



The Art of Capturing your Family's Oral History

Presenter: Edward Wons
Senior Partner at JPC Media LLC

Preparing for the Interview

Information you should gather as part of the pre-interview process.

- Develop a list of relatives who have passed away that the person being interviewed might have known.
- Significant Life Events
- Talk to other Family Members about questions that should be asked.
- Identify Favorite family stories
- Family Photographs
- A list of stories you may have heard before, maybe many times before.

Try to go back in time. Think about what was happening at the time for the person being interviewed and the people you want to learn more about.

- What historical events were occurring at the time.
- What were some of the cultural norms or expectations that may have influenced a family member's life choice.

Talk to the person you are going to interview well before the time of the actual interview.

Talk about some of the information you have gathered as part of the pre-interview process with the person you are going to interview.

When you arrange to conduct an oral interview you are giving the person permission to talk about their life. This is really a tremendous gift. It affirms the value of their life experiences and to allow them to reflect on the important milestones in their life.

Let some time pass between the pre-interview and the actual interview. Give the person being interviewed some time to get comfortable with the idea of telling their story and to think about the stories they might want to tell.

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Sample Interview Questions / Topics

When and where were you born?

Where you grew up?

When did your family move to the area? Homesteading?

Can you describe the place where you lived as you were growing up?

What was your neighborhood like? Who lived there and who did you play with?

What did your father do for a living?

Tell me about going to hockey games with your dad?

Tell me the story about Uncle Steve's brush with death at the lake?

Did you have any special jobs you had to do?

Did you ever get into any trouble as a kid?

Tell me about learning to pat your head and rubbing your tummy.

Can you describe what your father was like?

How about your mother?

How do you think the Depression in the 1930's affected your parents?

How about WWII?

Tell me about some of the other adults in your life growing up.

What was your family's attitude toward education?

What were your interests and talents early on?

Did you play any sports?

What were some of the things you enjoyed doing growing up?

You have a portrait of a young child holding a doll and this image has a special meaning to you. Can you tell me about it?

Tell me about the birth of your first daughter?

The Equipment You Will Need

Video Camera

A Digital High Definition camera with the following features:

It will record at least 2 hours of high quality video using the MP4 format. I would recommend that you avoid using the AVCHD format because it makes it more difficult to edit the video. A number of low cost editing programs will not work or will have difficulty with the AVCDH format.

The base camera may not be able to record 2 hours of high quality video but you can buy a larger flash card to expand the camera's capability.

The next most important thing to have on the camera is the ability to connect to an external microphone. The reason for this is that you want the sound pickup as close to the speaker as possible.

When using the built in microphone on the camera, no matter how good the microphone is, it will be quite a distance from the speaker. You will get a lot of echo and room noise. The end result is finished video which is difficult to understand.



Canon 8GB VIXIA HF R50 Full HD Camcorder

Record up to 1920 x 1080/60p HD Video
Internal 8GB Flash Memory
SD/SDHC/SDXC Memory Card Slot
Dual Recording in AVCHD & MP4 Formats
Input for an external microphone
Headphone output

Cost About \$300

Tripod

This doesn't need to be all that special but try to pick one that allows you to move the camera from side to side smoothly so the camera doesn't jerk if the camera need to be adjusted during the interview.

I would recommend you go to a camera store and try out tripods with your camera.



Slik Pro 340DX Tripod with 3-Way Pan/Tilt Head

A 3-way pan/tilt tripod head
a metal quick release plate that positively locks into the head.
Quick release lock allows for fast mounting and removal of the camera.

Cost about \$80

The Equipment You Will Need

Microphone

I would recommend using a lavalier microphone.

This is the small microphone that clips to clothing. On news programs or talk shows you will see these microphones being used.



Polisen OLM-20 Omnidirectional Lavalier Microphone

Dual OLM-10 Omnidirectional Mic Capsules
Single 1/8" Stereo Connector
Each Mic Routes to Discrete Channel
Left/Right Channel Indicated on Mics
Works with 1/8" Recording Devices
Includes 2 Tie Clips & Foam Windscreens

Cost About \$50

Headphones

Headphones that can plug into your camera's headphone jack.

