
Oral History Conversation Starters

Personal Information (short answer):

What is your full name? Were you named for another family member?

Do you like the name you were given? Nickname?

Do you have a favorite flower?

A favorite color?

What's your favorite food?

A favorite television program? Movie?

Favorite quote or Bible passage?

A favorite song?

What kind of books have you always enjoyed? Special authors?

Family:

Who were your parents and grandparents?

Who were your brothers and sisters?

Memories of parents and/or grandparents.

Physical characteristics of parents and/or grandparents

Religious background

Other relatives you remember?



Lincoln Co. Historical Association

403 East Main St., Suite 302 Lincoln, NC 28092 (704) 748.9090

LincolnCountyHistoryNC@gmail.com LincolnCountyHistory.com

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Did you know your father's family? Where did he come from?

Do you know how your mother and father met?

Stories about your siblings, trouble they got into.

Did you go on family vacations? Go to camp?

Did you have a favorite thing you liked to do together?

Did your family ever move?

Did you have any home remedies?

Did you say grace at the table? Was it a little poem like "God is Great?"

What did your siblings grow up to be?

What's the biggest difference between your childhood and the children of today?

Childhood:

What is the earliest memory you have of your childhood?

Can you describe the house you lived in when you were a child?

What do you remember most about that house?

What was your bedroom like? Did you share with a sibling? Did you keep it clean, or was it messy?

Did you do chores? How did you do laundry, get water, cook?

Did you live on a farm or in the city?

Who were your neighbors?

What kind of games did you play? Who did you play with?

Did you have a favorite toy?

Did you read as a child? Favorite books?

Did you have any pets growing up? Names?

Where did you go when you wanted to hide?

Were you afraid of anything as a child?

Do you remember anything really naughty you did as a child? Tell me about a time you got in trouble.

Where was your favorite place to visit when you were a child?

Did anyone ever tease you when you were young. What was it? How did you feel about it?

Did you have a favorite food as a child?

What kind of pets did you have?

Did you have any scary moments when you were a child?

Where did you shop for food and clothes?

How did you get money? Did you have an allowance? Did you earn it?

Did you listen to radio serials as a child? Favorite shows? What were the TV shows that you liked to watch?

What did you want to be when you grew up?

School Days

Where did you go to elementary school, middle school, high school? What year did you graduate from high school?

How did you learn to read? Did you like to read?

Can you describe what a classroom was like when you were a child?

Did you ever get in trouble?

Did you attend college and get a degree? What was college like for you? Roommates or special memories you have? Do you stay in touch?

Teen Years

Who were your best friends in high school?

Did you have favorite teachers?

What subjects did you like?

Did you work after school or in the summer? What was your first job?

Do you remember the first movie you ever saw?

Any hobbies or interests: differences between then and now; athletics

What songs do you remember from your high school days? Favorites?

How did people dress when you were in school?

Did you have dances? Go to sports events?

What were dances and parties like then? What kind of music? Did you listen to records or did you have a band? Parties at people's houses? Any popular dances?

Did you ever keep a diary? Still have it?

Did you ever skip school? If so, what did you do?

Who taught you how to drive?

Do you remember your first car? Where did you buy it? Do you remember how much you paid?

Dating and Married Life

Did you have a celebrity crush?

Did you ever have a first crush? Do you remember your first kiss?

How did young people meet?

Did you have a lot of boyfriends/girlfriends in high school? Anyone special?

Did you go on dates? What did you do on dates?

Where did you meet your spouse?

What attracted you to him/her?

Your spouse's physical characteristics; education, occupation

Where did you go when you and your future spouse went on a date?

Did your parents like him/her?

Wedding date. Describe your wedding.

Where did you live? How did you make a decision on where to live?

Have you ever moved?

Talk about the early years of your marriage.

Were there times when your marriage was tested?

What, do you think, are the secrets to a successful marriage?

Military Service

Active duty or reserve; grade; ranks held

Where did you serve?

Was this your first time leaving home?

Military life – officers, friends, overseas experiences, awards

Your Own Family

Children: names, when and where born, physical and psychological characteristics, interests.

Tell me about the birth of your children.

What kind of pets did you have?

Did you take family vacations, and where did you go?

When did you get your first TV? What was/is your family's favorite TV show?

What were your favorite things to do as a family?

Is there anything special you did with your children at Christmas, Easter, Halloween each year?

How did you celebrate birthdays at your house?

Where did you attend church? In what ways were your family members involved?

At what time were you proudest of your kids and your grandkids?

Did they ever do anything to make you crazy?

Do you have any advice for young parents?

Did you raise your children differently from the way you were raised?

Work and Career

What's the best job you ever had?

Why did you choose the career you did? Do you feel happy about the choice you made?

Where have you worked outside of the home?

Is there anything you especially remember about coworkers; supervisors; promotions, travel assignments, accomplishments, professional organizations and affiliations, salaries.

What work advice can you give?

Holidays

What is your favorite holiday and why?

What do you do on your holidays/birthdays?

Do you have holiday family traditions?

Do you have a favorite holiday memory?

Talk in general about birthdays, Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Easter, July 4 memories.

Do you have special gifts that you remember?

Did you attend special church services on Christmas and Easter?

Travel

What was your first big trip away from home? How old were you?

If you've traveled to other places and countries, talk about your experience and memories both negative and positive.

Memories

Do you have any special memories regarding your religious upbringing?

Is there anyone who has especially inspired you?

Do you have a favorite Bible verse and why?

Did your life ever take an unexpected turn? How did you meet that challenge?

What were some particularly happy events in your life? Pleasant memories?

Looking back, what was the hardest period of your life and why?

What life event caused you the most emotional pain?

Problems, illnesses, deaths, traumatic experiences

Political events, wars, the Depression, memories of presidents, national disasters, local events, changes in society, changes in technology, local politics

Do you remember any inventions that changed everything for you or your family? (washing machines, television, electricity, indoor toilet, etc.)

What did we have then that we don't have today?

About you today:

Once you got older, did your dreams change?

What is your proudest life accomplishment so far?

Do you think you ever made any sacrifices in life?

Did you ever think you'd end up where you are?

Is there any way you wish your life had turned out differently?

Are there any traditions from your family that you want to pass down?

Does your family have any recipes that you'd like to pass down?

Do you have any special heirlooms that you received from your Mom and plan to pass down?

If you could be any age today, what would it be?

In what ways are you still like a child?

What kinds of things make you laugh out loud? Make you cry?

What mistake did you make that you never want your children to repeat?

Any regrets?

What makes you laugh now that made you furious back then?

What things do your family members do that makes you happy?

What is your favorite memory about being a grandmother/grandfather?

Do you feel like you've accomplished everything you've set your mind to?

What's the best advice you ever got from your mom or any family member?

What advice would you like to leave with your children and grandchildren?

What problems in the world today bother you?

Looking back, what do you wish you'd made more time for?

What do you wish someone had told you about life when you were younger?

Is there a key to happiness?

Do you feel that your life has been blessed? In what way?

What are you most thankful for in your life today?

What should you never waste energy on?

Do you think life gets better as you get older?

What do you think is the root of all evil?

How do you feel about the phrases "nothing lasts forever" and "you don't know what you've got until it's gone?"

Over the years, what have you learned about true friendship? Who have been your best friends throughout your adult life?

What lessons have you learned about money through the years?

What things make you happiest today?

What should people expect out of life as they grow older?

Is there that one person who's passed from your life that you'd like to spend a day with.

Any advice you would give to your kids and grandkids that they should always remember?

What do you feel is your legacy? How do you think you'll be remembered by family, friends, in general?

After all is said and done, what is the most important thing?