

Basics of Oral History

A Brief History & Guide to Creating an Oral History
TLA 2016 Annual Conference

Oral History Question Examples

Basic Questions

- What is your full name, and why were you named this?
- What are the names of your parents and siblings?
- What is the date and place of your birth?
- What was your schooling like? (That is, how did you get to school, what classes did you take, and what was your favorite subject?)
- Did you get married? If so, to whom? When and where?

Family History Questions

- Do you remember hearing your grandparents describe their lives? What did they say?
- Do you remember your great-grandparents? What do you know about them?
- Who is the oldest person you can remember in your family from when you were a child? What do you remember about that person?

Lifetime Changes

- What would you consider to be the most important inventions during your lifetime?
- How is the world different now from when you were a child?
- As you see it, what are the biggest problems that face our nation, and how do you think they could be solved?

Travel/Vacation

- What is the most beautiful place you have ever visited, and what was it like?
- What is the longest trip you have ever gone on? Where did you go?
- What was your favorite vacation? Where did you go, and why was it special?
- What is the favorite place you ever visited, and what was it like?

Career

- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What kinds of jobs have you had?
- How did you decide on your career?
- If you served in the military, when and where did you serve and what were your duties? Were you ever injured in the line of duty?
- If so, what were the circumstances, and what were your injuries?