They should be comfortable and of good quality.



JVC HA-S160 FLATS On-Ear Stereo Headphones

Lightweight Fold-Flat Design
30mm Neodymium Drivers
Closed-Back Design
Soft On-Ear Cushions

Cost About \$15

Setting Up the Interview Environment

The goal in setting up the interview environment is to do everything possible to make the person being interviewed more comfortable.

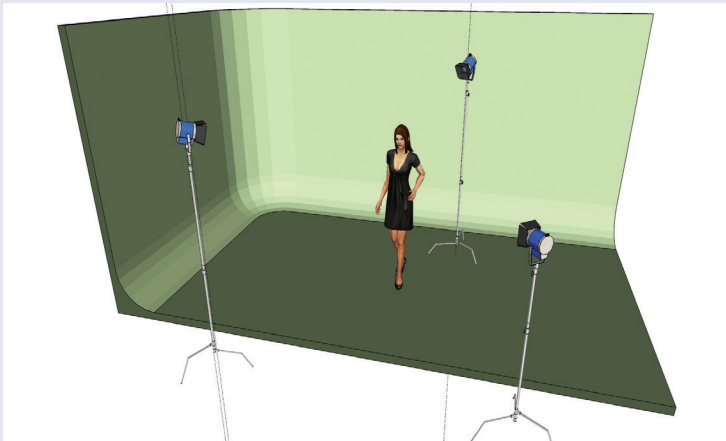
Select a location where the surroundings are familiar to the person being interviewed. Most often this is in their home but not always.

Setting up for an interview almost always involves repositioning some furniture. This is something you might want to mention as part of the pre-interview process.

Keep in mind that it is what really matters is the audio and video recorded by the camera.

Make sure the background behind the person being interviewed doesn't distract the viewer.

Arrange the lighting so one side of the face is brighter than the other. The illustration shows an example of how to set up lighting.



The distance between the interviewer and interviewee should be short.

What the interviewee should see is the interviewer and the normal setting of the room.

The camera should be off to the side and behind the interviewer.

Rearrange the furniture and set up the lighting first so the person being interviewed has a chance to acclimate to the changes in the room.

Next, frame the subject in the camera's viewfinder. This is a matter of preference but there are some rules of thumb. A wider shot (not close) creates a feeling of more distance between the viewer of the finished video and the person being interviewed. This produces an image that is perceived by the viewer as detached and less intimate.

The reverse is true; the more "close in" the person is framed in the camera's viewfinder, the more the viewer will perceive the stories being told as more engaging and intimate.

Use the headphones connected to the camera to make sure the microphones are properly placed and are working correctly.

Guidelines for Conducting the Interview

Ideally for the interview one person conducts the interview and a second makes sure the audio is OK and attends the camera. The second person can move the camera to keep the person being interviewed in frame throughout the interview.

An alternative is to have the camera set at a wider frame and have the interviewer wear headphones to listen to the sound being recorded.

Allow the person who is being interviewed time to become comfortable with the surroundings.

The interview should smoothly transition between social chitchat to the actual interview. The start of the interview begins with. "We can start when ever you are ready" instead of "OK the camera is on." This helps foster the idea of the interview as a conversation instead of a 60 Minutes style grilling.

The role of the interviewer is primarily to get the conversation started.

There are some things the interviewer should not do.

Resist the urge to say Uh Hu, OK, yea, sure or anything else like this during the interview. It may seem just fine while conducting the interview but it is terribly distracting when a viewer is watching the completed interview.

Resist the urge to add to the story or make comments or to start talking about a similar experience you may have had.

Things you should do.

Talk only when necessary.

Maintain eye contact with the person being interviewed. Give non-verbal cues indicating that you are interested in what is being said. Nod your head or smile.

