

Questions to ask your relatives

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- **Choose five or six.** Start with names and places; the hardest questions are at the end and always optional.
- **Ask one at a time,** and let silences sit. Ask for spellings and places.
- **Ask permission** before you record, and agree how you'll share what you hear.
- **Write down who said each thing.** Treat every answer as a lead to check, not a fact to argue about.

Names and the people behind them

- 1 What was your full name when you were born? Who were you named after?
- 2 What did people call you as a child? Were there family nicknames?
- 3 What were your parents' full names — including the surnames they were born with?
- 4 What were your grandparents' names? What did you call them?
- 5 Did anyone in the family change their name, or spell it differently? Why?
- 6 Were there names that came down the family — the same first name in every generation?

Places and moves

- 7 Where were you born? Was it at home or in a hospital?
- 8 What addresses do you remember living at? What were the houses like?
- 9 Where did your parents and grandparents grow up?
- 10 Did the family ever move a long way? What made them decide to go?
- 11 Is there a town or village the family always talked about as "home"?
- 12 Where are your parents and grandparents buried?

Parents and grandparents

- 13 What do you remember most about your grandparents?
- 14 What work did your parents do? Where did they work?
- 15 How did your parents meet? Where and when did they marry?
- 16 Did your parents have brothers and sisters? What happened to them?

17 Who in the family was the storyteller? What stories did they tell?

18 Were there relatives you heard about but never met?

Home and everyday life

19 What did a usual Sunday — or day of rest — look like when you were young?

20 What foods remind you of home? Who cooked them?

21 How did the family celebrate holidays and birthdays?

22 Which languages were spoken at home? Did anyone speak a language the children didn't?

23 Who were the neighbors and family friends you remember best?

24 Were there family sayings, songs or recipes that everyone knew?

School, work and military service

25 Which schools did you go to? Do you remember a favorite teacher?

26 What was your first job? How much were you paid?

27 Did anyone in the family serve in the military? When, and where?

28 Did anyone belong to a union, club, lodge or church society?

29 Did anyone run a business, farm or shop?

Relatives who came from another country

30 Who was the first in our family to come to this country? Do you know when?

31 Do you know the name of the town or village they came from?

32 How did they travel? Did they ever talk about the journey?

33 Did they keep in touch with family back home? Are there letters?

34 Did anyone become a citizen? Do you know when or where?

Faith, traditions and community

35 Did the family belong to a church, synagogue, mosque, temple or other community?

36 Where were people in the family baptized, married or buried?

37 What traditions came from the family's background or country of origin?

38 Was there a community hall, cultural club or newspaper the family was part of?

Papers, photographs and keepsakes

- 39** Do you have any family photographs? Can we look at them together?
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- 40** Is there a family Bible, prayer book or baby book with names written in it?
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- 41** Who has the old papers — certificates, letters, passports, discharge papers?
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- 42** Is there anything you were given that belonged to a grandparent?
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Family stories and legends

- 43** What story about our family has everyone heard?
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- 44** Who told you that story? Where do you think they heard it?
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- 45** Is there a family story about being related to someone famous, or about a fortune lost?
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- 46** Is there a story you always wondered about?
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Hard times and changes

- 47** How did the family get through hard times — a war, a depression, an illness?
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- 48** Were there people the family lost touch with? Do you know why?
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- 49** Is there anything about the family you think should be remembered, that hasn't been?
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- 50** Is there anything you'd prefer I not write down or share?
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Questions for a photograph

- 51** Who is in this photograph? Can you name everyone, left to right?
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- 52** Where was it taken? Do you recognize the house, street or town?
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- 53** When might it be? What makes you think so — clothes, a car, someone's age?
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- 54** What was the occasion?
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- 55** Who kept this photograph, and how did it come to you?
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From Fill In the Dots, a family history starter kit by Wren & Co. Free to print and share.