?
- How many children do you have, and what are their full names and birthdates?
- Were there any meaningful stories behind their names?
- Where was each child born? What do you remember about that day?
- Did you or your partner(s) experience pregnancy, adoption, or another path to becoming a parent? What was that journey like?
- Have you experienced the loss of a child, either during pregnancy or later in life? If so, what would you like to share about them?

Early Years

- What was each of your children like as a baby or toddler?
- What kinds of things made them laugh? What calmed them when they were upset?
- What were their first words, favorite toys, or early quirks?
- Were there traditions or routines you built during their early childhood?
- Do you remember any especially joyful, difficult, or surprising moments from their younger years?

Growing Up

- What were their personalities like as children? As teenagers?
- What were their interests, hobbies, or talents as they grew up?
- What were your biggest hopes or worries for them during their school years?
- How did you celebrate milestones like birthdays, graduations, or holidays as a family?
- Did any of your children go through a difficult time during childhood or adolescence? How did your family handle that?

Adulthood and Legacy

- Where are your children now in their lives? (Careers, families, locations?)
- Are any of your children married or in long-term relationships? If so, what do you remember about those relationships beginning?
- Do you have grandchildren? What is that experience like for you?
- How has your relationship with each of your children changed as they became adults?
- What do you admire most about each of them now?

Parenting Philosophy

- What values or beliefs were most important for you to pass on to your children?
- Did you parent the way you were raised, or take a different approach? Why?
- Were there lessons you learned the hard way as a parent?
- What did your children teach *you* about life, love, or yourself?
- How did you navigate parenting as your children became more independent?



Reflections

- What's something you wish you could tell your children that you haven't yet?
- Is there a photo, letter, or item that reminds you of your role as a parent?
- What traditions have you passed down to your children that you hope they'll continue?
- What advice would you give them about raising their own families?
- What do you hope your children remember most about growing up with you?



Military Service (if applicable)

Enlistment and Training

- Did you serve in the military? If so, which branch and when?
- What made you decide to join (or were you drafted)?
- Where did you go for basic training? What was training like?
- What were your first impressions of military life?
- Were there any lessons from basic training that stuck with you throughout your life?

Service Details

- What was your job (your MOS or rating) in the service?
- Where were you stationed during your service?
- Did you deploy overseas? If so, where, and what was that experience like?
- Can you describe a typical day in your military role?
- What ranks did you achieve over time?

Relationships and Camaraderie

- Who were your closest friends or comrades during your service?
- Are there any memorable experiences or stories about your fellow servicemembers?
- How did you keep in touch with family or friends while you were away?
- Did you ever have any humorous, surprising, or touching moments during your service?

Wartime or Peacetime Reflections

- If you served during a time of conflict, what do you feel comfortable sharing about your experiences?
- How did world events (wars, peacekeeping missions, natural disasters) affect your service?
- Were there ceremonies, parades, or homecomings that were particularly meaningful?

Post-Service Life

- When and how did you leave the military? (Discharge, retirement?)
- Did you use any veterans' programs after your service (GI Bill, VA programs)?
- How did your military service impact your later life — personally, professionally, or philosophically?

Artifacts and Memorabilia

- Do you still have any uniforms, medals, letters, photos, or souvenirs from your time in the military?
- Are there family stories connected to your service that you want to make sure are remembered?



