



# HOW TO INTERVIEW AN AGING LOVED ONE

When family comes together to celebrate a holiday or other special occasion, it's the perfect time to ask questions about family history, learn more about aging loved ones and talk about wishes and goals for the future.

As someone who has spent their entire career interviewing others, I've put together the following categories and questions to use as conversation starters and to help uncover unique family information and genealogy. Take the extra step to record the conversation – either in writing or video – to create a family treasure that is bound to be cherished for generations to come.

## **Birth**

1. When/where were you born? Where is your birth certificate?
2. Are there any stories about the day you were born or your early infancy? (rushed to the hospital, premature?)
3. Do you know why you were given the name(s) that you have? (family name?)

(Documents to ask for: Birth Certificate, Footprints, Photos)

## **Childhood/Family Life**

1. Where did you grow up? What was it like there? (big city, small town, rural area?)
2. Why did your parents live in that area? (job, family members lived nearby?)
3. What was your house like? (did you share a bedroom? where did you play?)
4. What was life like when you were growing up? (How did your family make money? Did you go on vacations? Did your parents both work?)
5. What were you like as a child? (sensitive, rambunctious, defiant, class clown?)
6. Did you have any childhood heroes? (athletes, movie stars, world leaders, family?)
7. What were your parents like? (strict, laid back, involved?)
8. Describe any siblings? Were you close? Where are they now?
9. Were you close with your grandparents?
10. Did you have big family holidays?

(Documents to ask for: Family Tree; Vacation, Holiday and Family Photos)

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### **Education/Accomplishments**

1. What kind of school did you go to as a child? (what did it look like, how big was it?)
2. What was your favorite subject? (did you have any favorite teachers?)
3. What did you want to be when you grew up?
4. Where did you go to high school?
5. Did you go to college? What was it like?
6. What's the highest honor/award you ever received?

(Documents to ask for: Report Cards, Diplomas, Awards, Photos)

### **The World When You Were Growing Up**

1. What was the world like when you were growing up? (peace, war, recession, who was the president?)
2. What did everyday life look like? (TV, cars, computers, phones, social life)
3. Where were you when...
  - a. President Kennedy was assassinated
  - b. First man landed on the moon
  - c. World War II started/ended
  - d. 9/11

4. How did major news events affect your life and your view of the world?

(Documents to ask for: Newspapers, Magazines, Advertisements, Photos)

### **Adult Life**

1. What was your profession? How did you choose it?
2. What was your day-to-day work life like? (did you walk to work, what was your office like, your boss?)
3. Did you ever serve in the armed forces?
4. How did you and Mom/Dad meet?
5. What was your courtship like? (first date, proposal, engagement, wedding?)
6. What do you admire most about your spouse?
7. Are there any birthdays or milestones that you were most/least excited for?

(Documents to ask for: Marriage/Divorce Certificate, Service Papers, Photos)

### **Parenthood**

1. Tell me your feelings when you found out you were going to be a parent? What was the pregnancy like? Delivery?
2. Why did you choose our names?
3. What was it like raising me and my siblings? (were we easy/difficult?)
4. What were some of your proudest moments as a parent?
5. What are the biggest differences between the way you raised us and the way we raise kids today?

(Documents to ask for: Letters, Awards, Report Cards, Photos)

### **Our Family's Story**

1. What are our best family recipes?
2. Are there any chronic illnesses that we should know about? (what was it? who? what were the ages people got diagnosed?)

3. Do we have any famous/infamous family members?
  4. Are there any family scandals that are too good not to tell?!
- (Documents to ask for: Recipe cards, Medical Records, Photos)

### About You

1. What accomplishments are you the most proud of?
2. If you had to describe your personality in 3 adjectives, what would they be? (loyal, positive, motivated, apprehensive, timid, talented, persistent)
3. What are your best qualities? Worst?
4. Do you have any favorite sayings or expressions?
5. If you could go back to any age, which would it be and why?
6. If you won \$1 million tomorrow, what would you do with the money?
7. Do you have a philosophy on life? What's your best piece of advice for living?

### Today/Tomorrow

1. What kinds of things bring you the most pleasure now?
2. How have you dealt with the ageing process? What have been the best/worst/hardest parts?
3. Do you have a bucket list? What's on it?
4. How do you envision your life in the coming years?
5. If there comes a time when you can no longer live safely on your own, where would you like to live?
6. Do you have a:
  - a. Will
  - b. Living Will
  - c. Durable Power of Attorney
  - d. Healthcare Power of Attorney/Health Care Proxy
  - e. DNR/DNI
  - f. Advanced Health Care Directive
7. Do you have any thoughts about what you want your funeral to be like? (what kind of atmosphere, anything you want said about you?)
8. What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

(Documents to ask for: Will, Living Will, Power of Attorney, Healthcare Proxy, DNR/DNI)

— *Joan Lunden*

*Former host of "Good Morning America"*