Start off with easy questions. Remember to ask questions that invite more than a one or two word answer.

Be OK with silent periods. Allow the person being interviewed to gather their thoughts and memories.

Take advantage of silent periods to ask follow-up questions or ask for clarification or change to another topic. These are also the points in the interview where your can check your interview questions to see if there are any stories or topics that have not been touched on.

The Art of Capturing your Family's Oral History
Ed Wons - JPC Media LLC

This talk will focus on bringing your family's story to life using video to record stories and life experiences.

Introduction

First I want to thank you for coming.

I think you will find discovering and recording family stories will be a rewarding part of uncovering your family's genealogical history.

I would like to give you a little background about myself and how became involved in recording family oral histories.

My Meyer-Briggs type is INTP and those of you know about Meyers-Briggs may recognize that I am the kind of person who kind of lives in the clouds and loves philosophy and the grand theory of things.

But I also have a real nuts and bolts MacGyver aspect to my personality.

So I kind of have one foot in the clouds being kind of theoretical and artsy and foot one on the ground rooting around in the technical details. The art of capturing a good oral history is like this having both an artistic and a technical aspect and this is subject of my talk today.

I also what to talk about value of going beyond the just the bare facts of genealogical research.

For example, I know my paternal grandparents emigrated from a small town in Ukraine just before WWI. They spend some time in Boston MA and then came to Minnesota. They had five boys and lived in West St. Paul. These are the things I know for sure.

Why did they leave Ukraine or more accurately Poland as Poland controlled that area of Ukraine at the time? Why did they go to Boston? Why did they move to West St. Paul when the majority of Ukrainian emigrants lived in NE Minneapolis?

At one time the answer to these questions was probably “common knowledge” and not worth the time and effort to record any of it. Now these family stories have been lost to time. Stories that would have given depth and meaning to the genealogical facts

This is why your interest in this topic is so important. You are the ones who are looking into the past and understand what it would mean to run across a first person account of a relative who has pass away.

Looking to the future, you are the ones who will preserve these stories for younger family members who may not have any interest now but I assure you will be grateful for your efforts at sometime in the future.

It illustrate this point I would like to tell you about my uncle Clete Jaeger. He told stories about his time in the Navy prior to, during and after WWII.

He was one of the men captured on Corregidor and spend 42 months as a prisoner of war in Japan.

He talks about always being on the edge of starvation. Regular beatings and being forced to build ships for Japan. 3 ½ years is a long time to endure these kinds of conditions.

For the sake of time I am leaving out of the graphic details but I want to tell you about an incident that happened after he was set free.

He was still very thin and was in an army food line for over 30 minutes. Just as he was to pick up his food tray a group of 50 Japanize POW were led in and allowed to get in line a head of him.

His first reaction was anger. After 42 months of starvation and beatings how dare they get in line first and get a good meal. Keeping his cool and thinking it over he agreed with the human treatment of the POWs.

To tell you the truth I couldn't be prouder of what this man endured and the kind of values he stood for.

The real punch in the gut came a couple paragraphs latter when described being treated as a trader in his hometown for becoming a POW.

I f these stories had not be recorded, I would have never know what truly remarkable person my uncle was because I really didn't read this account until long after his death.

The value of recording family histories is not in the here and now or necessary for you and I but in the future for family members who at some time will want to know these stories.

Story like this, and everyone has stories, contain a type of genealogical history that cannot be found in any database.

Probably like you I didn't just wake up on fine day and say "I think I will record some oral histories." It began while on vacation in Arizona when we visited the Vulture Mine near Wickenburg. We met up with a fella named Russ Hunting.

Russ stated to tell us about the various buildings and I just turned on my camera and started recording.

At first on the sly but we quickly found out Russ was a bit of a ham. He then told us about how he had cleaned out the buildings so visitors would have a better experience visiting the site.

He then told us a ghost story that I will show you now.

Play Ben ghost Story video

Over the next several months we corresponded with “Ben” and researched the history of the Vulture Gold Mine and though we could make a documentary video.