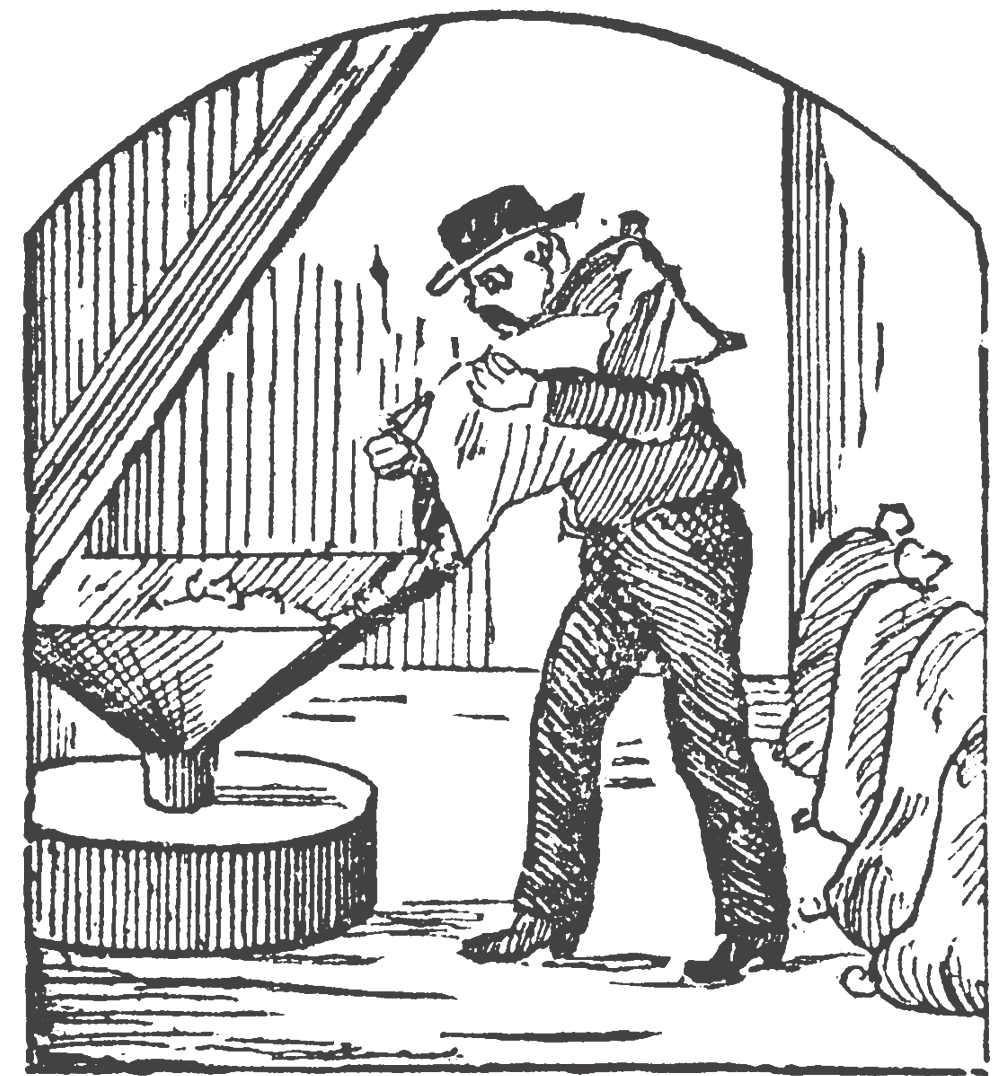
Career and Work Life

Early Career

- What was your very first job? How old were you?
- What did you learn from your early work experiences?
- How did you choose your career path (or did it choose you)?
- Did you pursue any additional education, certification, or training related to your career?
- What was your first "real" or long-term job as an adult?

Main Career or Occupation

- Where did you work for the majority of your career? What was your role?
- Did you work your way up or stay in the same role long-term?
- Can you describe a typical workday?
- What were some challenges you faced at work? How did you overcome them?
- What accomplishments at work are you most proud of?
- Were there mentors, bosses, or coworkers who had a major impact on your career journey?
- How did your career affect your personal or family life?
- Did you ever own a business or work independently? Tell me about that experience.
- Did you participate in any professional organizations, unions, or networking groups?



Career Transitions

- Did you change careers or industries at any point? Why and what was that like?
- Do the companies you spent most time working at still exist today? If not, do you know when or why they closed?
- Were there significant economic events (recessions, booms, strikes) that impacted your career?
- Did you ever experience a major success or failure that changed your life path?
- If you retired, when did you retire and how did you decide it was time? Where were you employed when you retired?
- What did retired life look like for you? Travel, new hobbies, time with family, etc.?

Work Culture and Stories

- What was the work culture like during your main career? (Formal? Casual? Family-like?)
- What inventions, technologies, or societal changes altered your work over time?
- What advice would you give someone entering your career field today?

Artifacts and Memories

- Are there any items — awards, plaques, uniforms, photos, tools of your trade — that tell part of your career story?
- Are there any funny, heartwarming, or unforgettable stories from your working life?



Immigration and Relocation (if applicable)

Leaving Home

- Did you or any of your ancestors immigrate to a new country? If so, from where and when? How old were you?
- What were the reasons for leaving your homeland? (Economic, political, family, adventure?)
- How did you prepare for the move? (Visas, paperwork, farewells?)
- What was your journey like — by ship, plane, train, or another way?
- Did anyone immigrate with you? Who were they?
- What possessions did you bring with you, and why were they important?

