

## RECORDING AN ORAL HISTORY

Congratulations on your decision to record an oral history. Whether recording

- your own recollections,
  - interviewing a family member or other individual,
  - gathering many family member together to record a greeting,
- the following suggestions are provided to assist you.

Included here are a short list of questions and a longer, more specific list of questions, to help trigger memories. It is not intended that you use all of the questions or that you use the questions as stated. They are simply a guide. Choose a few in advance and don't try to cover too many. Make your own list that will be easier to follow.

Following are suggestions to help you achieve a successful result.

### Recording your own recollections:

Remember, your story is very important. Record your story, not just for yourself, but for others. Now is the time.

Keep your recording session short, about 30 minutes to 1 hour. Avoid trying to record your whole life story in one sitting. You can return for multiple 30 minute to 1 hour sessions.

Prepare. Decide before you start, what memories you want to record - early childhood memories, romance, a specific incident, etc. Ideas follow to help you.

Always start by stating your name, the time and date. Then remember to label your disk.

### Interviewing another individual

Alex Haley said, "When an old person [or anyone with life experiences ] dies, it's like burning a library."

Assure the individual that their story is very important, for themselves and for others. Your subject may be the one who holds all the family stories for a particular period of time.

Keep your recording session short, about 30 - 60 minutes. Avoid trying to record a whole life story in one session.

**Prepare.** Decide your objective before you start. What memories do you want to capture - early childhood memories, romance, a specific incident, etc. Ideas follow to help you. Prepare your subject before you come by telling/giving them the questions you will be asking.

Keep the questions simple. Listen, your subject may ramble. Let them.

Always start by stating your name(s), the time and date. Then remember to label your disk

There are two types of questions:

Closed ended - What is your name?

Open ended - How did you get your name?

Both are necessary, but the stories come from the open ended questions.

Remember that *why*, *how* and *what* are often more interesting than *who*, *where*, *when*.

## QUESTIONS - The short list

### CHILDHOOD

- What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?
- When and where were you born? How did your family come to live there? Were there other family members in the area? Who?
- What is your earliest memory?
- What was the house (apartment, farm, etc.) like? How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones? Were there any special items in the house that you remember?
- What is your earliest childhood memory?
- Describe the personalities of your family members.
- What kind of games did you play growing up? What was your favorite toy and why? What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, beach, etc.)?
- Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favorite? Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?
- What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College? What school activities and sports did you participate in? Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?
- Who were your childhood heroes?
- What were your favorite songs and music?
- Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?
- What was your religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
- Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper?
- Who were your friends when you were growing up?
- What world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?
- Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?
- How were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did your family have special traditions?
- How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?
- Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?
- What was the happiest day of your life?

### FAMILY

- What do you know about your family surname? Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?
- What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors? Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family?
- Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
- Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family?
- Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?
- What is the full name of your spouse? Siblings? Parents?
- When and how did you meet your spouse? What did you do on dates? What was it like when you proposed (or were proposed to)? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?
- Where and when did you get married? What memory stands out the most from your wedding day?
- How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them? What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?
- How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time? Why did you choose your children's names? What was your proudest moment as a parent?
- What did your family enjoy doing together?
- Of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel was the most valuable?
- What family heirlooms do you have?

### CAREER

- What was your profession and how did you choose it? If you could have had any other profession what would it have been? Why wasn't it your first choice?

### OTHER

- What accomplishments were you the most proud of?
- What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you.
- What places have you visited?
- What prayers have you had answered?

