The best stories start with a conversation.

A gentle, practical guide to interviewing a parent, grandparent or someone you love.

Before you sit down

Choose a quiet place and a relaxed time. Ask whether the person wants to be recorded and who may hear or read the result. A short conversation of 20-30 minutes can be easier than trying to cover a lifetime.

Begin with the everyday

Ask about a childhood home, a favorite meal or the people who lived nearby. Familiar details can make it easier to begin. Try: “What would I have seen if I walked into your home when you were ten?”

Follow the detail

Use open questions such as “What happened next?” and “How did that feel?” Give the person time to answer. Avoid suggesting the answer or correcting a memory while they are telling it.

Respect the pause

Some stories may be painful or private. Make it clear that any question can be skipped. Stop recording when asked, and check before including sensitive details about anyone else.

After the conversation

Label the recording with the speaker’s name and date. Write a short summary and note names or dates to verify. Offer the speaker a chance to review the story before sharing it, then save a backup of the original recording.