Arriving in a New Place

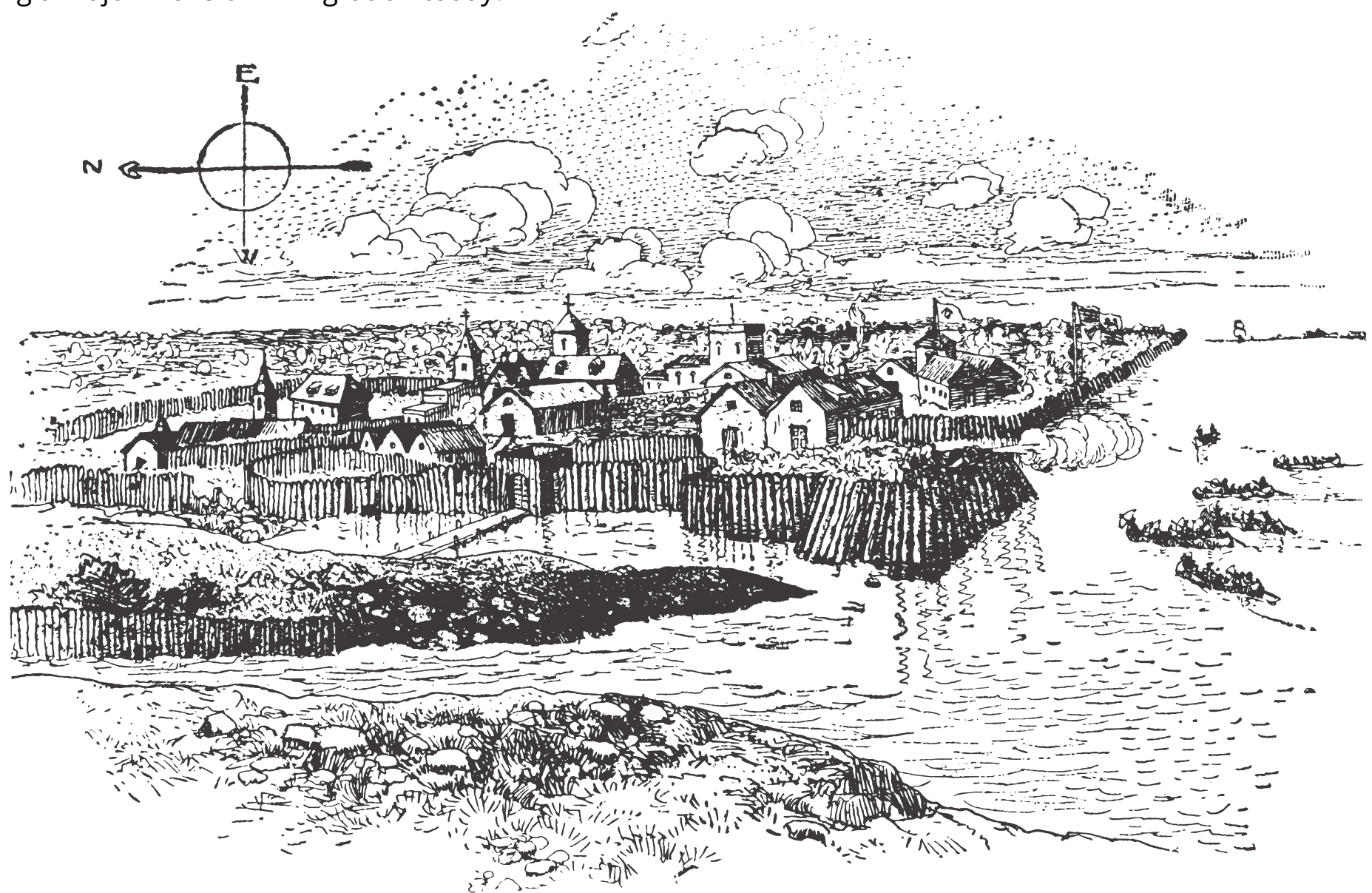
- Where did you first arrive? What were your first impressions?
- Did you know anyone when you arrived, or were you starting fresh?
- What were the biggest challenges you faced adjusting to life in a new country or city?
- How did you find housing, work, or community support after relocating?
- What foods, customs, or traditions from your home country did you continue to practice?

Cultural Identity and Adaptation

- How did you balance preserving your cultural identity with adapting to a new culture?
- Were there times you felt homesick? How did you cope?
- Did you ever face discrimination, misunderstanding, or kindness from others?
- Did you change your name (or was it changed for you) when you moved? If so, why?
- What cultural celebrations, holidays, or traditions did you maintain in your new home?

