

FAMILY HISTORY:
55 Questions to
Spark Thanksgiving
Story Sharing



a free resource from

MODERN / HEIRLOOM / BOOKS
by Dawn Roode

Thanksgiving—or other holidays where extended family gathers in one place—is an optimal time to gather stories and memories via oral history interviews. There needn't be a lot of pressure: Simply turn on your smart phone's voice recorder or set up a video camera on a tripod, then forget it's there...and begin reminiscing.

The important thing is that you relax and let the stories flow. Don't wait until next year or when everyone is available or any other “better time”—trust me when I say: *Now* is *always* the right time!

Use these questions merely as a guide or to give you ideas for questions of your own. The key to any good personal history interview is listening—so ask follow-up questions that genuinely interest you, and let the stories take their own paths...***that is usually when the magic ensues!***



Ask questions that genuinely interest you, and let the stories take their own paths.

55 Questions to Spark *Thanksgiving Story Sharing*

FOOD

Is there a dish you always associate with Thanksgiving? Do you know who has the recipe, and who originally cooked it for your family?

Did your parents make you eat anything you absolutely hated?

What food(s) do you associate with comfort? With the onset of the school year?

Who made the cakes for birthdays in your home?

Do you recall any massive failures at cooking—a horrible dinner, burnt pie, missing ingredients?

Who taught you how to cook?

TRADITION

What traditions do you most fondly recall from your childhood?

Are there certain traditions that have persisted for generations in your family?

What traditions have you begun anew with your own nuclear family?

Is there a memorable gift you have given someone?

What is the best gift you have ever received?

LAUGHS

Was there ever a moment where you laughed uncontrollably?

Whose laughter do you find heartwarmingly contagious?

Who in the family tells the best jokes?

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LESSONS

Do you recall a time you failed in a big way? Can you share the story of how you felt, who comforted you, what you learned? Did that failure hinder you from taking chances in the future, or embolden you in any way?

Do you remember lessons your grandparents taught you?

How were you punished as a child?

Is there a fear you have that you have never been able to overcome?

LOVE

Who was your first love?

Do you remember the first time you said “I love you” to someone who was not part of your family?

How would you describe the love you received from your parents?

Was your grandparents’ or great-grandparents’ love different in any way from that of your parents’?

FANDOM

What teams do you root for?

Did you ever tailgate at a football game?

Did you play sports growing up? Were you a team captain?

Do you remember any big wins? Any big losses?

Are/were there any big rivalries among family members and team loyalties?

The key to any
good personal
history interview
is listening.
Be quiet;
wait; there is
more to the story.

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HOME

What do you remember most about your childhood home?

Where did you do your homework when you were a kid?

Did you have a secret hiding place in your home?

Did you ever move from one home to another? What was that like?

Was there another place you considered a “home away from home”?

Were there any comforts from your childhood that you translated into all your adult homes?

Did you play outside after school? What was it like being a kid in your neighborhood?

SCHOOL

Did you have a favorite teacher as a kid?

What were your favorite years in school? Why?

What did it say about you in your high school yearbook?

Did you have a childhood dream about what you wanted to do with your life?

Do you ever think about it now?

Do you remember drills during school

(depending upon age of interviewee, could refer to duck and cover drills during war, fire drills, etc.)

What subjects were you good at? Which ones were more challenging for you?

What kind of grades did you get?

Did you belong to any clubs? Go to dances?

What were some challenges from your school years, particularly ones that made you a stronger or more compassionate person?

Describe your family legacy with regard to education—who was the first to go to college; have any of you attended the same schools; etc.

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