

# HOW TO WRITE ONE'S OWN FAMILY HISTORY

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

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

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

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 Saturdays & Sundays...

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

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)

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...)

Unforgettable occasions...

- birthday party
- celebration rituals
- family jokes and sayings
- Easter memories
- Xmas tree decorations
- Carol singing, fun songs

### 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

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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

## 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.

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

### 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

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## BOOKS

Some helpful books (generally available in public libraries)

“With Love, Gifting your stories to grandchildren”  
Mike Paterson, Tandem Press, 1995

“Writing from Personal Experience”  
Nancy Davidoff Kelton

“How to Write Family History”  
Terrick V H FitzHugh

“Writing Up Your Family History: A Do It Yourself Guide”  
John Titford, Countryside Books, reprint 2005  
[www.countrysidebooks.co.uk](http://www.countrysidebooks.co.uk)