Family and Legacy

- Did other family members immigrate with you, or follow later?
- Have you visited your country of origin since relocating?
- What traditions or stories about your immigration experience have been passed down?
- Are there heirlooms, photographs, or documents that tell the story of your move?
- What advice would you give to someone considering a major move or immigration today?



Cultural and Family Traditions

Cultural Identity

- How would you describe your cultural or ethnic background?
- Were there particular cultural values or beliefs that were emphasized in your family?
- What languages, dialects, or ways of speaking were used in your home growing up?
- Were there cultural traditions, rites of passage, or ceremonies that were important in your family?
- Were there songs, dances, or other arts that were passed down through generations?

Food and Celebrations

- What traditional foods did your family prepare? Are there special recipes that have been handed down?
- What holidays were most important to your family, and how did you celebrate them?
- Were there family gatherings (like reunions, Sunday dinners, annual trips) that became traditions?
- Was there a family member known for a particular dish, craft, or skill?
- Are there food-related customs (such as special bread at holidays, fasting, feasting) that were important?

Storytelling and Customs

- What stories, legends, or sayings were passed down in your family?
- Were there any superstitions or folk beliefs your family held?
- Are there proverbs, sayings, or "rules for life" that reflect your family's culture?
- Were there traditional crafts, arts, or skills taught in your family (quilting, woodworking, embroidery, storytelling)?
- What family traditions or customs are you most proud of and want to see continued?

Objects and Heirlooms

- Are there objects (quilts, furniture, books, jewelry) that hold cultural significance in your family?
- Do you know the stories behind those heirlooms? Would you like to share them?