Six weeks before my wife and I planned to return, Russ suddenly passed away. Since we had our plane tickets and mapped out the archives in Tucson and Prescott we wanted to visit we decided moved ahead.

When we returned to the Vulture Mine we met John & Marge Osborne. John suggested we create a tour video for people unable to manage the Vulture’s walking tour.

As we got to know the John & Marge, we realized, that as caretakers living alone at the mine for over 25 years, they were as much a part of the history of the mine as its founder Henry Wickenburg.

Part tour and part interview we were able to capture a slice of the history of the Vulture Gold Mine. What it was like nearly 20 years ago to visit this historic site when John and Marge Osborne were the sites caretakers.

This experience is no longer possible since John has passed away and the Vulture is now an active gold mine. But capturing the peaceful nature of the Vulture Mine and the warmth and hospitality of John and Marge stated JPC Media down the path doing this kind of work.

So over the years we have interviewed quite a number of people in a variety of setting and learned a lot about how to get a good interview and the kind of things to avoid. I hope that by sharing this knowledge with you it will encourage you make the effort to record your family’s personal history.

About Oral Histories

When I talk about a family oral history what exactly am I talking about. I know that my first impression was that it was just a series of questions like; What kinds of food did you have to eat? Did you have a garden? And so on. All questions that elicit short simple answers.

Although some books and sites on the Internet talk about this kind of oral history, it is not the kind of oral history I am talking about.

Ann Banks writes in about oral histories in *First Person America*, As “The way people make sense of their lives,

the web of meaning and identity they weave for themselves.”

The stories people tell, and the cultural traditions they preserve, speak volumes about what they value and how they bring meaning to their lives and to the lives of those around them. This is the kind of personal oral history we want to capture.

I have an example of what I am talking about and I call it “Two Tails about Cows.”

The first Cow tail is from Norm Brakken. Norm’s grandfather Gilbert Brakken, homesteaded a farm on the shores of Lake Ida near Alexandria, MN.

Norm’s father, Anton Brakken being the youngest son was stuck with milking the cows and taking care of the livestock. But what he learned about animal husbandry allowed him to keep his farm when crop farming collapsed during the depression in the 1930s.

Norm grew up during this period of time and got involved in 4H and the U of M extension service. Through this connection he found bulletin 218 Feeding Dairy Cattle.

Here is a clip of Norm talking about how this bulletin impacted the family's farm.

Play 218 Feeding Dairy Cattle – Clip (1 minute)

When you look at the 3 ½ hours of interview you begin to understand this was a pivotal point in Norm's life which eventually led to a life time of teaching agriculture to farmers of all ages.

The second cow tail involves Wayne Cole who grew up on a farm near Colgate, ND. He was about the same age as Norm.

What was interesting during the course of Wayne's interview, he kept coming back to the subject of cows. On the surface this seemed a little odd since he went on to become a bulk oil distributor.

But when edited together the connection between selling oil and his experience with cows begins to make some sense.

Play Wayne Cole – Cows to Selling Bulk Oil Clip

Here we have two gentlemen growing up in the same cultural circumstance having two completely different reactions that became pivotal in their choice of careers. These are the kind of stories we try to capture in an oral interview.

It allows us to do more than say Norm was taught agriculture or Wayne was a bulk oil distributor.

In their own words they can tell us why they made these life decisions.

It allows people like you and I the ability to introduce these people to future generations who may never get to know them as adults.

Think about that for a moment. What would it be like for you to run across a video of your great grandfather talking about his great grandfather.

So let's start diving into the details of the art of capturing a family history.

Preparing for the Interview

First understand that each interview will be unique. To begin with you need to gather some basic background information.

Where did the person grow up?

What did their parents do?

It is also important to think about what was going on historically at the time?

In preparing for the interview what you are trying to do is to fall back in time to get a feel for what kind of questions you should be asking. A friend of mine asked me how does this work?

So I asked her these questions.

