

52 Questions in 52 Weeks: Writing Your Life Story Has Never Been Easier

August 26, 2013 By Steve Anderson



Few people would argue the value of creating a story about a life lived. In fact, it's really quite a noble idea to create a story of your life for your descendant. From it, they will likely learn something valuable and endearing from the things you experienced and will get to know you as an individual.

Many people believe that it takes a lot of time and work to write their life story and feel that the task is just too big. Because of that, they never start. But sharing memories of your life does not have to be a big, involved effort. Imagine how much easier the task of writing about your life might be if you were to focus on writing about just one topic each week. It doesn't matter if you write a few paragraphs, a single page, or several pages. The important thing is that you write something. Anything is better than nothing at all.

Now imagine if someone provided you with one question to write about each week for 52 weeks. At the end of just one year you will have created your own life story to share with your children and your future posterity. You will never be forgotten because your own life story will bear witness to your existence. Add some pictures, and you can make it even more inviting to read.

Below are 52 questions. Each week for one year, take one question and write as much or as little as you want. Don't worry about how much you write for each question, but do write something. Questions do not need to be answered in any special order.

When you are done, go to FamilySearch.org, and add your stories to your family tree. By adding your stories to your own branch of your family tree, you are assured that your life story will be safe and secure for future generations. Your great-grandchildren will be able to read them and enjoy learning about your life and getting to know who you are. Future generations will be glad that you took the time to write something about your life and that you left them with such a valuable legacy.

1. What is your full name? Explain why your parents gave you that name.
2. When and where were you born? Describe your home, your neighborhood, and the town you grew up in.
3. What memories do you have of your father (his name, birth date, birthplace, parents, and so on)?
4. What memories do you have of your mother (her name, birth date, birthplace, parents, and so on)?

5. What kind of work did your parents do (farmer, salesman, manager, seamstress, nurse, stay-at-home mom, professional, laborer, and so on)?
6. Have any of your family members died? If so, explain what they died from and what you remember of their death; the circumstances of their death.
7. What kind of hardships or tragedies did your family experience while you were growing up?
8. Are there any obvious or unusual genetic traits that run in your family line?
9. What are the names of your brothers and sisters? Describe things that stand out in your mind about each of your siblings.
10. What were some of your family traditions that you remember?
11. Did your family have special ways of celebrating specific holidays?
12. Share some memories of your grandparents.
13. Did your grandparents live close by? If so, describe how they were involved in your life. If they lived far away share some memories of visiting them or of them traveling to visit you.
14. Who were your aunts and uncles? Write about any of your aunts or uncles who really stand out in your mind. Give some details about them (names, personalities, events that you remember doing with them, and so on).
15. Where did you go to school? Give some details about what was school like for you and some of your memorable experiences.
16. What were your favorite subjects in school? Explain why.
17. What subjects did you like the least? Explain why.
18. Who were some of your friends in school? Explain what your friends were like and what they are doing today if you know that.
19. If you went to college or a vocational school, what school did you attend? Describe what memories you have of those years and what subjects you studied.
20. What do you see as your greatest strengths?
21. What were some of the challenges you have had to deal with in your life?
22. What medical issues have you had to deal with throughout your life?
23. Was religion an important for you and your family? If so, explain what religion your family practiced and what it meant to you. Explain if it is or is not an important part of your life today.
24. What foods do you like and dislike? Describe any food allergies you or other family members had.
25. Were there two or three food dishes your mother or father made that were especially memorable?
26. How did you meet your spouse?
27. What was your courtship like? Describe your marriage day.
28. Share some stories about your spouse.
29. How many children do you have? List their names and share a few memories about each one.
30. Describe some of the major community, national, and world events you lived through. How did these events change your life?
31. What are some of your life philosophies or life views that you would share with others?
32. What are some of the personal values that are very important to you? Share some examples of what have you done and what are you doing now to teach these values to your children, grandchildren and others.
33. List at least five people who have had a memorable influence on your life. What did they do that had such an influence on you?
34. What are 20 things about yourself that make you uniquely you?
35. What are 50 things that you are grateful for?
36. What is your philosophy on money?
37. If you could spend a day with any famous person in the world, who would it be, and what would you do during your day with him or her?
38. What scares you?
39. What makes you stop and go "Wow!"?

40. What are some of the things you enjoy doing in your leisure time?
41. If you could go back in time and spend an hour visiting with yourself at age 15, what would you tell your younger self?
42. What are some of your talents? Explain how you discovered them and what you have done to cultivate and improve them. Describe how your talents have they affected your life.
43. What did you do for a career? Explain how you chose that career.
44. What were some of the jobs you had throughout your life? Explain some of the memorable experiences you had with these jobs.
45. What are 5 significant events or experiences in your life, and explain what effects they have had on you.
46. What are some of the life lessons that you have learned and would like to pass on to your descendants?
47. In how many places have you lived during your lifetime? Provide a brief description of each place you've lived, why you lived there, and why you moved.
48. If someone gave you \$10,000 and told you that you could NOT give it to any of your friends, family members or use it for yourself, what would you do with it?
49. If you could go back in time and do things over again, what would you change?
50. When all is said and done, what do you want to be remembered for? Explain what you are doing now to create a legacy worthy of remembering.
51. If you were to leave 5 different bits of advice for your future posterity, what would they be?
52. Have you traveled to any place outside of your home country? If so, explain the reasons for your trip(s) and what memorable things happened on some of those trips.