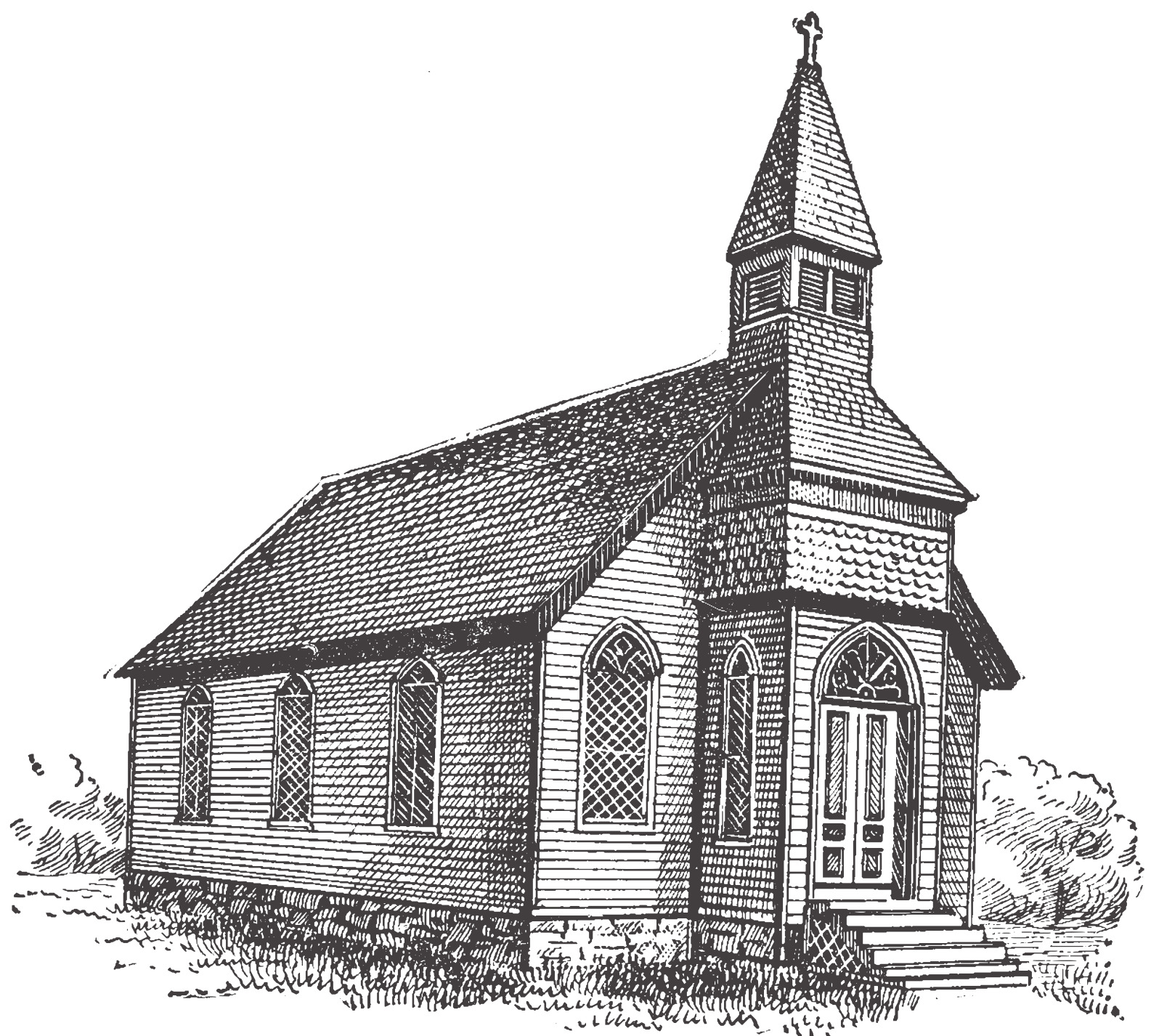
Community and Religion

Community Life

- What town, city, or neighborhood did you live in most of your life?
- How would you describe the community? (Small town, big city, close-knit, isolated?)
- Were there community traditions, festivals, or events that everyone participated in?
- Who were your neighbors? Did they play a big role in your life?
- Was there a place where everyone gathered (community center, diner, church, school)?
- What businesses, stores, or gathering spots were central to your community?
- Were there important local leaders or figures you remember?
- How did your community handle major events (wars, economic booms/busts, natural disasters)?
- Were there rivalries, traditions, or social norms specific to your town or region?
- What makes you proud of where you grew up or lived?

Religious and Spiritual Life

- Did your family belong to a religious community (church, synagogue, mosque, temple)?
- How important was religion in your household growing up?
- What religious holidays or festivals were most important to your family?
- Were there particular religious ceremonies or rites of passage (baptisms, confirmations, bar/bat mitzvahs, weddings)?
- Who were the religious leaders in your life — pastors, rabbis, imams, elders?
- How did your religious community support its members during hard times (illness, unemployment, death)?
- Were there community service traditions connected to your faith (volunteering, mission trips, charity drives)?
- How has your religious or spiritual perspective changed over the course of your life?
- Are there spiritual traditions, teachings, or practices you still follow today?
- Are there religious or spiritual heirlooms (Bibles, prayer beads, ceremonial garments) passed down in your family?



The Middle Chapters (Age 40 - 60)

Career and Identity

- How has your career or work life changed during this stage of your life?
- Are you where you thought you'd be at this age? Why or why not?
- Have you made any major career shifts or taken new paths in recent years?
- What does success mean to you now, compared to your 20s or 30s?
- What have you learned about leadership, work-life balance, or burnout?
- What do you wish younger people in your field understood?
- Are there goals or dreams you've had to let go of — or are still holding onto?
- Have you started to think about retirement? What does that look like for you?
- If you could give your younger self advice about career and ambition, what would you say?
- What does your work mean to you now?

Family and Relationships

- How have your relationships with your parents, children, or siblings evolved at this stage?
- Have you become a parent, stepparent, or grandparent? What has that journey been like?
- What have been the joys and challenges of raising children — or watching them become adults?
- What family traditions have you tried to pass down, keep alive, or reinvent?
- Are there things you've done differently from how you were raised?
- Have you reconnected with any family members, or built new relationships with older relatives?
- What roles do you play in your family now — caretaker, peacekeeper, memory-keeper?
- What does home mean to you now, and has that changed?
- How do you stay connected to your extended family or roots?
- What's something your family doesn't know about you — but you'd like them to?

Personal Growth and Reflection

- How has your view of yourself changed in your 40s, 50s, or 60s?
- Have there been moments in this phase that felt like a turning point or awakening?
- What have you had to let go of — physically, emotionally, or spiritually?
- What are you still learning about yourself?
- What brings you joy now that might have surprised your younger self?
- Are there hobbies, passions, or causes that have become important to you?
- What does aging mean to you?
- Do you feel more like your parents now — or less?
- How do you handle fear, uncertainty, or change differently than before?
- What gives you hope for the next season of your life?



Later Life and Reflections (60 and Beyond)

Changes and Milestones

- How has your life changed in ways you never expected?
- Looking back, what decisions are you most proud of?
- Are there decisions you regret or wish you had made differently?
- What was one of the hardest periods of your life, and how did you get through it?
- What was one of the happiest periods of your life? What made it so joyful?