Where did the person grow up?

What did their parents do?

What was going on historically at the time?

Cynthia told me she grew up in a small town in Illinois in the 1950's. Her parents ran a general store that sold groceries and dry goods and that they lived over the store.

From this information I asked her if there were any special jobs she had to do in the store as a child.

Her eyes light up and she said Oh I don't know if I should tell this story.

Non-verbally I give her a que that yes it was OK to tell me the story.

She told me one of her jobs was to wrap the boxes of feminine napkins in the paper used to wrap meat at the meat counter.

The wrapped boxes were placed on the way to the meat counter and not near other items like sewing needles that were considered women's things.

She explained that when a wife sent her husband to the store to pick up things she needed, the husband could discreetly pick up one of the wrapped boxes on his way to the meat counter.

Reflecting on this she added that the thing was everyone knew what was in these wrapped boxes and no one was fooling anyone, but it was a different time, discretion mattered and this was just how things were done.

These are the kind of stories that got lost in time as people pass away. They are important in that they provide insights and provide a richer and fuller understanding of a family's history.

Now we know what types of stories we want to capture let's dive into how to go about getting them recorded. The first step is the pre-interview.

The pre interview is where you investigate what information and stories the person being interviewed might be able to tell. This kind of things you are looking for are:

A list of relatives who have passed away the person being interviewed might have known.

Identify significant Life Events

Talk to other Family Members about questions that should be asked.

Identify Favorite family stories

Maybe some of these stories you may have heard before, maybe many times before. As an example, I have a photo of my grandmother's family in our house. From time to time visitors ask about the photo and I tell them I never knew about the two great uncles in the photo until I stumbled across the family schism that was part of church schism.

If there is any interest at all I begin to tell the story starting in 988 AD and Prince Vladimir of Ukraine. Now at this point I can see my wife rolling her eyes and I know she is thinking “Oh no not 988 again”. She either stops me or leaves to pick the thorns off the raspberry bushes.

My point is to not discount the value of well worn stories. I know one family that fondly remembers their grandfather telling stories he made up about the mice that lived in the barn. But now that he is gone and they have this memory but are unable to recall a single story.

Family Photographs

Family photos are a great way to begin to engage the person being interviewed.

I had one instance where there was a photo of two people in a golf cart. I thought it was unremarkable but the person in the photo said Oh that was the time I went on vacation and almost came back in a body bag.

This photo triggered a story about being on a river cruise in South America where the boat broke apart and sank in a river with piranhas and crocodiles. She was a good swimmer but someone panicked and grabbed onto her sending them both to the bottom.

She got up once and went down again. She got up again and managed to call for help. She was about to go down for the third time when someone pulled the other person off her and they managed to get to shore.

Photos are a great conversation starter.

In the pre-interview, you are beginning the process of giving the person permission to talk about their life. This is really a tremendous gift. - to affirm the value of their life experiences and to allow them to reflect on important milestones in their life.

After completing the pre-interview process, let some time pass between the pre-interview and the actual interview. Allow the person being interviewed some time to get comfortable with idea being interviewed.

It also gives the person being interviewed time thinking about what they might what stories they might want to tell.

Generate a List of Questions

By the time you have completed the pre-interview, you should have a good idea of what you want to capture. The next step in the process is to develop a list of questions or topics.

Developing this list should do a number of things.

It helps you make sure you cover all the topics you hope to capture. It helps you control the level of intensity starting out with easy questions and moving deeper in to more reflective thoughts and memories.

If you look at the handout with some generic interview questions / topics you will notice the first four questions are ones that are really easy to answer.

Where and when you were born? Where did you grow up?

The next question gives the interviewee the ability to expand on the family's history and connection to the community.

The fourth question helps the person to move back in time to describe their childhood home.

The purpose of these initial questions is to get the person being interviewed comfortable answering questions and into the mode of describing people, places and events.