## QUESTIONS - A Longer List

### CHILDHOOD

#### ABOUT YOU

- What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname and how did you get it?
- When and where were you born? What were the circumstances you have heard about your birth? Were you a healthy baby, any birth defects or health problems you had to overcome?
- Describe yourself physically, small or tall for your age, fat, thin, color of hair and eyes. Did you have freckles? How did you wear your hair? Did you wear glasses?
- Describe your temperament - shy, outgoing, active, passive, show displays of temper, spoiled, etc. What worries or fears did you have as a child?
- What childhood diseases and other illnesses did you have? Describe accidents, broken bones, tonsillectomy, operations that occurred during childhood and what circumstances surrounded them. Did you spend time in a hospital? Did you have braces on your teeth?
- How did you learn responsibility? What were your jobs around the house? Did you have an allowance?
- What were the kinds of things you did as a child that caused you to be punished and how were you punished?
- What is your place in the family, oldest, youngest? How did your birth order affect you?
- Are you more responsible, spoiled. Are you still treated as the dependable older sibling?  
The baby in the family?
- If you were a child during the Depression, World War II, etc, what do you remember about these times?
- Describe your happiest, most exciting memory of your childhood and describe the worst memory of your childhood
- Did you take music lessons. Which instruments? Who was your teacher and how long did you practice each day? Did you practice willingly or were you made to practice? Did you take other lessons, dance, tennis swimming, etc.?
- What activities did you participate in as a child - 4-H, Scouting, summer camp, etc? Did you earn some of your own money? How?

#### PARENTS

- Full name, birth dates and places. Death dates and causes of death and place where they are buried.
- Describe mother and father physically - short, tall, thin, heavy, color hair and eyes, Did they have any unusual features?
- What kind of temperament did they have: easy going, tense, quick to anger, full of humor? Who was the disciplinarian?
- What was your father's role in the home as you grew up? How did he earn his living? Did he actively participate in family life or was he passive?
- What was your mother's role in the home? Did she work outside the home?
- Describe some interactions with each parent that you remember in your early childhood.
- What was the climate of your home –authoritarian, permissive, strict, happy, sad, Ec.?
- Describe your family's financial condition during your childhood - rich, poor, poor but you didn't know it?
- What was the social climate of your family? Did you have guests often?
- What difficulties did your family have to deal with during your childhood – deaths, divorce, financial setbacks?

#### SIBLINGS

- Full names, birth dates and places of birth. Death dates and place of death. Cause of death and where they are buried.
- Describe your relationship with each brother and sister. Are you closer to some than others?  
Do you have a special relationship with an older or younger sibling?
- Were there any handicapped children in your family? If so, what lessons did you learn from your relationship with this child?
- Describe special memories you have of your brothers and sisters.

#### YOUR CHILDHOOD HOME

- Describe the first childhood home you remember - frame or brick- how many rooms - two story - indoor or outdoor bathroom - how was home heated?
- Describe each room as you remember it. What kind of furniture was in the living room? Radio or TV? Piano? Did the family gather there in the evenings? Describe the kitchen. Where did the family eat? Where did you eat when company came? What did your bedroom look like? Did you share it? Did you have your own bed? Which

- was your favorite room? Why? What was your favorite piece of furniture? Do you have in your home today any of the furniture from your childhood home? Did you have a telephone. Were you on a party line?
- Describe the outside of your home. Did you have a yard? Was there a lawn, trees, swings, flowers, vegetable garden, orchard? How much property did you have? What other buildings were on the property?
  - Did you have farm animals? Describe.
  - What did the neighborhood look like? What kind of houses or buildings were in the neighborhood?
  - Where did you shop? Describe the stores. How big was the town you lived in? Did you travel to a bigger town to shop?
  - Do you have memories of trips to the doctor and dentist?
  - Describe the first permanent you had in your hair?
  - Did you have any daring escapades? Describe.

#### **SCHOOL - Elementary School - Grades Kindergarten through Six.**

- Name the locations of elementary schools you attended. Was the building large or small, approximately how many classrooms and students?
- Names of teachers if you remember them. Did you have the same teacher all day? Who was your favorite teacher and why?
- Which was your favorite subject and which subject did you do best in?
- Did you eat a hot lunch in the school cafeteria, eat a sack lunch, or go home?> Did you have a special lunch box?
- How did you get to school? Walk, school bus, car pool?
- What kind of clothing did you wear to school?
- Who was your special playmate as you grew up?
- Describe some of your elementary school memories. What are the special events you remember: plays, spelling bees, sporting events, field day, fist fights, etc