Relationships Over Time

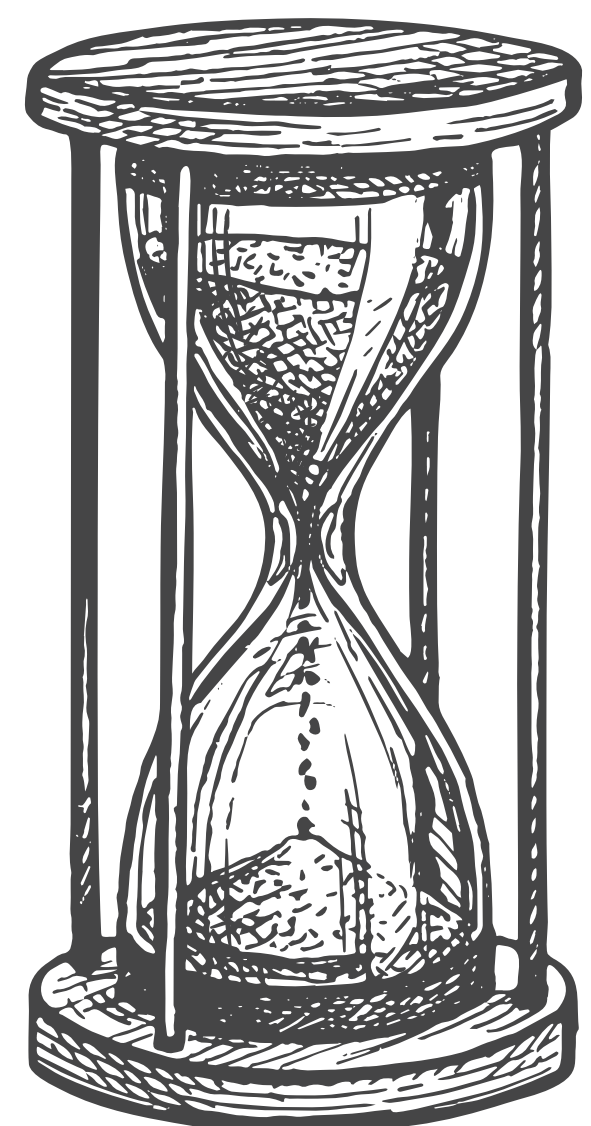
- How did your relationship with your children, grandchildren, or family change as you grew older?
- Have you lost people close to you? What have you learned about grief and memory?
- What friends have stayed in your life the longest? What bonded you?
- Have you reconnected with people from your past later in life?

Retirement and New Chapters

- If you retired, what was it like adjusting to retirement?
- Did you take up any new hobbies, passions, or routines later in life?
- Did you stay in the same home or move somewhere new? Why?
- How has technology changed your life from when you were young to now?
- What invention or change in the world surprised you most?

Reflecting on Life Lessons

- What does success mean to you now?
- What were the biggest challenges you faced as a person? As part of a family? As part of a community?
- Have you ever experienced discrimination, hardship, or injustice? How did you respond or survive?
- How did your family traditions evolve over time — were some lost, changed, or revived?
- If you could go back to one day in your life and relive it, which would it be and why?
- What is one thing you hope people remember about you — even after you're gone?



Family Lore and Stories

Family Legends and Tall Tales

- Are there any legends, myths, or stories that have been passed down in your family? (Ghost stories, near-mythical ancestors, epic adventures?)
- Was there anyone in the family who was considered larger-than-life? (War heroes, notorious characters, beloved eccentrics?)
- Are there “unspoken” family stories that everyone knows but rarely talks about? (Scandals, secrets, mysteries?)
- Was there ever a feud, rivalry, or falling out in the family? What happened?
- Are there stories about how ancestors survived major historical events (wars, the Great Depression, immigration journeys)?
- Are there humorous or embarrassing stories that get told at every family gathering?
- Was anyone famous, infamous, or involved in a major event in history?
- Did anyone "run away," disappear, or start a new life somewhere else?
- Are there stories about unexpected fortunes or losses in the family?
- Are there any long-standing family mysteries that were never fully solved?

Characters and Personality

- Who was the family comedian? The troublemaker? The storyteller? The dreamer?
- Who were the hardest workers you remember hearing about? The most daring? The most creative?
- Who had a talent or skill that stood out? (Music, invention, leadership, entrepreneurship?)
- Was there anyone in the family known for their generosity — or their stubbornness?
- Were there rebels or rule-breakers in the family? What did they do?

