

Personal History Inventory

Everyone has history. Even as young as you all are, there are things that have happened in your own lives that influence the people you are today. History shapes who we are - as individuals, as people, and as nations. In this exercise, you are being asked to interview two members of your own family who are at least twenty years apart in age. So that might mean your mother and your grandmother, uncle, aunt, etc. – anyone will do as long as they are part of your history, and are at least twenty years older than each other (that means one person needs to be at least twenty years older than you, and the second person interviewed must be at least twenty years older than the first person you interviewed. That way you are covering a time span of at least forty years. ***Pick and choose enough questions to write a two-page essay about your own history, describing your family's past, and how that past may have influenced the person you are.***

Try to ask questions that will help you understand the person you are interviewing, the times they lived in, and how their life experiences have impacted your own life. Here are some examples to get you started, but feel free to make up your own questions, too!

Sample questions:

GENERATIONS

- Where did your great-grandparents come from?
- If it was other than the United States, why did they leave their homeland?
- Where did they live in the United States?
- What did they do for a living?
- How many brothers and sisters did they have?
- How many children did they have?
- What do you remember about your great-grandparents?
- Where did your grandparents live?
- What did they do for a living?
- What do you remember about your grandparents?
- How many sisters and brothers did they have?
- How many children did they have?
- Are there any customs or family traditions that have been passed down?

CHILDHOOD

- Where and when were you born?
- What was it like there?
- What was the residence like that you lived in?
- What were your parents like?
- What are your favorite memories of them?
- What is the most important thing they taught you?
- Did you have any brothers or sisters?
- What were they like as children?
- What kind of things did you enjoy doing together?
- What were you like as a child?
- Did you have any pets?
- Who was your best friend?
- What was your school like and did you like it?
- Did you have chores around the house?
- Did you participate in sports, scouts, clubs, or church?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What did you like most about your childhood?
- When you misbehaved, what was your punishment?

ADULT LIFE

- Where did you live when you left home?
- Did you further your education? What degrees?
- What was your first job like as an adult?
- What were the best and worst jobs you ever had?
- What is your present job or was your last job before retirement?
- Did you serve in the military? What was your assignment? (refer to Veteran section)
- Have you belonged to any organizations?
- What was your favorite activity/sport?
- When did you buy your first house?
- What was your favorite car?
- Have you done any traveling? What places did you visit and what did you do there?
- What do you remember about the world at different times in your life?
- Where were you and what did you think (about) during historic events?
- What were some of your greatest accomplishments?
- What was the most embarrassing thing you ever did?

FAMILY STORIES

- Did you marry? If not why did you chose to remain single?
- If you married how did you meet your spouse?
- How old were you when you got married?
- What was it like when you were dating?
- What was popular at the time? (music, movies, clothes...)
- Did you marry for love or another reason?
- What was your wedding like?
- Where did you get married? Where was your honeymoon?
- Where did you live when newly married?
- Do you have any children?
- What were your feelings when your children were born?
- How do your children's lives differ from yours?
- What was your home and neighborhood like?
- Why did you chose to live where you did?
- What were the happiest days that you remember?
- What were your proudest accomplishments?

LOVE STORIES

- Who did you first fall in love with?
- How and where did you meet?
- What did you talk about?
- Do you remember a special present you bought or received from him/her?
- Did you have a favorite place to go together?
- Did you have a favorite song?
- Do you have a special memory of a time you spent with that person?
- Are you still together or, if not, why did you part?

WISDOM STORIES

- If you could go back and re-live any part of my life, what it would be?
- What was your proudest moment?
- What main things guided your life decisions?
- At times of stress in your life, what got you through it?
- What was your greatest fear growing up? How did you dealt with it?
- What is the most important lessons you have learned so far?
- Who was the one person you admired most? Why?
- What are you most sorry about?
- What cause were you most concerned with?

- What was the hardest thing you ever had to do?
- What/Who was the greatest influence in your life.
- What thing(s) did you mother/father always say?
- What movie or book impacted the way you lived your life? Why?
- As you look back, what are the three most fantastic changes you witnessed?
- What are some of the principles that you have lived by? What guides you?
- How well have you been able to live by those principles?

MEDICAL HISTORY

- How old did your great-grandparents live to be or how old are they, if they are still living?
- If they have passed, how did they die?
- How old did your grandparents live to be or how old are they, if they are still living?
- If they have passed, how did they die?
- How old are your parents?
- If they have passed, how did they die?
- Do any specific illnesses run in your family?
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BUSINESS, CAREER, & FINANCE

- If you have your own business or manage one that has been in the family, what kind of business is it?
- What do you like most about what you do for a living?
- What accomplishments and recognition have you received? How did they make you feel?
- What did you do that led to those accomplishments?
- How did you manage your money?
- Have you ever gotten in over your head? How did you get out?
- What was your typical workday like?
- Was your work stressful? If so how did you deal with it?
- Do you have any special thoughts on dealing with bosses, subordinates, coworkers, or customers?
- How do you define SUCCESS?
- What gave you the most satisfaction in your career?
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VETERAN'S HISTORY

Jogging the Memory:

- Were you drafted or did you enlist?
- Where were you living at the time?
- If you joined, what was your motivation?
- Why did you pick the service branch you joined?
- Do you recall your first days in service? What did it feel like?
- Talk about your boot camp/training experiences. What do you remember about your instructors?
- How did you get through it?

Experiences:

- Which war (s) did you serve in?
- Where exactly did you go?
- Do you remember your arrival and what it was like?
- What was your job/assignment?
- Did you see combat?
- Talk about a couple of your most memorable experiences.
- Were you a prisoner of war? If so, talk about your experiences and when freed.
- Were you awarded any medals or citations? What did you do to earn them?

Life in the Service:

- How did you stay in touch with your family?
- What was the food like?
- Did you have enough supplies?
- Did you feel pressure or stress?
- Was there something special you did for good luck?
- How did people entertain themselves?
- What did you do when on leave?

- Where did you traveled while in the service?
- Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?
- Did you and others pull pranks? If so, describe some.
- What did you think of officers or fellow soldiers?

After Service (appropriateness of questions will vary if the veteran had a military career.):

- Do you recall the day your service ended? How did you feel? Where were you?
- Did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?
- How did your service and experiences affect your life?