

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR A LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW

Full name

Place and date of birth

Father's name, place and date of birth, occupation

Mother's name, place and date of birth, occupation

Grandparents:

names, places and dates of birth; any memories of them?

- when did they come to New Zealand?

- what was their physical appearance?

- what stories have you heard about them?

Were you told any stories about other forebears? If so, what were they?

Childhood:

- where did you grow up?

- describe the house you lived in

- describe the sort of food you ate

- describe the types of clothes you wore

- describe the games you played as a child (not only sport but things like skipping, marbles, etc)

Family activities:

- what sort of things did your family celebrate? (Christmas, birthdays, etc)

- describe a typical family Christmas/birthday and/or another appropriate family gathering

- describe a tangi or unveiling ceremony

What were your family's attitudes towards alcohol? smoking?

What was the discipline like at home?

- what sorts of things were your parents strict about? How? Why?

Education:

Where did you go to school?

- how did you get there?

- how many classes were there?

- how many children in the classroom?

- did you have any favourite teachers? Why did you like her/him?

- were there any teachers you disliked? Why?

- what was the discipline like at school? (strap, other punishments?)

- how did you feel about being punished? Why?

- were you or other students allowed to speak Maori at school? How did you feel about that?

- describe the games you played at school

- how old were you when you left school? Why did you leave? What did you do next?

Ask the same questions about high school and university, if appropriate

Work:

What was your first paid job?

Where did you work?

- describe what you did in your job. Hours of work?

- wages? Did you give any to your parents?

- did you need special clothes? equipment?

- how did you feel about your job?

Were you involved in a union? Which? How?

What were your relations like with your workmates? with your boss?
Were there any problems getting time off to go to tangi, etc? If so, describe them.
Why did you leave?
If person interviewed had more than one job, repeat for each

Leisure:

What did you do in your spare time? (clubs/youth organisations/sports/games/dances/hobbies/cinema/theatre/pub?) Describe what was involved.
- did you go out in the evenings? What was a good night out when you were young?
Did you stick to a group of friends?
- did your parents expect to meet your friends?
Did your parents disapprove of any of your activities? If so, why?

Marriage/Partners

How did you meet your partner?
- how did you feel about him/her? Why?
Why did you decide to get married/live together?
- was there any pressure from your families? If so, what?
Marriage: Where did you get married?
- was it a religious or civil ceremony? Why?
Describe what you wore.
Was there a reception held and what was it like?
Honeymoon? Where? How long?
How did you manage the housekeeping after marriage/living together?
- who paid the bills?
- who decided how the money should be spent?
What did you do when you disagreed?
How would you describe your relationship?
- did you talk to each other and share important things?
Did you both have the same ideas about bringing up children?
- was there anyone you talked to if you were worried about the children?
- did you ask your mother for advice? Reasons?

Other things you might want to ask about:

Interviewee's experiences during a war
Interviewee's experiences during the Depression of the 1930s
Moving away from home - how did you feel about that?
- did you keep in touch with your family? How? Why?

As an example of how you can ask very detailed questions on a topic you are particularly interested in, here are some model questions from Paul Thompson's book *The Voice of the Past*, (2d ed., p. 299):

Religion

Could you tell me how you spent Saturdays in those days? How about Sundays?
Did you have different clothes? Did you play games? Did your parents think it wrong to work or play on Sunday? Did your parents attend a place of worship?
Denomination? How often? Both mother and father? Did either hold any position in the church? Did you attend? Did you go to Sunday School? Outings? Choir?
Temperance Club Band of Hope? Evening classes? Other activities organised by the church?
Were you taught to say prayers at night? Did you ever have family prayers?
How much would you say religion meant to you as a child?