#### **RECREATION, FRIENDS, AND PETS.**

- What were the names of your best childhood friends? Did they live near? What memories do you have of these friends? Do you know where they are now?
- Describe some of the games and activities you enjoyed: kick the can, hopscotch, cops and robbers, crack the whip, marbles, etc. What were some of your favorite sayings, jump-the-rope rhymes, ditties, poems, songs? What kind of clothes did you wear to play? Did you go barefoot?
- Did you have your own bike?
- How did you spend Saturdays? Did you go to the movies?
- What were your favorite radio programs? Green Hornet, Jack Armstrong, The Shadow, Let's Pretend, Sky King, etc.
- What were your favorite TV shows?
- Describe your pets - dogs, cats, turtles, fish, rabbits. What memories do you have of these pets?
- What did your family do for fun?
- Describe trips with your family? Did you ever travel on an airplane, train, bus? What was the longest distance from home you traveled as a child?
- What were the special things you did with your family - picnics, boating, skiing, fishing, etc? Did you take camping trips, attend family reunions?

#### **HOLIDAYS**

- did you have a Christmas tree? Describe the decorations. Did you decorate your home in addition to the tree? Do you use any of the decorations in your home today? What were the Christmas traditions in your family? How did you spend Christmas Eve? Did you celebrate with big family parties, religious observances, sing carols, visit friends and relatives? When were gifts opened? Were they opened all together as a family? Were the gifts wrapped? Did you hang a stocking? What was put in it? Did you believe in Santa Clause? Were there special foods you always ate at Christmas? Was a big dinner a tradition? Did your mother bake fruitcake, dip chocolates, etc. Did you earn your own money to buy gifts? Describe some of the gifts you remember giving to others. What was your most memorable Christmas? What was the favorite gift you received as a child? Did your family do some sort of charitable activities at Christmas?
- How was your birthday celebrated? Did you have a cake, invite friends to parties, special dinners, etc?
- How did you observe the forth of July The 14<sup>th</sup>? Parades, fireworks, picnics, etc?
- Describe Easter. Did you have an Easter basket, new clothes, etc.
- How was Thanksgiving spent? What was the menu? Was it a big family gathering?

#### **CHURCH EXPERIENCES -AGE BIRTH TO TWELVE**

- Blessing: When, where, by whom. Were there unusual circumstances about your blessing? Did you wear heirloom clothing?

- Baptism: When, where and by whom were you baptized and confirmed? Describe what you remember about the event.
- Where did you attend church meetings: church, school, home, rented hall? Were there unusual circumstances about your meetings?
- Was the gospel practiced in an active way in your home: family prayers, scripture study, father's blessings, etc? How did your family feel about church? Describe your religious training as a child.
- Did you have any temple experiences as a child? Did you go to the temple to be sealed to your parents, or attend a temple dedication?
- Describe some of the changes that have occurred in Primary, Sunday School, Young Women/Men since your childhood - names of Primary classes, bandelos, Primary penny march, Primary held after school, dime Sunday, 2 ½ minute talks, Sacrament gems, Sacrament during Sunday school, etc
- If you converted to the Church at an older age, describe.
- What prayers have you had answered?

### **SPECIAL EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD**

- Did you move to a new home during your childhood? What were the circumstances that made your family move?

## **ADOLESCENCE**

### **JUNIOR HIGH OR MIDDLE SCHOOL**

- Names and location of the junior high school you attended. Describe the building inside and out.
- Approximately how large was the student body?
- What courses did you take? Describe some of your classes. Did you take cooking, sewing, gym, etc? Describe your gym suite. What were your favorite classes and why?
- Who were your most memorable teachers? Why do they stand out in your memory?
- Describe special activities you enjoyed—sports, clubs, dramas, music, etc.
- Did you have a graduation ceremony? Describe.

### **HIGH SCHOOL**

- Name and location of the high school you attended. Describe size and physical facility.
- What course of study did you pursue? Tell about some of the classes you particularly remember.
- Were you a serious student or a laid back student?
- What were the special activities you participated in—clubs, pep club, choirs, operettas, dramas, sports, etc? Describe special memories.
- Were you elected to a student office?
- Did you receive any special recognitions, scholarships, or other awards?
- Describe your high school graduation. Where, what did you wear, how did you celebrate after the ceremonies?

