

*an ebook for grandparents*

# **CAPTURE YOUR LEGACY**



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# Tell My Stories

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Tell My Stories is a legacy video project created by Hibard Group Los Angeles to help this generation pass on their greatest gift: their stories.

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# 25 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU CAPTURE YOUR LEGACY

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*Edmund Burke wrote, “Those who don’t know history are doomed to repeat it.” Passing on our heritage begins with understanding the past and putting it into proper perspective.*

As a grandparent, you have good things to pass on to your children and grandchildren, and that should give you confidence and purpose. What are you uniquely equipped to instill in your grandchildren? What do you want them to remember about you?

We are the architects of our own heritage. The positive words and memories we share will have a lasting impact on our grandchildren and on us as well. Can we do this perfectly? No, but we can do it better. And the positive aspects of our heritage can become solid building blocks for our grandchildren.

With so much to say, where do you begin? What should you communicate to your children and grandchildren? Perhaps these words from Kipling will be helpful:

I keep six honest serving-men:  
(They taught me all I knew)  
Their names are What and Where and When  
And How and Why and Who.

As you consider various events that have shaped your life and your heritage, one family historian suggests that it's best to start with memories of a fixed point in time, like a significant "first" in your life.

For example, the first home you lived in, your first school or learning environment, your relationships to your family members or caregivers, your first work experience, the first time you remember being hurt physically or emotionally, your first spiritual awareness, your first success or failure, and so on.

Those life experiences helped to define who you were and who you would become.

Here are 25 questions to help you uncover more specifics. I have adapted these from a list written by Marshall Duke, Ph.D., which many researchers commonly use to help people tap into their family stories.

With each one, ask yourself, *Do my children and grandchildren know about this? What would I want them to know about this?*

1. Where did you meet your wife/husband?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. Where did your spouse grow up?
4. Where did your parents (their great or great-great grandparents) grow up?
5. Where did your parents (their great or great-great grandparents) meet?
6. Where were you married?
7. What was happening, in your family and in the world, around the time of your birth?
8. What is the source of your name?
9. What were your nuclear and extended families like?
10. Which family member do you look most like?
11. Which family member do you act most like?
12. What illnesses and injuries did you experience when you were younger?

13. What lessons did your parents learn from good or bad experiences?
14. What things happened to your mom and/or dad when they were in school?
15. What is the ethnic background of your family (Mexican, German, African, Russian, etc.)?
16. What jobs did you have during your childhood, teen or young adult years?
17. Which awards or recognitions did you receive when you were young?
18. What are the names of the schools you attended?
19. What jobs, awards, and schools were part of your parents' early lives?
20. Were there relatives who were known to have grumpy, happy, or solemn dispositions?
21. What is your faith tradition?
22. What was the first book you read and the first movie you saw?
23. What are some of your most embarrassing moments?
24. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
25. Who was most influential in your life during your teen years?



These kinds of questions will likely get you going in a good direction, and they may bring related experiences and details to mind.

Often, the next step is to take that memory or experience and *write* a few sentences about it. If writing things down or journaling isn't your thing, at least capture a few notes to help you remember later. Meaningful, heritage-related conversations with your children and grandchildren can happen in the spur of the moment and with no preparation, but if you want to do your very best at passing on those pieces of your heritage, then it's best to be at least a little bit prepared.

Often, once you jot down those first few sentences, more and more details and memories will emerge. It might also help to reflect on various sensory information from a specific moment: What did you see? What noises could you hear? Were there any interesting smells you remember? Did you touch or taste anything? Use your five senses to help you remember, then jot it down. Develop the key points and let the brief narrative flow. Each story will become a building block in your "heritage house," and something precious you can share.

These memories and stories are useful in revealing insights about the environments in which you lived and, perhaps, how you were nurtured at various stages of life. Don't forget to include the critically important aspects of your personality and who you really are—your genetic code, character attributes, spiritual truths, and your perspective on life. How did those factors, combined with early life experiences, impact your heritage? And which of those attributes can you see being replicated in your grandchildren or great-grandchildren?

*It's also appropriate to mention others who have invested in your life, and the wisdom and experiences you gained from them. This can be family members as well as others who have mentored you.*

One notable example of this is found in the bestselling book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, a memoir by a young reporter, Mitch Albom, describing his relationship with his 78-year-old former college professor, Morrie Schwartz. After hearing that Morrie had a terminal disease and was likely to die soon, Albom contacted Morrie and soon set up regular Tuesday meetings that continued for fourteen weeks. The book describes those meetings and the stories and life principles they discussed,

including Morrie's experiences, memories, beliefs, and the essence of what he knew about life—his heritage.

As grandparents we are a lot like Morrie, except that our children and grandchildren are not likely to call us and set up regular visits to ask about our life and soak up our wisdom. That's rare, and sadly, would almost seem unnatural in today's world. But we do have opportunities to capture our heritage for others to enjoy and learn from, and we should be ready to talk about it with our grandchildren or anyone else who may ask.

As heritage builders, we must recognize that we can also have a profound influence on other adults and children who aren't family members, as mentors or grandparent figures. If grandchildren live far away and we see them only occasionally, that shouldn't stop us from investing in future generations.

Dr. Duke, the author I mentioned earlier, wrote: "I spent 10 years studying this question: How do we build resilience in children and families? ... The answer is, establishing yourself as a trans-generational person. That is, learning about the history of your family."

# *Grandparenting, of course, is trans-generational.*

If we are going to transfer things of meaning and value to the next generations, then it is incumbent upon us to first learn about and explore our heritage, identify what is meaningful there, add our own stories and truths, and then find ways to pass it along.

If we're successful, then our children and grandchildren will also become trans-generational and keep that heritage alive for the generations that follow.



Dr. Ken Canfield, a nationally-known leader and scholar, has committed his life to strengthening families and fathers. He has founded and continues to engage in several organizations dedicated to improving family well-being. He is currently president of the National Association for Grandparenting.

While leading the National Center for Fathering, Dr. Canfield served as a consultant to media, and to national, state and community leaders. He has served as a founding member of former Vice President Al Gore's "Father to Father" Initiative and the National Fathers Leadership Group. He has been recognized for his leadership and awarded the Father of the Year by the National Congress for Men and Children, and the Polish Presidential Medal of Honor.

Dr. Canfield is the author of numerous articles, both popular and scientific. His work has appeared in *Psychological Reports*, *Educational and Psychological Measurements*, *The World and I*, *Parents*, *Today's Better Life*, *Living with Children* and *New Man*. He is the author of the award-winning *7 Secrets of Effective Fathers*, *The Heart of a Father*, *The Adventures of Fatherhood Series*, and *They Call Me Dad*.