

## Family History Questions

So now you have a date set for a visit with your family member. [Check.] You know now that you'll be visiting and sharing with your relative and not interviewing. [Just nod your head.] So what do you ask to get your family member talking? Well, there are really no special magic questions that will help them to open up, but some questions are better than others. As mentioned in the previous post, try not to ask yes or no questions. If you have to, make sure you follow them up with additional questions on the topic. The most important thing to remember is to be comfortable and conversational. Because that's what you are doing. Conversing. Don't worry, though. Most people like to talk about themselves. [Just ask us.] Speaking of asking, the following are some questions to help you along your merry way down memory lane with your family member. It's not exhaustive, but it should give you enough examples to get you started.

Who you were named after? What nicknames did you go by? How did you get it? Did you like it?

Which schools did you attend, and what were they like? Who was your favorite teacher? And why were they your favorite? What was your favorite subject? Least favorite?

Where did you live when growing up - on a farm or in town? What did your house/apartment look like? If a farm, what kind? Where else, if any, did you live? Where did your family live before?

What was the name of your favorite pet while growing up? Why was it your favorite? Any special stories about your pet?

When you were a child, what kinds of games did you play? What kinds of toys did you have. What did you do for fun? Who was your best friend? Are you still in touch with them?

What kinds of chores did you have to do. Did you have a favorite? Least favorite?

[Especially for older family members:] Did you have a washing machine, a radio, a t.v., a car, or a phone? If they were purchased while you were growing up, what were your thoughts about them? Was it a big deal? Did they make life easier?

What were your parents like? Easy-going? Strict? What did you learn from them about life?

What do you remember about your grandparents? What were their names? Where did they live? Where did they come from? Any special stories about them? Did you ever know your great-grandparents? If so, what do you remember about them? Where did they live? Where did they come from?

What was your very first job? What did it entail? Did you like it? What other jobs did you have? Favorite, least favorite, and why? What made you choose the career path that you did? Are you happy with that decision?

What was the first car you ever owned? How much did it cost? How long did you have it? Whatever happened to it?

[If married:] How did you meet your spouse? What was the first thing you thought when you met him/her? What was your marriage proposal like? What kind of wedding did you have?

[If had children:] What are all your children's names [complete]? Who did you name your children after? Are they family names?

What presidents were in office in your lifetime? Which ones did you like? Dislike? What important world events happened in your lifetime?

If you had the chance to do things over again - to live your life over again - what would you do differently? What would you do the same?

What do you want to be remembered for? What do you want people to know about you?

There are many more questions you could ask, and even more ways to ask them. But the most important thing to remember is to keep them talking. As mentioned in the last post, photos and memorabilia are excellent conversation starters. Nothing jars the memory like the memory staring you in the face. So if your family member has them, let them show them to you. Let them show you their history. Let them share their family story.

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