



Family history interview questions

When gathering with family and friends, at any event, if the opportunity arises make sure to collect family stories. So many times, as I gather with my current family, there are questions that arise and no one knows the answers; answers my mother or grandmothers would have been able to tell us. Don't lose their stories. My son, finally interested in genealogy, always asks my dad at dinner "Papa, tell me a life story!" or "Papa, tell me a life story about mamma!". My dad gladly will relate family history this way. Here's a few topics to get you started on your journey.

CHILDHOOD & FAMILY

- What was the home you grew up in like? Where was it, and what was your favorite/least favorite spot?
- What is your first memory as a child?
- What was a typical day like in your family when you were little?
- How does your family show their affection for one another?
- What makes your family unique?
- Who was the serious child in your family?
- What did you do when you were bored as a child?
- Who was your favorite elementary school teacher? Which teacher do you remember most from high school? And why?
- Did you like school, and what type of student were you?
- Did you have a best friend when you were young? Are you still friends? Who is your best friend now?
- When you were little, what did you answer when asked "What do you want to be when you grow up?"
- What were you like when you were 15, 25, 50?

FOOD

- What meal makes you feel nostalgic for your childhood or for home?
- What comfort food do you cook most?
- What are your oldest recipes and from who did they come?



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- What smells do you associate with to your childhood?
- Who are/were the best cooks in the family? Tell me about them.
- What family dish do you want your children to continue cooking for future generations?

TRANSITIONS & MILESTONES

- Did you ever move as a child? What was it like to live in a new place?
- Who was at your high school graduation? Did you have a celebration?
- How do you celebrate birthdays, anniversaries?
- How did you decide where to go to college?
- How did you choose your career?
- Did you serve in the military? Were you drafted or did you volunteer?
- Tell me about your first job. How old were you? What and where was it?
- How did you feel on your wedding day? What memories of that day do you think of first?
- What can you tell me about the first time you experienced a death?
Who died? How old were you? How did it effect your outlook on life?

DECISIONS & LESSONS

- What is the best decision you ever made?
- When have you failed at something, and how did you recover?
- What lesson do you remember learning from your parents? Grandparents?
- What hardships did you experienced in your life, and how did you survive/thrive/cope? (in history, such as the Depression or a war, or in their personal life, such as a divorce or unemployment)
- Tell me about a significant time you said “no.”
- What do you most regret, and how would you change it if you could?

TRADITIONS

- What was your favorite holiday growing up?
- What are some family traditions related to that holiday?



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- Do you have any traditions that have been passed down for generations?
- Does religion hold a strong place in your family?
- What is the most memorable gift you have ever received? Given?
- Are there any family heirlooms you have inherited? Why do they hold meaning for you?

FUN & GAMES

- What songs have hold special meaning to you?
- Who was the prankster in your family?
- Tell me a funny story from your past.
- What's your favorite family story to tell at dinner?
- Did you play sports as a kid? in high school? Or as an adult?
- What was the main form of entertainment when you were a kid (board games, radio, playing music/singing, reading books, putting on shows, etc.)?
- On what family vacations did you go? Which was your favorite and why?
- What is the furthest you've traveled from home?
- Tell me a funny vacation story!
- Tell me about a time you were incredibly embarrassed.

LEGACY QUESTIONS

- What values would you like to pass down?
- What would you tell your 20-year-old self?
- What would you like your legacy to be?
- What questions do you wish you had asked your own parents? Grandparents?

An important suggestion I hope you'll take: before asking these questions, download or locate a voice recorder app on your phone, and record the answers as they're told to you. Nothing is as comforting as listening to the voice of a loved one relating stories. These recordings become extra meaningful as future generations can physically hear their voices.