

ancestors if you are to understand who they were and why they made the decisions they made. The ordinary day-to-day activities help define who they are and are a reflection of their lives and times. George discusses the *WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW* of a story. "Researching the time period is essential so that you know what historical events were transpiring and what everyday life was like: food, clothing, transportation, communication, socialization, etc."

## Collecting Your Family Stories

Every person has a story to tell. Family stories are tales about people, places, and events related to your family and your ancestors. The memorable stories of our lives and of others in our family take on special importance, even if everyone tells different versions of the same event. These tales are family heirlooms held close to the heart. They are a gift to each generation that preserves them by remembering them and passing them on to future generations, and will become some of the most valuable and exciting information you can document about your family history. We call these family stories *oral history*, which is history the way our parents and grandparents remember it.

There is some urgency in collecting these precious family stories because older people will obviously not be around forever. Often, a parent, grandparent or great aunt is the last living person who knows these stories, and if they pass on before their story is recorded, it is lost forever and may never be known. By gathering your family stories, and learning more about the personalities and heritage of your ancestors, they become more than just names and dates. They become real people with real struggles and dreams and triumphs in their lives just like you.



It doesn't matter if your family was famous or just regular people like most of us, there is great value in getting to know them. Start with older people who you believe might not be able to wait for you to get around to gathering their story. Decide what you would like to learn about from each family member, and don't delay in interviewing them. And don't limit yourself to one person, collect several perspectives on the same subject by getting lots of stories from different family members. One thing you can count on, your family stories are guaranteed to become absolutely priceless possessions in your family for many generations to come.

## Conducting an Oral Interview

Whether your interview is in person, by phone, or by mail, there are some important steps which will encourage a more open and thorough interview.

Older relatives can be very helpful in piecing together your family's history. Often there is at least one person in a family who has assumed

Here's an excellent article about how to prepare and conduct an oral history interview.



### Capturing the Past - [www.byubroadcasting.org/capturingpast](http://www.byubroadcasting.org/capturingpast)

In the article, they provide four main steps in conducting an oral interview with family members:

Planning the Interview  
 Preparing for the Interview  
 Conducting an Interview  
 Preserving the Interview

the role of family historian – *the keeper of the flame* – and may already have accumulated and organized a great deal of genealogical information. Get reacquainted with family members through family history interviews.

Some of the things you will need to conduct an interview are: digital recorder or video camera, digital tapes, and a list of questions to help you remember what things you want to know about this person. You can *listen* better if

## Suggested Activities

Identify your oldest living relatives and decide which one you would like to interview first. Schedule a time for a personal visit. Look at the information you have recorded on your pedigree chart and make a list of questions to ask your relative that will help you fill in the blank spaces on your chart. When you have completed the interview, record the new family history information on your pedigree chart, family group record and research log.

you don't have to be thinking about your next question.

Usually, the *less talking* you do, the better the interview. So don't interrupt when they're telling their story. And usually limit your interview to 1½ hours so they don't get worn out. Store the tapes in a safe place and make a transcription as soon as convenient.

Use your pedigree chart to help determine what you want to learn from your interview with a family member.



## Interview Tips

- Prepare your questions in advance (see interview questions).
- Check to make sure your recording equipment is working properly and that you have enough tape, batteries, and other accessories for the interview.
- Give the person you are interviewing time to prepare for the interview, at least a week if possible.
- Ask the person you are interviewing to start gathering family photographs, documents, letters, or any other items that will help them share their memories with you.
- Bring someone with you to the interview if possible to handle the camera or tape recorder so that you can keep your attention focused on the person you are interviewing.
- Store the tapes in a safe place and transcribe the interview to help preserve it.
- Enter the information you gather in the interview on your pedigree chart, family group record, and research log.