

Oral History Interview Questions

Family Background

1. What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?
2. When and where were you born?
3. How did your family come to live there?
4. Were there other family members in the area? Who?
5. What did your parents do for a living?
6. Tell me about your parents: What kind of people were they? What was most important to them? Did they have a good marriage? What do you remember most vividly about them?
7. Was there a saying your mother or father often repeated to you? What did they try to teach you?
8. How did you know when you had done something your parents did not approve of?
9. Describe the personalities of your family members. What was your relationship like with your mother/father/sister/brother?
10. What do you remember about your grandparents?
11. What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors?
12. Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
13. Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family? Were there a lot of people in the family who resembled each other? What were the most outstanding family characteristics?
14. Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?
15. What do you know about your family surname?
16. Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?

Early Childhood

17. Tell me about your childhood home. Describe your room. How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones?
18. Were there any special items in the house that you remember?
19. What is your earliest childhood memory?
20. Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?
21. Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favourite?
22. Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?
23. What kind of games did you play growing up?
24. What was your favourite toy and why?
25. Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?
26. What activities did the family do together? Vacations?
27. What did you do on Christmas? Thanksgiving? Birthdays? Other holidays? Did you family have special traditions?
28. Describe the community you grew up in.
29. What was school like for you as a child? What did you like about it? What was hard about it for you? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school?

30. What was your religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
31. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities? What were they?
32. What did you do in your spare time? Hobbies? Sports? Games?
33. What kind of clothes did you wear everyday? On special occasions?
34. What did you want to be when you grew up?
35. Who were your childhood heroes?
36. What were your favourite songs and music? Books? Authors? What do you like about them?
37. Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper?
38. Who were your friends when you were growing up?
39. What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?

Adulthood

40. What education did you pursue after high school?
41. How did you meet your spouse? What drew you to him/her?
42. What was it like when you proposed (or were proposed to)? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?
43. Tell me about your wedding day. Where and when did you get married? What memory stands out the most from your wedding day?
44. How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
45. What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?
46. What was your first car?
47. How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time?
48. Why did you choose your children's names?
49. Tell me about the family you raised. What was your proudest moment as a parent?
50. What activities did the family do together?
51. What values did you try to raise your children with? How did you go about doing that?
52. Describe your first job.
53. What did you go on to do in your work and career? What was your profession and how did you choose it? If you could have done any other profession what would it have been? Why wasn't it your first choice?
54. What lessons has your work life taught you?
55. Over the years, have you had any particular hobbies? Why does/did it appeal to you?
56. What world events have affected you most closely?
57. How do you spend your time now?

Wrap Up

58. What has provided you the greatest satisfaction in life?
59. Of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel was the most valuable?
60. What sorts of things give you pleasure now? What makes you sad?
61. What has been the hardest time of your life? How have you dealt with it?
62. What accomplishments were you the most proud of?
63. What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?
64. What haven't we talked about that you'd like to discuss in the time we have left?