

FAMILY HISTORY SAMPLE OUTLINE

I. Early Childhood and Family Background

A. Parents and Family

Start off with a general question: "Tell me about your parents" or "Tell me about your family background."

Where was family originally from? What do they know about that place? Have they ever visited it?

What stories did they hear growing up about earlier ancestors whom they never knew?

What parents did for a living? As a child, did they contribute to the family income or help parents in their work in any way?

What was parents' religious background? How was religion observed in their home?

What were parents' political beliefs? What political or other organizations were they involved in?

What other relatives did they have contact with growing up?

What do they remember about their grandparents?

Describe their siblings and their interactions with when they were young. What did they do together? What conflicts did they have? Who were they closest to?

Describe the house they grew up in. Describe their room.

What were family's economic circumstances? Do they remember any times when money was tight? Do they remember having to do without things they wanted or needed?

What were their duties around the house as a child? What were the other children's duties? How did duties break down by gender?

What skills did they learn (e.g., cooking, carpentry, crafts) and who taught them? What activities did the family do together?

Any special food they remember from their childhood? Do they currently make any traditional family foods?

What did they do on Christmas? Thanksgiving? Birthdays? Other holidays?

B. Community Grew Up In

Have them describe the community they grew up in and especially their own neighborhood--the homes, any businesses, any natural features.

Races and ethnicities in the neighborhood, what people did for a living, class differences.

Where did they shop? What was the largest town or city they remember visiting when they were young and what were their impression of it?

C. Early Schooling

Description of school they attended. What was school like for them? What did they like about it? What was hard about it?

Friends. Favorite teachers.

Favorite subjects.

Special activities.

Discipline.

Any teasing or bullying.

D. Friends and Interests

What did they do in their spare time?

Who were their friends and what did they do when they got together?

Hobbies? Favorite stories? Favorite games or make-believe?

What did they want to be when they grew up?

II. Teenage Years

A. Changes in Family

Changes in family composition: divorces, deaths, siblings moving out.

How did relationship with parents change when they became a teenager?

Additional responsibilities, chores?

If they had conflict with parents, what was it over?

B. School

Favorite subjects? Particular interests?

Least favorite subjects?

Memorable teachers? Describe their teaching style. How did they influence them?

Different groups in school? Which did they belong to? How do they think they were perceived by others?

Extracurricular activities.

What were their plans when they finished school? Education? Work? What did their parents think of their plans? What did their friends plan to do? Did the boys and girls in the family have different plans/expectations?

C. Work

Jobs during teenage years.

Contributing to family income? If not, how spent money?

D. Social Life and Outside Interests

Who were their friends and what backgrounds did they come from? What did they do together?

Crushes/romantic interests. Parents' advice/rules related to dating/romantic/sexual relationships? Advice from church or school? Norms among friends?

Hobbies/interests? Books read? Music listened to? Sports played? Crafts participated in?

III. Adulthood

C. Further Education

If went to college, what studied? How came to choose a major. Professor they admired or who influenced them? Other activities? Friends? Employment? What were preparing for as a career?

Any specialized training other than college?

B. Marriage or Formation of Significant Relationships

How met. What drew them together.

Describe decision to marry/move in together

What was most difficult being in a relationship originally? What was most satisfying?

Changes in relationship. Break-ups, divorces, deaths.

C. Employment

Who worked in the household/what were the household's sources of income?

If worked, how acquired first job? Then follow through changes in employment over time (rising through the company, striking out in a new direction, starting own business).

Difficulties and stresses on the job. Rewards

Balancing work and family

D. Family

Decision to have children or not: What went into that?

Describe the birth of children. What was each child like when they were young? How they have changed or not changed? Relationships with when young and now

Division of household work between parents and between individual children. Tensions or conflict over?

What values did they try to impart to their children? How did they go about doing that? What forms of discipline did they use and why? What was most satisfying to them about raising children? What was most difficult?

What activities did the family do together? What traditions did they have?

Changes in the family's circumstances: moves, economic hardships, divorce, deaths.

E. Church, political and other involvement: specifics of, reasons for and passions behind

F. Ongoing interests and hobbies

IV. Overview and Evaluation

What has provided them the greatest satisfaction in their life?

How would they say the world has changed since they were young?

In addition, don't forget to ask people about historically significant events they lived through:

How was their family affected by the Depression?

What do they remember of World War II? Did anyone close to them serve in the war?

Do they remember their first contact with such significant inventions as radio, television, personal computers, etc.? When did their family first buy them and how did the family use them?

Did they support or were they opposed to the war in Vietnam or the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and how did they express their political opinions?

Did they participate in or do they have any memories of any of the movements that came out of the fifties, sixties, and seventies—the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the gay liberation movement?

If the interviewee belongs to a group that has traditionally been discriminated against, what they were told, both positive and negative, about their group inside their family and outside of it. What kinds of discrimination did they experience? What cultural traditions are important to them?

If the interviewee is an immigrant or their parents or grandparents were immigrants, ask them to describe what they know of the country their family came from, why they immigrated, how they immigrated, and the specifics and difficulties of beginning a life in a new country.