Home and Heirlooms

- Is there a family home, farm, or land that carries a lot of history? What stories are attached to it?
- Are there heirlooms (a table, quilt, ring, painting) that have dramatic or emotional stories connected to them?
- Has anything ever been sold, lost or stolen that the family still talks about?
- Are there recipes that have a funny, emotional, or legendary origin story?
- Are there photos, letters, or diaries that tell stories you want to preserve?

Family Identity and Lore

- Were there any traditions your family had that made you unique compared to others?
- Were there sayings, jokes, or words of wisdom unique to your family?
- Are there old jokes or humorous misunderstandings that live on through the generations?
- Was there anyone whose story deserves to be told but often gets overlooked?
- If you had to sum up the spirit of your family in one word, what would it be — and why?



Legacy and Advice for Future Generations

Reflections on Life

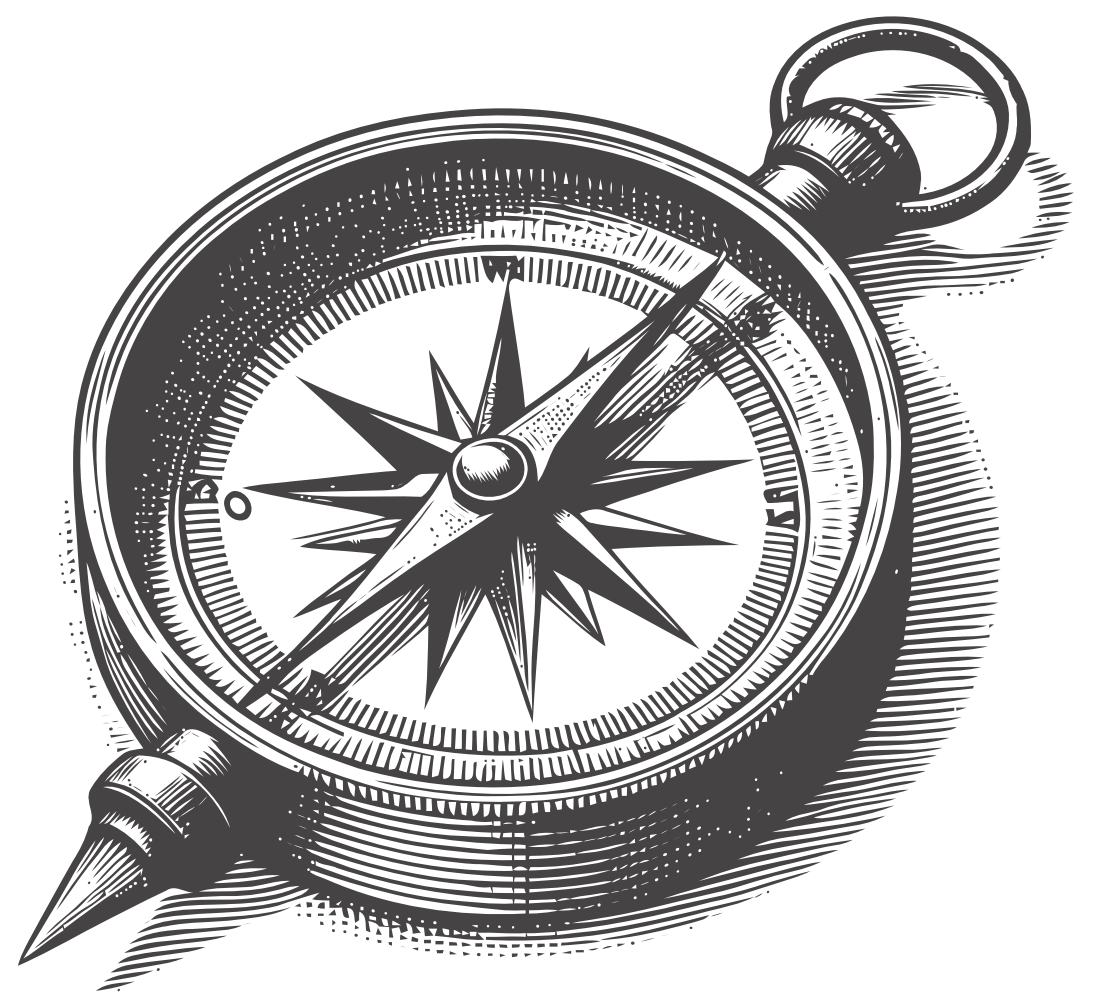
- What does the word legacy mean to you?
- When you think of your life's story, what chapter are you most proud of?
- What do you wish more people knew or understood about the life you've lived?
- Is there a moment you believe changed the direction of your life?
- What have you learned about love — and what it really means?
- What have you learned about loss — and how to keep going?
- What does it mean to you to be resilient?
- What's the hardest thing you've ever had to forgive — and how did you do it?
- What mistake taught you the most?
- What's something you were afraid to do, but did anyway?

