

A LIST OF QUESTIONS ~ from WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY NZ GUIDE ~ JOAN ROSIER-JONES ~ 2005

Key questions for live or written interviews

When and where were you born?
What is your full name? If the interviewee is married —
What was your maiden name?
Were you named after anyone else?
Did you have a nickname?
When and where were you married?
Who was in your immediate family? Parents, siblings, grand-
parents, great-grandparents?
Can you give me information about their births/deaths/marriages
(as appropriate)?
What can you remember about your parents, your grandparents?
Your great-grandparents?
What did they tell you about their own lives?
What memories and anecdotes did they pass on to you?
Who was in the extended family?
Which of your relatives had the biggest impact on your early life?

Early childhood

What is the first thing you can remember?
Where did you spend your childhood?
What was your home life like?
Describe the house/s you lived in.
What did you do for entertainment?
Did you have any favourite books or stories?
Did you have any favourite radio or television programmes?
What were your hobbies?
What toys did you have?
What games did you play? Who with?
Are there any crazes you can remember?
What sort of food did you eat?
What recipes can you remember from your childhood?
How much pocket money did you receive, if any?
What did you have to do for it?
Were you allocated chores around the house?
What did you want to be when you grew up?
What childhood ailments did you have?
What was your health like?

What, if any, hereditary diseases do you suffer from?
What was the health like of those around you?
What access did you have to medical help?
Did you have a religious upbringing? What denomination was it?
How did you feel about your involvement in this church/sect?
What part did politics play in your family life?

Schooling

Where did you first go to school?
How old were you?
What was that school like?
How did you enjoy your early schooling?
What were your favourite subjects?
What were your least favourite subjects?
What grades did you get?
What subjects were you best at?
Describe your favourite teacher/s.
Describe your least favourite teacher/s.
Describe what you wore to school.
What sports did you participate in?
What other extra-curricular activities did you participate in?
Who were your school friends?
What sorts of things did you do together?
Did you have a special meeting place?
Did you visit each other's homes? If so, what were the difference in lifestyle, if any?
What, if any, school prizes did you win?
Did you go to secondary school? Which one?
What subjects did you study?
Did you have to wear a school uniform? If so, what was it like?
How many years did you spend at secondary school?
What was your highest achievement there?
What would be the equivalent today?

Tertiary education

Where did you attend?
What area of study did you pursue?
What was the highest qualification you obtained?

Working life/adulthood

What was your first job?
How did you get this job?

Can you describe your first day at work?
How well did this job match your childhood ambitions?
What hours of work did you do each day? What breaks did you have?
What annual holidays did you have?
How did you spend your leisure time? What hobbies and interests did you have?
What did that first job lead to?
What other employment have you had?
Were you ever made redundant?
When did you retire?
Was your working life satisfying? If so, how so? If not, why not?
What was/is your attitude towards politics?
Who are the leaders, both national and international, who have impressed you over the years? Why?
Who are the people you most despise?
What events on the world stage have had the most impact on you?
What events on the domestic scene have had the greatest impact on you?
Where were you when . . .? (Ask about the seminal historic events of their lifetime, e.g. when World War II broke out; the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima; President Kennedy was assassinated, etc.)
How, if at all, have your religious/spiritual beliefs changed over the years?

Military service

When did you do military service? Was it compulsory or did you volunteer?
Where did you serve?
What was your rank?
What were your duties?
If you were injured in the line of duty, what happened?
Are there any war stories you would like to tell?

Criminal past

Has any of the family been on the wrong side of the law?
If so, was it a crime of necessity? For example, many prisoners were transported to Australia for petty theft caused by the need for survival.
Was it a crime motivated by ideology? For example, Nelson Mandela: those who suffered during the McCarthy era in America; the Tolpuddle Martyrs (forerunners of the trade unionists); or other examples of those who were in

conflict with the establishment, but not necessarily criminals.

Fashions/lifestyle

What did you wear to work?
What did you wear for leisure?
How affordable was it to keep up with fashion?
Did you make your own clothes?
What were the popular songs of the day?
Who were the celebrities?
What movies were popular at that time?

Dating

Who was your first date?
What attracted you to them?
Describe them.
How old were you?
What did you do?
What other dating activities were available to you?
What did you wear?
How did you meet your first spouse?
What did you do on your first date?
Where did their parents live?
How did you get on with their parents?
How long before you got engaged?
How long was the engagement?

Marriage

Describe your wedding ceremony.
Who were your witnesses? Bridesmaids/best men, etc.?
Who gave you away?
Who else was there?
Did you have a honeymoon? Where did you go?
Where did you live when first married?
How long have you been/were you married?
If your spouse is dead, when and where did they die?
What do you think constitutes a good marriage?

Children

When did you have your first child?
How many children did you have?
What are their names, places and dates of birth?

Were they named after anyone in your family?

What did you enjoy about raising a family?

What did you find most difficult about being a parent?

What are your children doing now?

Do you have any grandchildren? If so, how many and who are they?

Great-grandchildren?

Loss/death

Whose death has had the biggest impact on your life

When did your parents die and under what circumstances?

What about your parents-in-law?

What other family members have died and under what circumstances?