



# Collecting Your Family Stories

Barbara Truesdell, Ph.D.  
Indiana University Center for  
Documentary Research and  
Practice

WTIU Conference on Aging  
November 21, 2020



# Family Stories/Family History

“Each has his past shut in him like the leaves of a book known to him by heart, and his friends can only read the title.”

Virginia Woolf



# Preparation is the Key

- ◆ Know your goals
- ◆ Know your setting(s)
- ◆ Know your subject(s)



# Recording Equipment

- ◆ Goals and cost determine equipment
- ◆ Audio or video
- ◆ Always double check equipment
- ◆ L.O.C.K.S.S.



# Kinds of Questions to Ask

- ◆ “Who, what, when, where, why, how”
- ◆ Timeline questions
- ◆ Role-based questions
- ◆ Follow up questions are vital



# Story Sources & Prompts

- ◆ Spaces
- ◆ Objects
- ◆ Traditions
- ◆ Pop Culture



# Before the Stories Start

- ◆ Prepare the narrator(s)
- ◆ Prepare your recording equipment
- ◆ Prepare the location
- ◆ Prepare yourself



# Interviewing Skills

- ◆ Focus on the interviewee
- ◆ Set the tone and pace
- ◆ Monitor your responses
- ◆ Monitor your equipment
- ◆ Handling sensitive topics





# After the Stories are Told

- ◆ Attending to the narrator(s)
- ◆ Attending to the recording(s)
- ◆ Attending to the future



# The Value of Our Stories

“The Universe is made of stories,  
not of atoms.”

Muriel Rukeyser



# For More Information:

Dr. Barbara Truesdell, Assistant Director  
Center for Documentary Research & Practice  
Indiana University  
812/855-2856  
[barbara@indiana.edu](mailto:barbara@indiana.edu)