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Record and Preserve Family Memories

We all cherish the stories told by family members. Like many people, you may hope to capture these memories but find the activities of daily life often get in the way. Voices and unique perspectives within the family fade with time. You can take a few steps now so memories can be shared far into the future.

Recording interviews with relatives does not have to be an elaborate affair. Today, a smartphone or tablet could help you gather stories and bridge generations. Let loved ones know how much they mean to you and engage them in conversations focusing on personal anecdotes and life lessons that paint a vivid picture. Keep the process simple and start collecting stories.

These experiences provide a deep, enriching connection to our roots and give us a greater understanding of our place in the world.



Three Steps to Begin Recording Your Family

Create a Plan

- Choose a family member whose stories you would like to capture.
- Reach out to them, expressing your desire to document the memories they hold.
- Some individuals are reluctant to talk about themselves or aspects of their lives. Be sensitive to their hesitation and look for ways to foster a natural, relaxed environment. You may help a person ease into the conversation by including other family members.

Prepare for the Interview

- Ensure your equipment or device is in good working order and test it before the interview. You can use a mobile device, digital or analog audio recorder, or video recorder. Have extra batteries, drives, or other supplies on hand.
- Bring a pen and paper to take notes. Written notes may be useful to you and serve as a backup if the recording is lost.
- Discuss the type of recording before the interview. A camera-shy relative may prefer audio recordings.
- For family members far away, consider arranging an interview via phone call or video session using Zoom or similar options.
- Gather family tree charts, photos, maps, etc. to spark memories and storytelling during the interview.

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Three Steps to Begin Recording (Continued)

Craft the Conversation

- Draft a list of key questions you wish to touch upon during the interview. Make sure most are open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses.
- Before asking questions, spend a little time chatting casually with your relative to set a comfortable tone.
- Discuss how you plan to use and share the recordings to ensure the family member is on board with the entire process.
- Aim for a balance between collecting facts and capturing emotions.



Resources to Help You Collect Stories

Below are some places to start finding easy-to-follow steps or services used by people in the genealogy community.

FamilySearch, “Record My Story”

Questions and prompts to record short stories.

familysearch.org/discovery/recordme

FamilySearch Wiki, “Oral Personal History”

Tips to create an oral history, write questions, and more.

familysearch.org/en/wiki/Oral_Personal_History

Learn Genealogy, “Talking to Relatives: The Family History Interview”

Advice from genealogy educator Kimberly Powell.*

learngenealogy.com/family-history-interview

StoryCorps, “Participate”

Guide on capturing and preserving stories, particularly the “Recording 101” section.

storycorps.org/participate

WIRED, “How to Use Tech to Capture Your Family History”

An article on how to approach interviews.

wired.com/story/how-to-use-tech-capture-family-history



*Kimberly Powell is NGS’s Director of Education.



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