

"Inspiring and a call to action! This book greatly increases the likelihood that a significant and treasured account of your life (or your loved ones) will be produced and maintained." – Ron Stegall

The Oral History Workshop: Collect and Celebrate the Life Stories of Your Family and Friends

by Cynthia Hart with Lisa Samson

WORKMAN PUBLISHING • NEW YORK

Softcover 6" x 9" 196 pgs

ISBN 978-0-7611-5197-5 \$12.95 U.S.

www.workman.com

• Available November 2009

Online at www.amazon.com and at bookstores nationwide •

SAMPLE PAGES: THE ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOP

The following sample spreads appear in *The Oral History Workshop*. They are provided here solely to illustrate what the book is like as a whole and to offer a unique peek into its pages. © Cynthia Hart All Rights Reserved.



“To be a person is to have a story to tell.”

—ISAK DINESEN

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Your Family and Friends*

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For all those whose stories will be told

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN 978-0-7611-5197-5

Workman books are available at special discounts when purchased in bulk for premiums and sales promotions as well as for fund-raising or educational use. Special editions of book excerpts can also be created to specification. For details, contact the Special Sales Director at the address below.

Workman Publishing Company, Inc.
225 Varick Street
New York, NY 10014-4381
www.workman.com

Printed in the United States of America
First printing October 2009
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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“The universe is made up of stories, not atoms.”

—MURIEL RUKEYSER

Before You Ask

Preparing for the Interview

YOU PROBABLY ALREADY know whom you want to interview. Maybe you’ve thought about approaching your parents for years and put it off—if so, you’re not alone. You may even know the topics or events you’d like to learn more about or the questions you’d like to ask. If not, start off by identifying your hopes for the scope of this project. Are you interested in a certain time period—your subject’s childhood or experience of a unique slice of history? Are you curious about a particular area of your subject’s life—a short fling with an alternate career or life path, a previous marriage? Are there specific stories you’ve heard time and again and want down for the record once and for all—the elaborate prank with unintended consequences, the storied courtship? Or are you in it for the big picture—a full-scale account of your subject’s life?



“The danger lies in forgetting what we had.”

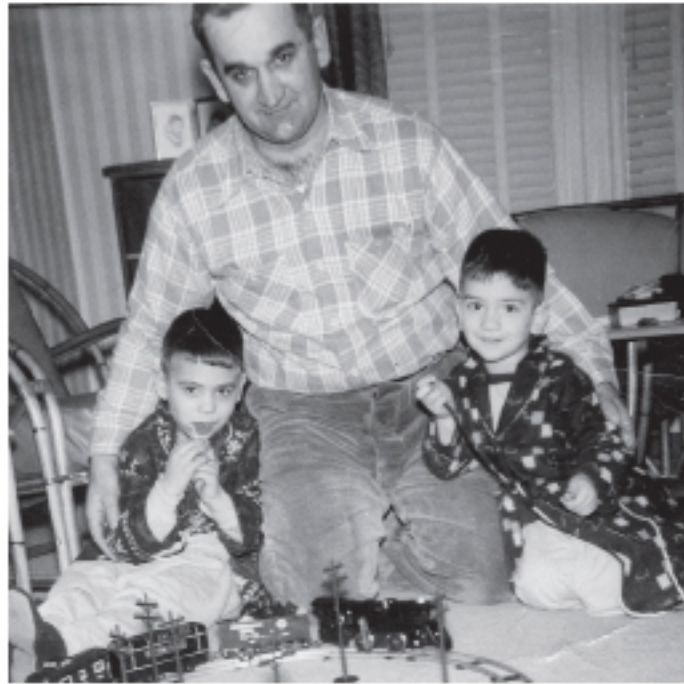
—ADRIENNE RICH

Making It Happen

Recording & Troubleshooting the Interview

TO BEGIN AT the beginning: Why record your interviews? Fortunately, it’s an easy enough question to answer. Let’s say you make the effort to interview your late mother’s closest workplace confidante. What eye-opening tales you’ll hear, along with the thrillingly mundane details—what they brought for lunch, their after-hours escapades, their harmless crushes on coworkers. But without an audio or video recording or written record, you’ll have no way to share this real and rounded story of your mother’s life with your siblings or your children. And after a few days, *you’ll* begin to forget those stories; and those gestures, pauses, winks, and giggles will start to fade too.

The potential reach of a recorded interview is inherently broader, and that’s why finding the stories is only the first



“A clever, imaginative, humorous request can open closed doors and closed minds.”

—PERCY ROSS

Ask a Question, Gather a Story

Mapping Out Your Interview

IT'S DIFFICULT TO overstate the power of a question. What you ask or don't ask has a direct influence on which stories you'll hear—and even how stories are told. If you want to know about a particular event, ask about it. (Don't wait for the topic to come up on its own—it may not.)

You may want to pursue a chronological review of your interviewee's life in order to pin down the “facts”; maybe you want the arc of his career path and personal achievements, or maybe you're interested in questions that act as windows on his inner journey—how he feels about his life experiences and what's important or truly meaningful to him. In all cases, a mix of fact-based questions and queries about emotional issues will help create a well-rounded interview.

Think about the stories you want to capture as having two layers: the broad outlines and the telling details. Sketch in a



“Memory . . . is the diary that we all carry about with us.”

—OSCAR WILDE

Molding Your Material

Preparing & Preserving the Interview

YOU’VE PRESSED THE off button and packed up your things. You’ve gone home and had a listen—and it’s real . . . you did it! You’ve captured the stories you wanted—and maybe you’ve gotten much, much more. Now what?

Don’t just file away the treasure you worked so hard to unearth; find a way to keep your interview safe, and go one step further by turning it into a keepsake.

By definition, a “keepsake” is an object held onto for sentimental reasons. It’s the kind of thing a cranky curmudgeon might call useless—but its purpose, its usefulness, is to serve as a physical reminder of a person, a time, or an experience.

Why not stop at the interview? Because now that you’ve saved your interviewee’s stories in physical form, they depend on you for survival. Your role has evolved: You’ve graduated from cocreator to caretaker.



“Right now a moment is fleeting by! Capture its reality in paint!”

—PAUL CEZANNE

Turning It Into Something More

Writing, Scrapbooking & Archiving Your Interview

ONCE YOU’VE GOTTEN the story down, the creative possibilities are endless. Your interview can be preserved as a historical document in a family archives, local history association, library, or oral history project; it can also be given as a timeless gift to family and friends. Here are a few projects and approaches to consider.

- ❖ Print out copies of interview transcripts on acid-free paper and present them in custom-decorated archival-quality envelopes or boxes.
- ❖ Burn (that is, copy) edited versions of the original recording on archival-quality “gold” CDs or DVDs and enclose them in decorative sleeves.