Wisdom and Advice

- What advice would you give to your children? Grandchildren? Future generations you'll never meet?
- What's a lesson you wish you'd learned earlier?
- What do you believe makes a meaningful life?
- What's your personal motto or mantra? Has it changed over time?
- What are the most important values you hope will continue in your family?
- What kind of ancestor do you want to be remembered as?
- What's something you hope people don't forget?
- What's something you hope people do forgive?

Final Wishes and Messages

- Are there any final messages, memories, or stories you want to make sure are preserved?
- If someone finds this interview 100 years from now, what would you want them to know about you?
- Is there a message you'd like to speak directly to your descendants — in your own words?
- What would you say to someone who feels lost or unsure about their place in the world?
- Is there a story, letter, or item you'd want buried with, passed down, or kept in the family forever?
- What unfinished stories in the family would you hope someone picks up and carries forward?



After the Storytelling: What Comes Next

You've just finished a conversation that matters. One that may have included laughter, long-forgotten details, a few tears, and more than one surprise. These are the kinds of conversations that leave a mark—on both the listener and the storyteller. But what do you do now?

At Embracing Your History, we believe that oral history is just the beginning. What you do with the stories you've gathered is just as important as the moment they were spoken. Whether you're building a family tree, writing a family narrative, or simply preserving someone's legacy, here are your next steps.

1. Preserve the Interview

- If you recorded the conversation, back it up immediately. Save it to your computer, an external hard drive, and a cloud storage service.
- Create a folder labeled with the interviewee's name and the date of the conversation.
- Transcribe the interview (or use a transcription tool and then review it for accuracy). This makes it searchable and usable later.
- If you took notes, label them clearly and scan or photograph any handwritten pages.

2. Store with Intention

- Keep your files in a place that's easy to find. Use consistent naming conventions.
- If possible, print a physical copy of the transcript to store with your genealogy records.
- Consider uploading your files to your genealogy software or attaching them to relevant profiles on platforms like Ancestry, FamilySearch, or your own digital archive.

3. Reflect and Record

- Read or listen to the interview again—this time as a researcher. Highlight dates, places, names, occupations, religious references, and migration stories.
- Pay close attention to small details: names mentioned in passing, the name of a church or school, where someone worked or lived. These are your research breadcrumbs.
- Add these clues to your research log or family group sheets with a note that says, "Mentioned in oral history interview with Mary Smith, April 25, 2025."

4. Follow the Clues

- Use details from the interview to guide your next research steps:
- Was a hometown mentioned? Search for census records, maps, or directories.
- Did they talk about immigration? Look for passenger lists, naturalization records, or local history collections.
- Was a relative named but not well-known to you? Try building out that person's tree.

5. Share the Stories

- Consider turning the interview into a short written narrative: "Mary's Story" or "What My Grandma Taught Me."
- Include direct quotes if possible. Let their voice come through.
- Share with other family members. Email it, print it, or include it in a family newsletter.
- Upload recordings or transcripts to online trees (with permission), or save them in a shared cloud folder for your family.

6. Protect the Legacy

- Get permission in writing if you're planning to publish, podcast, or publicly share their story.
- Make sure you store the files in formats that are likely to last (MP3, PDF, DOCX, TXT).
- Create backups in at least three places.
- Consider including a printed version of the transcript in your family history binder or archive box.



7. Keep the Conversation Going

- Schedule follow-up interviews—you never get it all in one sitting.
- Ask if they remember more details, names, or stories since your last conversation.
- Use the interview as a bridge to talk to other family members. “Aunt Mary mentioned your grandfather worked on the railroad—do you know more about that?”

What you’ve captured isn’t just information. It’s identity. Culture. Connection. You’ve helped preserve a story that matters, and now you get to protect it, explore it, and pass it on.

Let this interview be the thread you follow to something deeper—a new ancestor, a lost tradition, or a truth that redefines your family story. And remember: every interview is a gift. Every story has value. And every person has something worth remembering.

This is the heart of family history.