As the interview progresses you can begin to ask about specific stories or events uncovered in the pre-interview process. A couple of examples from the sample list are

Tell me about going to hockey games with your dad?

And

Tell me about learning to pat your head and rubbing your tummy.

As the interviewee becomes more relaxed you can begin to ask questions that are more reflective in nature. A couple of examples combine personal reflection along with the historical context of the time.

How do you think the depression in the 1930's affected your parents?

How about WWII?

Notice that this list tries to invite an open-ended response. I want to show you the kind of thing you want to avoid.

Play Video of Janine asking quick questions of the Hutmakers.

So this is just a series of quick questions that only require a short one or two word answer.

As you are developing this list, remember is not a checklist that you need to get through – treat it like as guide or a conversation starter.

What Equipment will you Need

We are at the point were you are ready to setup for the actual interview. I want to touch on the kind of equipment you will need.

I just want to give you and idea of the basics and not present a technical critique to cameras microphone ect.

You can just set up a camcorder and turn it on and you will capture audio and video. but what I want to share with you is how to make something a better than a just setting up a camera and turning it on.

Let me show you what it looks and sounds like just setting a camera using the camera's microphone.

Play Sondra tape interview. Version 1

In contrast, let me show you how different this appears by making just a few changes.

Play Sondra tape interview. version 2

There is a real difference in the look and feel between these two clips. This is part art of capturing a family oral history.

Notice how the black edge of the table looks like it is going through head of the person being interview. I will talk about avoiding this kind of issue a little latter on

How are we going to improve on the just setup a camera and turn it on approach?

The most oblivious thing is the camera. I would recommend one that has the following.

You don't have to write down any of technical details it is included in your handout.

A digital High Definition camera with the following features.

It will record at least 2 hours of high quality video using the MP4 format.

I would recommend that you avoid using the AVCHD format because make it more difficult to edit the video.

Free or low cost editing programs will not work or have difficulty with the AVCDH format.

The base camera may not be able to record 2 hours of high quality video but you can buy larger flash card to expand the camera's capability.

The next most important thing to have on the camera is the ability to connect to an external microphone. The reason for this is that you want the sound pickup as close to the speaker as possible.

Using the build in microphone on the camera, no matter how good the microphone is, quite a distance from the speaker and you get a lot of echo and room noise. The end result is finished video is difficult to understand.

I have had Sony, Panasonic and Canon cameras over the years and my personal preference is the Canon cameras because their auto settings typically produce really good-looking video.

In your handout I have a modestly priced Canon video camera that fits the criteria. There are other brands and models but as I said I don't want to dive into a camera critique and bore you to tears.

The next thing you need is a tripod. This doesn't need to be all that special but try to pick one that allows you to moved the camera from side to side smoothly so the camera doesn't jerk if the camera need to be adjusted during the interview.

I would recommend using a lavalier microphone. This is the small microphone that clips to clothing. If watch news casts and interview programs you will this type kind of microphones.

In your handout I am showing a low cost wired microphones that will plug into the modestly priced cameras that allow for an external microphone. This one in particular is nice because there is just one plug into the camera and a microphone for the interviewer and interviewee.

A good set of headphones is also essential. What gets recorded on the camera is the only thing that matters. If there is something wrong with the audio you need to know in as the interview is taking place so the problem can be corrected.

If a plug gets disconnected and suddenly there is no sound all your efforts are for nothing. So monitoring the audio during the interview is very important.

The last piece of equipment you will need is a fairly new computer and some video editing software. Apple offers a program called iMovie and Microsoft offers Windows Movie Maker. This is really kind of a big subject area with lots of ins and outs and I don't have any real experience with free or low cost video editing programs. I have looked at them and know they will most likely do the simple kind of editing and sharing suitable for a home project.

I have been using various version of Final Cut Pro for about 15 years now and if you have some technical questions about video editing I would be happy to talk with you after the presentation.

I know I just give you a quick overview of equipment. I hope I have given you the basics of what equipment you need to capture a good quality oral history interview.

