

Conference on Aging

Tips for getting your elder friends and family to tell their stories

Compiled by Nell Weatherwax with expert help from Cathleen Ingle Weber

- Keep your priority hold space in a warm way for the teller
- Some members of the family may have heard the story and will try to hurry it along – avoid that happening.
- Settle in and give them your full attention – no multitasking or looking at your phone
- Clear out as much background noise as possible – turn off TV, be in a quieter room,
- If you are recording the story, set up the recorder and have it running from the start so you don't fumble with it
- Make it clear you have plenty of time
- Make sure anyone else with you knows to give the teller
- Do not rush the teller – help make them comfortable taking their time
- Avoid being at all critical – avoid correcting or pointing out that the story is different what you heard before.
- Allow for so-called “rambling” and keep your focus on listening and reflecting what you hear.

If comfortable and appropriate – touch their arm, sit close, and maintain connecting eye contact

Instead of asking “do you remember” help them return to the moments in their minds and the memories will bubble up.

Prime them with beginnings of things you know and may have heard before (but do not “correct” them – keep the focus on keeping them talking. Examples:

- You know that cowbell that us kids used to bang – didn't your Mom used to hit that in a band?
- You and Dad took a trip to The Everglades when we were kids – what was that place we visited with the parrots?
- You and your best friend loved The Everly Brothers – tell me more about your friendship
- When I smell this pumpkin pie spice it reminds me of Mom's apple crisp – what does it remind you of?

Follow up questions are the best way to learn more – keep them open ended:

Tell me more about that...

What impression did that make on you?

What thoughts do you have about that?

How did that feel?

What was it like?

What happened because of that?

What did Dad/Mom do when she found out?

Go through the ways we experience things:

See Describe the room. What kind of thing did she wear?

Sounds like you thought she was cute...

Feel What did the grass feel like under your feet?

What was it like to run around barefoot?

Hear Describe how it sounded

When you first heard Elvis, what did you think?

See Describe what it looked like

What did you think when you first saw it?

Taste Describe the flavor/texture/heat/temp

What was it like eating your own strawberries?

Smell Scent / Aroma of specific things

What was the feeling you got smelling that?

Know Facts/Realizations/Revelations

How did you deal with that realization?

Sense Hunch/intuition/Sensing

When it came to you, how did you feel about it?

What was it like? What did it feel like? What did it remind you of?

Presenting Partner:



Supporting Partners:



Contributing Partners:

