

100 Life Story & Oral History Interview Questions

For families, students, activity directors, and volunteers preserving a life worth remembering

How to use these: Ask one question at a time, then wait — the best answers come after the silence. Follow the tangents, because the detour is usually the better story. Record the conversation on your phone so you keep their actual voice. You don't need all 100. A handful of real answers beats a rushed checklist.

1 Early Childhood

1. Where and when were you born?
2. What's your earliest memory?
3. What was your childhood home like?
4. Who was in your household growing up?
5. What did your family do for fun?
6. What were you like as a small child?
7. What smell or sound takes you straight back?
8. What did a typical day look like?
9. What chores did you have?
10. What did you want to be when you grew up?

2 Family & Roots

11. What were your parents like?
12. What do you remember about your grandparents?
13. Where did your family come from?
14. What family stories were passed down to you?
15. What traditions did your family keep?
16. Who were you closest to in your family?
17. What was your family known for?
18. Was there a character everyone talked about?
19. What values did your family try to teach you?
20. What recipe or ritual do you still remember?

3 School & Growing Up

21. What was school like for you?
22. Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
23. What subjects did you love or hate?
24. Who were your childhood friends?
25. What did you do after school and in summers?
26. What were you like as a teenager?
27. What was popular then — music, movies, fashion?
28. What trouble did you get into?
29. When did you start to feel grown up?
30. What did you dream about back then?

4 Young Adulthood

31. What did you do after finishing school?
32. What was your first job, and what did it pay?
33. Did you move away from home? What was that like?
34. What was the world like when you came of age?
35. What freedoms or struggles defined your twenties?
36. Who influenced the direction you took?
37. What's the most daring thing you did young?
38. What did you believe then that changed later?
39. What was your first taste of independence?
40. What are your best memories from that time?

5 Love & Relationships

41. How did you meet your spouse or partner?
42. What attracted you to them?
43. What was your first date like?
44. When did you know it was serious?
45. What was your wedding like?
46. What's the secret to a lasting relationship?
47. What was the hardest thing you came through together?
48. Who were the great loves or friendships of your life?
49. What did you learn about love over the years?
50. What would you tell someone just starting out?

6 Work & Purpose

51. What work did you spend your life doing?
52. How did you get into it?
53. What did you love, and what did you dread?
54. Who taught you the most?
55. What are you proudest of in your working life?
56. What was the hardest job you ever had?
57. Did you ever take a big risk at work?
58. What did work teach you about people?
59. What would you have done differently?
60. When and how did you stop working?

7 Home, Place & History

61. Where have you lived over your life?
62. Which place felt most like home?
63. How has the world changed most in your lifetime?
64. What historical events do you remember living through?
65. Where were you during a major moment in history?
66. What technology amazed you when it arrived?
67. What's gone now that you miss?
68. What did people get wrong about "the good old days"?
69. How did your community change over the years?
70. What place do you most wish you could visit again?

8 Challenges & Resilience

71. What's the hardest thing you've ever faced?
72. How did you get through it?
73. Who did you lose that shaped you?
74. When were you most afraid?
75. What did you worry about that turned out fine?
76. What's a mistake that taught you something?
77. Where did you find strength in hard times?
78. What are you most proud of surviving?
79. What kept you going?
80. What would you tell someone facing the same?

9 Beliefs & Reflections

81. What do you believe in most deeply?
82. How did your faith or philosophy develop?
83. What's the best advice you ever got?
84. What's the best advice you'd give?
85. What matters more to you now than it used to?
86. What matters less?
87. What do you know now you wish you'd known young?
88. What does a good life mean to you?
89. What are you most grateful for?
90. What's brought you the most joy?

10 Legacy & Looking Ahead

91. When were you happiest?
92. What are you proudest of, all told?
93. What do you hope people remember about you?
94. What do you want your grandchildren to know?
95. Is there anything you've never told anyone?
96. What traditions or values do you hope carry on?
97. What are you still hoping to do?
98. What would you want said about you?
99. What do you hope we do with your stories?
100. What one message would you leave for the future?

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