Extra Questions

1. If a newspaper wanted to do a story about you, what would the story be about?
2. What were some of the popular fads you experienced during your life?
3. How did you spend your summers?
4. What were some of your more memorable vacations?
5. Did you ever have pets? If so, tell us about them.
6. List 20 things you think the world would be better off without.

living the story

the civil rights movement in Kentucky

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Sample Oral History Interview Questions

The following questions will serve as a starting point if you are planning to interview someone about the civil rights era in Kentucky. (See our [tips for successful interviewing](#) for advice on preparing for and conducting the interview itself.)

Of course, every oral history interview should be tailored to the individual being interviewed. Before the interview, ask your subject for a biographical vita, an article, or some other descriptive information. Explain that having this information in advance will help you frame your questions. Then modify and add to the following generic suggested questions as needed.

1. Could you please give me some basic background information about yourself—your full name, date and place of birth, parents and siblings, ancestors, spouse and children, education, religion, community involvement, professions, political party, etc.?
2. Growing up during segregation, can you recall an early incident when you recognized a difference of treatment on account of color?
3. Have you traveled outside Kentucky? If so, how did travel affect your thinking about race or about segregation?
4. Were there people in your life who encouraged you to think about the treatment of African Americans in society? If so, can you name several?
5. Were there articles, books, films, speeches, newspapers, or theater performances that influenced your thinking about race relations?
6. Describe your memories of segregation in Kentucky. What was it like? Were you ever personally discriminated against because of your race? How did you respond to this treatment? How did it make you feel? Did you ever confront the discrimination? If not, why not?
7. Do you remember family members, friends, or individuals in your community being discriminated against under legal segregation? In education, public accommodations, employment, etc.? How did this make you feel?
8. Was any of this treatment ever violent? If so, how did the black community respond? The white community? Were the responses to the discrimination different depending on race? Were there differences between how young people and older people responded?
9. Did men and women respond similarly or differently to legal segregation? Did women and men in your community feel differently about racial segregation? If so, in what way?
10. Who were your civil rights heroes locally? Nationally? Why?
11. Are there records of civil rights activity in your community? Photos? Where

are they located?

12. Were you involved in any civil rights organization (e.g., NAACP, CORE, Urban League)? What was the membership like? Were there more women than men, more men than women, or about equal numbers? Were there both black and white members? Who held the elected positions? Who did the "organizing" work (collecting dues, arranging meetings, hospitality, telephone campaigns, etc.)? Can you recall any of the more active members? Describe them.
13. How were women treated in meetings of civil rights groups? Did they hold leadership roles? Did they sit on committees? Were their ideas for action different from or similar to those of the men in the group? Did they perform office work, telephoning, and hosting more than the men in the group? Did the women ever talk together about organizational focus or actions?
14. Describe any involvement of your church or synagogue in civil rights. Was there support for speaking out against legal segregation in your church or synagogue? How was that demonstrated?
15. [for women] Were you a member of a sorority, the League of Women Voters, the YWCA, or any other women's organization that worked to eliminate legal segregation? What tactics and strategies were used?
16. [for men] Were you a member of a fraternity, the Masons, the YMCA, or any other all-male organization that worked to eliminate legal segregation? What tactics and strategies were used?
17. If you attended a segregated school, how did it compare with schools attended by students of the opposite race? Were there any interactions between the white and the black schools?
18. If you were one of the first students to attend an integrated school, will you please describe that experience? How did you feel about being a "first"? What student organizations did you belong to? Did you play athletics on an integrated team? Describe some of these experiences.
19. If you attended college, please describe your experience there. Was it predominantly an all-white or all-black college? Did you belong to any student organizations concerned about civil rights? Describe any black faculty members [or white, if the subject attended a black college] you recall. Was the student body interested in civil rights advocacy? If you belonged to the Black Student Union, did you ever network or attend meetings with students from other colleges' black student groups?
20. [for women] Do you recall any white woman [or black woman] with whom you were friends as a child? At school? At work? In your civil rights advocacy? What was that relationship like?
21. [for men] Do you recall any white [or black, if the subject is white] man or woman with whom you were friends during segregation? At work? At school? In your civil rights advocacy? What was that relationship like?
22. How did national sports figures like Jackie Robinson, Hank Aaron, Muhammad Ali, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar affect your thinking about integration? How did you feel about them and their accomplishments?
23. Do you recall when you first heard about the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.? Describe that recollection. Did his death influence you in any way in your advocacy for civil rights?
24. How did you see the role of President John Kennedy with regard to civil rights?

President Lyndon Johnson?

25. Do you recall the effort to secure access to public accommodations under Governor Combs and Governor Breathitt? What do you remember? At the time, what did you think about this campaign? Did you attend the 1964 rally in Frankfort? Did any of your friends, family members, or colleagues? If you were there, describe the rally as you remember it.
26. How did the escalation in Vietnam affect your thinking about race relations? Did you personally serve in Vietnam? Did any of your family members, friends, or colleagues? How did the war affect them and their attitudes about race?
27. How did the Black Power movement affect your thinking about race? Were you involved in any groups or any activities in which Black Power ideology may have changed previously held attitudes?
28. Did the thinking about African roots and heritage affect your thinking about race and racial relations before 1975? If so, how? Describe any events you might have attended to celebrate African heritage during this period. Did you travel to an African nation before 1975?
29. Did you ever attend any out-of-state events focused on achieving racial equality (e.g., the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Freedom Summer, the Selma-to-Montgomery march)?
30. Where do you think African Americans in Kentucky have made the most progress since 1930? Where do you think the least progress has been made? Did African Americans gain from the civil rights struggle? How? Did they lose anything? What issues still need civil rights advocacy?

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