### **FRIENDS & ACTIVITIES DURING TEEN YEARS**

- Who were your close friends during your teen years?
- What did you do for fun after school and on weekends? Did you participate in any daring escapades?
- Did you have a part-time job to earn some of your own money? How did you use your money—spend it all on clothes, save for college, buy a car, etc?
- What were the clothing fads you wore—pegged skirt, sack dresses, Joyce shoes, Jantzen sweaters, rolled up blue jeans, charm bracelets, saddle oxfords, circle skirts, platform shoes, mini-skirts, etc. When did you get your first high heels?
- How did you wear your hair? Did you wear make-up?
- What special music or other lessons did you take during this time? How did you use your talents—for performing or for your own enjoyment?

### **DATING AND ROMANCES (DO NOT INCLUDE COURTSHIP WITH HUSBAND)**

- When, where, and with whom was your first date? How old were you and do you remember what you wore?
- What kinds of activities did you do on dates? Did you go in cars, ride the bus, or walk? Did you double date or have blind dates?
- Tell about some of the most exciting, memorable evenings—proms, girl's choice dances, special dinners, football games, etc. Were you given corsages?
- Where did you go to dance and who were your favorite bands or groups?
- What kind of clothing did you wear for dates? Describe your most loved dresses and formals.
- Describe the absolutely worst date you can remember. What made it the worst?
- What qualities did you most like in your dates?

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

- When did you learn to drive a car? How old were you and who taught you? Were there funny incidents that happened while you were learning? Describe the family cars you remember.
- Tell about some of the trips you took with your family. Describe some of the family activities you particularly enjoyed.
- Were there special projects or experiences you participated in - talent shows, state or national competitions, beauty contests, etc?
- What were some of the world events that took place while you were a teenager?

## **ADULTHOOD**

### **POST HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION**

- Name and location of the institution you attended after high school –university–business college–technical college, etc.
- How many years did you attend and what course of study or major did you pursue?
- Describe some of the classes you particularly enjoyed.
- Where were the instructors that influenced your life either for good or bad?
- What were the factors that helped you decide on your career choice–example of parents, peers, expected income, working conditions, etc?
- How did you pay for your schooling - scholarships, earned your own expenses, parental support, support from spouse?
- Describe some of the events you remember - special speakers, concerts, athletic events, pep rallies, dances.
- Did you participate in student government, clubs, sororities, etc.? Were you elected to honor societies or did you receive special recognitions?
- Did you attend Institute of Religion classes during this time? How did these classes influence your life?
- Did you graduate? Describe your graduation ceremonies.

### **FULL-TIME MISSION EXPERIENCE**

- When, where, and length of time of your mission.
- When and how did you make the decision to serve a mission?
- Were there incidents or people who influenced your decision?
- Describe your feelings when your call arrived.
- Describe the training you received prior to leaving - MTC, a few days in the old mission home, or no training.
- If you had to learn a foreign language, how did you learn and did you become fluent quickly and easily?
- Tell about some of the highlights of your mission- inspirational experiences, difficult times, people you particularly learned to love.
- How has your mission influenced the rest of your life?

### **COURTSHIP**

- When, where and how did you meet? What was your first impression? Was there an immediate attraction?
- Describe your first date.
- Did your relationship grow slowly from friendship into love or was it "love at first sight?"
- Tell about some of the special, wonderful dates you remember.
- Was your relationship stable and easy or did you argue and quarrel?
- How did your first impressions change as you became better acquainted? What qualities did you most appreciate? What were some of the serious differences - religion, cultural backgrounds, philosophies about family life and child rearing, etc?
- Describe your marriage proposal.
- Was there an engagement ring?
- How many months/years did you date before becoming engaged and how long were you engaged before marriage?
- Would you change anything about your courtship?

### **WEDDING DAY AND HONEYMOON**

- When, where and by whom were you married? What time of day were you married and what was the weather like? Describe what you remember about the marriage ceremony.
- What did you wear? Did you have a wedding gown? Describe the style and fabric. Did you purchase it or was it home sewn? Describe your veil. Did you wear heirloom clothing?
- Did you have a wedding breakfast or a rehearsal dinner? When and where and what was the menu?
- Who were some of the guests?
- Did you have a reception or party after the ceremony?

