

# HOW TO WRITE ONE'S OWN FAMILY HISTORY

A list of possible topics to stimulate one's thoughts and get started

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Genealogists are taught to collect stories from the older generation. Look in the mirror and see who we mean!

Although we may think of ourselves as 'ordinary folk', we have lived through a period of tremendous social and technological change: WWII, the advent of TV, wider availability of cars, telephone, washing machines, refrigerators, computers... Our written stories of everyday life will fascinate our grandchildren and future generations – much more so than anything they read in a school history book.

Gone are the days when a top copy and 2 or 3 carbons had to be letter perfect – or the boss wanted them all retyped. Now you can jot down a few thoughts when something strikes a chord in your memory. Then you may edit at leisure, using Copy and Paste, to create a more readable story.

If you can't quite remember all the details you can include questions in your everyday 'chatty' letters and emails to friends and relations. Remember, their memories of you and your family will be different, allowing you to build up a broader perspective.

Start by writing your own life stories and then extend to writing notes or stories about family members, their occupations, places where they lived, eventually putting it all together in a family history.

## **"I REMEMBER WHEN ..."**

## Recalling Memories of Childhood and Growing Up.

### CHILDHOOD

Earliest memory of ...

- a beach outing
- visiting old people
- going to school
- new shoes, slippers
- gathering autumn leaves
- caterpillars, ants
- neighbourhood pets
- using the telephone

Favourite belongings...

- stuffed toy, doll
- trike, cart, trolley
- picture on our wall
- favourite item of clothing
- best book, story
- ornaments on a table
- china cup or plate
- jewellery I treasured
- best present ever received

Recalling special places...

- secret hiding places
- treehuts, bushy 'nests'
- flights of stairs, steps
- the corner shop
- bus stops, short trips
- huge lawns, big gardens
- churches, stained glass
- neighbourhood landmarks
- the route to school
- holiday spots (with grandparents)

Unforgettable occasions...

- birthday party
- celebration rituals
- family jokes and sayings
- Easter memories

Xmas tree decorations

- Carol singing, fun songs
- getting 'mumps', etc.
- special rewards
- visiting relatives, cousins
- gala days
- a time of 'danger'

Recalling Saturdays & Sundays...

- chores around home
- how pocket money earned
- team sports/clubs
- musical interests
- creative activities, hobbies
- crafts, handicrafts, collections of...

Childhood fears ...

- spiders, insects
- dogs that barked
- loud noises
- the dark
- getting lost
- scoldings
- bullies at school
- strange beds
- being left behind
- isolated, rejected
- fear of failure

### OUTDOOR

- swimming, bikes, beach rambles, hill climbs, hut building
- wash-day (helping at the wash tub, mangle, using dolly blue, starch...)

### INDOOR

- doll clothes, dressing up, scrapbooks, board games, puzzles, drawing, music, baking, sewing, letter writing

## ADOLESCENCE

Recalling my ...

- attitude to parents, teachers, g'parents
- people I admired
- people who encouraged me
- secret crushes
- secret ambitions
- friends I envied
- special possessions
- radio/TV programmes
- chores most disliked
- doctor/hospital visits
- choices that differed from siblings or best friends
- nicknames (liked and loathed)
- phobias and fears

The Very First Time ...

- bought a present alone
- wore a watch
- lost some precious item
- wrote a letter overseas
- planted a small garden

- got lost up town (in one's own city)
- changed my hairstyle
- travelled alone (on train, bus)
- spoke or performed in public
- made hand crafted gifts
- banked money by myself
- bought first pair of shoes on my own

## TEENS

- Things I saved up for
- Exam nerves
- Coping with figure faults
- Dreams of jobs, careers
- Who most influenced me
- Experiencing grief, loss
- Music, movies most enjoyed
- Make up/ cosmetics
- Creative projects/ interests
- Values that changed since childhood
- Attitudes to racism, drugs, discipline, parents, money, friendships, clothing
- Job applications

## Other Writing Topics for us as Adults

Birth and Birthdays

Toys

Parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins

Pets

School: kindergarten, primary, intermediate, high school

Holidays

Failure and hope

Illnesses and remedies

Religion

Houses we've lived in

Special furniture

Children

Jobs

Politics

Depression, war

Influence of music, theatre, dance, movies, books, painting, etc. on my life

Turning points

Inventions

Hobbies

Marriage

Games and sports

Talents

Famous people I have met

Love: romance, relatives, friends, etc.

Spiritual growth

Persons who have been a special influence in my life

Family traditions

Gifts, special gifts you have given or received

Heirlooms

Special moments

Children and the things they say

Food

Cars and transport

Clothes

My first ...

- Washing machine, refrigerator, TV set ...

- Gadgets – including computer

- Trips by ship, train, plane

My life today

My plans for the future

My attitude towards death

Courtship

Brief encounters

Stories unique to me

Immigrants

Unforgettable people I have met

Lessons I have learned

Natural disasters

Tears I have shed