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## BASICS

Virtually everything that is documented began as oral communication

Oral history (including interviewing) is subject to  
interpretation

perceptual differences

alteration over time and retelling

Even interviews of eye witnesses should be considered fallible

However

Interviews also provide

clues for places to find documented evidence

a sense of our ancestors' humanness

a connection to the person with whom we are conversing

The interview format is one of status:

the one asking the questions is the one with perceived power until

the one giving the answers stops providing the information, causing the  
locus of control to shift

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Make an appointment

Explain who you are (including your relationship to the interviewee)

Tell what information you are seeking and why

Advise how long the interview is expected to last

Suggest a variety of dates and times for the interview, if possible

Research the family in advance

Fill in the blanks on the pedigree chart and family group sheets

Plan interview questions ahead of time

Use open-ended, not closed-ended (“yes”/ “no”) questions

Gather materials

Recorder (video or audio) – be certain it works properly and you know  
how to work (with) it

Extra tapes, memory cards, batteries (do not expect to plug in)

Notebooks/paper and writing implements

Charts, (copies of) documents, photos to share, etc.

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

Be sure to clearly identify the specifics on the recording

Who is being interviewed

When the interview is taking place

Where the interview is taking place

Minimize the background noises, if at all possible

Be respectful

Let the person tell stories

Look at photo albums and scrapbooks

Do not interrupt; listen carefully

Make notes

of photos/documents you want to copy

of follow-up questions

of correct spelling of names of people and places

Ask only appropriate, non-intrusive questions

save sensitive topics for when you are better acquainted with the person

Avoid arguments or contentions

Observe non-verbal cues that the person is getting tired and stop, even if you are not finished

Before you leave

Make arrangements for a follow-up meeting (or continuing interview)

Verify how to get in touch and where to send copies of the compiled information

Thank the person for his/her time and (if applicable) hospitality

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Process recordings

Clearly label and date the tapes or discs

Secure medium so it cannot be accidentally erased

Transcribe the material verbatim (that may survive even if the recording is destroyed or lost)

Double check information that may be ambiguous, unclear, or incomplete

Properly document that your information came from this particular interview, recording the person's name, the date, and interview location in your genealogy program and, if applicable, on publications (web and/or hard copy)

Send a thank you note and include your updated family group sheets

Follow-up a short time later with any new findings, allowing the interviewee an opportunity to stay in touch and, perhaps, provide you with more data

## ALTERNATIVE INTERVIEW OPTIONS

- 1) Go through photos or photo albums and record your conversation with the interviewee identifying the people and places and, hopefully, telling stories (be sure to clearly identify what pictures you are speaking about)

- 2) Send a questionnaire, with large spaces between the questions, to the interviewee
  - Include a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope
  - Keep a copy of the questionnaire in your files
- 3) Communicate with associates of the family
  - former neighbors
  - fellow parishioners
  - former co-workers
  - nursing home associates
  - people who married into the family
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> (etc.) cousins
- 4) Talk with your siblings to see if they remember things differently

#### INTERVIEWING TECH TOOLS

- Tape/digital recorders
- Laptop or netbook computer (with transferring hardware – discs or flash drives)
- Portable scanner (with connecting cables)
- Portable printer (with extra ink & paper)
- Smart-phone or P(ersonal) D(ata) A(ssistant)
- Digital and/or conventional (still) camera
- (And don't forget the chargers for all the above!)

#### AS THE INTERVIEWEE

- Ask the important questions
  - Who is the interviewer (relationship to you)?
  - What information is requested?
  - When will this information be made public?
  - Where can you get in touch with this person in the future?
  - Why is he/she interviewing you?
  - How will the information be used (and will you get credit as the source)?
- Don't get sidetracked with your own, irrelevant experiences
  - Help the interviewer stay focused
- Remember the power/control component
- Share information that will be helpful (don't be difficult)
- Do not share confidential information about living individuals (or anything that might bring shame or embarrassment to those still alive)
- Avoid making derogatory or evaluative remarks about any person or group
- Recognize when the interview is over
- Request a transcript of the interview to verify that information is accurate
- Follow-up with a courtesy call, note, or email, as appropriate

#### THE INTERVIEW GOLDEN RULE

- Give information/photos/documents unto others the
  - information/photos/documents you would have others give unto you

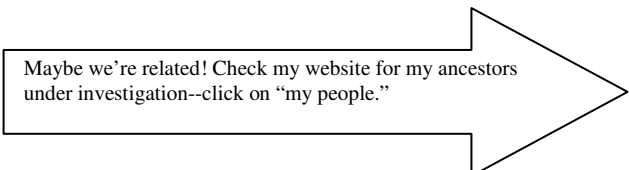
## REVIEW

- Interviews are 2-way streets (be prepared, no matter which side of the street you are on)
- Remember, and respect, the power component of the relationship
- Exercise courtesy – Apply the Golden Rule
- Stay in touch

### Very Limited Reference List

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\*sources used in the preparation of this presentation



Maybe we're related! Check my website for my ancestors under investigation--click on "my people."

