

50 Life Story Questions to Ask

The following questions have been adapted from the GreatLifeStories.com web site. These 50 questions have been used with success in generating conversation and high-quality information. You do not have to ask all of these questions. You may edit and add to this list according to your own interests and preferences. Often, after one or two questions, questions are no longer needed as the interview takes on a life of its own. Don't forget your pen and digital or video recorder!

Family/Friends

1. What were your parents and grand-parents full names, dates of birth, places of birth?
2. What were the occupations of your parents?
3. How many children were in your family? Where were you in the lineup?
4. Generally speaking, what was your childhood like?
5. What one or two stories do you remember most clearly about your childhood?
6. Are there any particularly happy, funny, sad or instructive lessons you learned while growing up? What were your family's favorite jokes or pranks?
7. Who is, or was, the family comedian? "Straight" man?
8. What's the funniest family story you remember?

Place/Home

9. What was it like where you grew up?
10. Describe your most important friendships
11. Where and how did "news of your neighborhood" usually flow?
12. Education
13. What are the names of schools and dates you attended grammar school, high school, colleges, trade or technical schools?
14. What are your earliest school day memories?
15. Are there any teachers or subjects you particularly liked or disliked?
16. What did you learn in those first years of school that you would like to pass along to the next generation?
17. Were you involved in sports, music, drama, or other extra-curricular activities?

Work/Volunteer

18. What did you want to be when you grew up?
19. What was your first job, and how did you get it?
20. What was your first boss like? What did you learn from him or her?
21. Did you leave? Quit? Get promoted? Get fired?
22. Were you ever out of work for a long time? If so, how did you handle it?

Family/Friends

23. What do you recall about your first date?
24. How did you know you were really in love?
25. Tell me how you "popped the question," or how it was popped to you.
26. Tell me about your wedding ceremony. What year? Where? How many attended? Honeymoon?
27. Tell me about starting your family.
28. Were you married more than once? How often?

Recreation/Leisure

29. What were the most memorable family vacations or trips you can recall?
30. What leisure time activities are you involved with?
31. What are your greatest accomplishments in this field?

Spirituality

32. Do you follow any religious tradition?
33. If so which one, and what is it like?
34. Have you ever changed faiths?
35. What role do your beliefs play in your life today?
36. What would you tell your children about your faith?

Historical Context

37. Were you a volunteer, drafted or a conscientious objector?
38. If you didn't serve, what do you recall about being on the home front during the war?
39. What key moments do you recall about your service?
40. What would you tell today's young soldiers, sailors and fliers?

All Domains

Triumph and Tragedy

41. What were the most joyous, fulfilling times of your life?
42. Any sad, tragic or difficult times you'd care to share such as losing a loved one, a job, or something you cared about?
43. What lifelong lessons did you learn from these tough times? Joyous times?
44. Were there any moments you recall as true breakthroughs in any area of your life?
45. If you could do one thing differently in your life, what would that be?

Words of Wisdom

46. What have you learned over your lifetime that you'd like to share with the younger generation?
47. People will sometimes repeat aphorisms such as "honesty is the best policy." If they do, be sure to ask how they learned that life lesson.

Gratitude

48. What are you most grateful for you your life?
49. How have you taught your children to be grateful?
50. Are there items or places that mark special gratitude for the ones you love? What are they? What are their stories?