Setting Up the Interview Environment

At this point we have done the pre-interview, we have our list of questions and topics and we have the equipment.

Here is where it all comes together to capture your family's history. I call this the art of capturing a family history because, despite all the preparation, you really don't know what is going to happen.

I want to share with you some of the techniques and insights I have learned over the years.

Everything you do in the interview should be geared toward making the person you are interviewing comfortable. The interview environment and interviewer should be constantly communicating that yes I am interested in what you are talking about.

The first is where to conduct the interview. Select a location where the surroundings are familiar to the person being interviewed. Most often this is in their home but not always.

Setting up for an interview almost always involves moving around some furniture. This is something you might want to mention as part of the pre-interview process.

I have set up for an interview so you can get a sense of how much space you will need and I would like to walk through all the various components and reasons for why things are as they are.

Here are some things you should avoid in setting up the interview environment.

Have the person being interviewed in rocking or chair that swivels. If you do they will rock and or swivel and this is very distracting in the finished video.

Shooting outside. This is not an absolute. An outdoor interview might be very appropriate depending on the person being interviewed. Be aware that the lighting will change over time or every time a cloud passes by. This may make editing a storyline more difficult. Also planes, lawnmowers, leaf blowers can undo the kind of atmosphere you are trying to create not to mention the audio noise.

Take a look at the room and determine what the camera is going to see and what the person being interviewed is going to see. Both are important.

With respect to the camera you want to select a background that is not distracting.

Show examples of good backgrounds.

There is no real hard and fast rule here but keep in mind the person watching the video will be looking at what the camera sees so try to pick a background that will not detract from the stories being told.

The same is true for the person being interviewed. You want to place the interviewer and interviewee close together and the person being interviewed should have a background that is not distracting.

The moving of the furniture and setting up the lighting should be done first. The reason behind this suggestion is that it gives the person being interviewed time to acclimate to the changes in the environment.

Walk to set up and talk about the following

You will probably have noticed that I have lighting in this setup that I didn't mention in the list of equipment. I am guessing you don't want to spend several hundred dollars on a lighting kit. You can get pretty much the same effect using floor and table lamps.

Let me show you what you are trying to achieve.

You want one side of the face to be lit brighter than the other side of the face. You don't want one side in light and the other in shadow.

Also you need pay attention to the angle of the light. You want to show a pleasant contrast but not so that highlights every wrinkle and blemish.

The next thing I want to call you attention is the relationship between the placement of the camera, the person being interviewed and the interviewer.

The distance between the interviewer and interviewee is short. In essence this is really just a conversation between two people. The reason people freeze up when they see a camera or a microphone is that it doesn't give them friendly feedback.

The blank stare of a camera sends the verbal cue that says “I’m bored or not at all interested in what you have to say.” Being able to talk to a camera naturally is highly developed skill that most of us just don’t possess.

The placement of the camera is distant with respect to the interviewer and not in the direct line of the site of the person being interviewed.

Return to Podium Here

The desired outcome is to have the person being interviewed so engaged in telling their story to the interviewer that begin to forget that the camera is there.

Let’s go back and review what we set up in list of questions and topics. If you recall the first series of questions are rather simple and easy to answer and gradually draws the person being interviewed into a deeper conversation.

When two people are in conversation there are any number of verbal and probably more importantly non-verbal cues that provide feedback to the person speaking telling them to stop or keep going.

The close proximity between the interviewer and interviewee combined with positive non-verbal cues become the predominate focus and the lights, microphone and camera all kind of fade into the background.

Should other family members be present during the interview? We have done a couple of interviews with a number of family members present. In one instance it was fine and in another it was a bit disruptive.

Overall, I would recommend that family members not conducting the interview not be present. You want to avoid having someone off camera disrupting the interview with comments and corrections.

Framing the subject in the camera. This is a matter of preference but there are some rules of thumb. The wider the shot meaning the more you see of the person, the more distance is created between the viewer and the person being interviewed. This creates an image that is perceived by the a person watching the interview as detached and less intimate.