- If there were bridesmaids/groomsmen, who were they and what did they wear?
- What was the color scheme and how was the reception room decorated?
- What did you serve for refreshments? Describe your wedding cake.
- What were your favorite gifts? Was it the custom to register your china and silver?
- Did anything funny or dreadful happen on your wedding day? Did you get cold feet at the last minute?
- Did you have a honeymoon? Where did you go and for how long? Describe fun and special events of your honeymoon.
- If you and your husband were sealed in the temple at a later time, describe that experience. When, where, and by whom were you sealed? Were children sealed to you? What were your feelings on that day?

### **EARLY YEARS OF MARRIAGE**

- Description and addresses of first apartments or home. Do you remember how much you paid for rent?
- How much furniture did you have and was it cast off from your parents or borrowed?
- Did either of you attend college or some other kind of schooling after marriage? Did you live in student housing?
- How did you support yourselves—student loans, GI bill, parental support, or were you the major means of support?
- What was your income and how did you make your budget stretch?
- Did you spend time in the military service? When and where did you live?
- Describe memorable experiences during this time.
- Describe some of your homemaking failures and successes during these early years.
- What memorable meals do you remember?
- What were some of your biggest and funniest housekeeping, cooking, sewing or budgeting errors?
- Describe the first car you bought together. How did you pay for it?
- What were the major adjustments you and your husband had to make as you learned to live together?
- Do you remember your first quarrel, what was it over and how did you resolve the problem?
- What was the best thing that happened to you early in your marriage to unify you as a couple?
- Did you move away from your parents?

### **CAREER**

- What was the first full-time job you held after your schooling? Did you find a job in your major field of study?
- What was your salary and how did you spend your money - cloths, car, support yourself, etc.
- Describe other jobs you have held during your adult life.
- What was the reason for the change in employment - bigger salary, better hours or working conditions, moving to new location, arrival of children, etc.
- What kind of a savings program have you had?
- Have you ever been fired from a job? What was the reason and what did you learn from the experience?
- Wife - Have you been employed since you have had children? Have you worked because you want to or because you really needed the salary? What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of a mother working? What are some of the ways you have managed to balance home and family and your employment?

### **CHILDREN**

- When and where were each of your children born?
- Describe how you felt when you first realized you were expecting a baby—excited, happy, frightened, worried, space, etc.
- What preparations did you make for the baby - decorating the nursery, sewing?
- Were there unusual or funny events during the pregnancy?
- Were there any serious medical problems with either the pregnancy or the birth?
- Did the baby's father witness the birth?
- What inadequacies did you feel as a new mother?
- Tell about funny or scary experiences you had in the first days and weeks of your child's life.
- Describe each child's personality traits. What traits made them easy or difficult to care for.

### **RECREATION**

- What kind of activities has your family done for fun - camping, picnics, boating, swimming or other sports, singing together, etc.
- Do you own a vacation home? Describe.
- Tell about some of the family vacations you have taken.
- What were the funny or difficult things that have happened on vacations?
- Have you and your spouse continued to have dates or some time alone together? What kind of activities do you enjoy doing together?
- Describe vacations you and your spouse have taken without the children. Who took care of your family while you were gone? Do you feel time with your spouse has helped unify you as a couple? What was the most memorable

trip and why?

### **HOBBIES AND TALENTS**

- What talents have you pursued and tried to improve through your adult life? Have you tried to continue using the talents and skills you developed as a young person? Have you taken music or art lessons? Describe.
- What kind of adult education classes have you enrolled in through the years? Have you gone back to college to graduate or to pursue a graduate degree?
- What books and magazines have you enjoyed reading? Who are your favorite authors, musicians, artists? Do you enjoy poetry, classical music, operas, ballets, plays, pop concerts, jazz, etc?
- Describe some of the events you have particularly loved.
- Have you done community service through the years? Describe.
- What are your hobbies - genealogy, music, writing, art, cooking, sewing, gardening, etc? How have you found time to pursue your hobbies and interests?
- What advice would you give your children and grandchildren about the importance of staying interested and involved in the world?