Framing the person in the camera closer has the opposite effect. A person watching the interview will perceive the stories being told as more engaging and intimate.

A note of caution here. If you are zoomed in rather close, you need watch for the person going out of frame if they move around during the interview. It will seem like nothing as you are conducting the interview but will be very distracting when viewing the final product.

Conducting the Interview

We are now at the point where we can start to conduct the interview.

Ideally one person conducts the interview and a second makes sure the audio is OK and moves the camera to keep the person being interviewed in frame throughout the interview.

The last and maybe the most important thing for the person running the camera is to be quiet and to not draw attention to yourself. The goal is to have the person being interviewed to forget about the camera and direct their attention to the person conducting the interview.

An alternative to having two people is to have the camera set at a wider frame and have the interviewer wear headphones to listen to the sound being recorded.

I recommend having person being interviewed to sit in the interview chair while the lights, microphones and camera are being adjusted. This is good point to start the camera running and engaging the interviewee in light conversation.

I recommend this because it allows the person being interviewed time to get comfortable with the surroundings. It also allows the interview to smoothly transition between social chitchat to the actual interview. The start of the interview begins with. "We can start when ever you are ready" instead of "OK the camera is on."

The role of the interviewer is mostly to get the conversation started. There are some things the interviewer should not do.

Talk only when necessary. Resist the urge to say Uh Hu, OK, yea, sure or anything else like this during the interview. It may seem just fine while conducting the interview but it is terribly distracting when a viewer is watching the completed video.

Resist the urge to add to the story or make comments or to start talking about a similar experience you may have had.

Things you should do.

Maintain eye contact with the person being interviewed. Give non-verbal cues indicating that you are interested in what is being said. Nodding your head or smiling.

Start off with easy questions. Remember to ask questions that invite more than a one or two word answer

Being OK with silent periods. Allow the person being interviewed to gather their thoughts and memories. This is a little longer clip but it illustrates the importance of allowing for silent periods.

Play Bill telling his second story.

Silent periods are where you can ask follow-up questions or ask for clarification or change to another topic.

These are also the points in the interview to check your interview questions to see if there are any stories or topics that have not been touched on.

Don't be afraid to let the person wander "Off topic". As they begin this process one thing can lead to another. The person can touch on parts of their life that they never gave much thought to but the process of remembering and recalling events can bring personal insights into focus.

Session length should be between 1 and 2 hours. Our experience has shown that some people can go longer but tend to get restless. Since it is quite a bit of effort to setup the equipment, our recommendation is to break longer sessions into two and to maybe have a light lunch in-between sessions.

Exercise

Like I said this is an art and while this is all fresh in you minds I would you to take about 5 minutes to actually experience the interview process.

Break into groups of two.

One person is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee.

The interviewer should spend a couple of minutes getting to know a little of the background the other person.

Come up with a couple of open-ended questions you might ask in an interview.

Conduct a face-to-face interview making sure to use the techniques I just talked about.

After 5 minutes.

OK hopefully you now know something about the person next to you that you didn't know before tonight. This is probably a good point to see if there are any questions before I conclude my talk.

Q & A

Once you have the interview you will want to get it into a format where it can be shared with others. This is a whole other topic but here are some options.

- DVD with chapter marks at the start of each story.
- Edited interview that can include photos and home movies
- Create a series of short videos on topic and posting them to Facebook or a Family blog.
- Select a genealogy program that allows you to add video to your family tree.

One final thought.

The video clip I just showed you was from an interview of my mother she was about to turn 90. Less than 3 months after the interview, she passed away.

I have this video of my mother talking about her life and when I watch it is much more meaningful to me than just visiting her grave.

With this in mind, I am going to end with the words that started the Arch Oboler's "Lights Out" radio program in the 1940s. It is later than you think.

If you are thinking about recording your family's oral history you will be giving the person you are interviewing and your family a tremendous gift and now is the time to do it.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you this evening.