

Family Gatherings: Dragging Genealogy Information Out of Your Family

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Family gatherings, we all have them. Whether they are annual events like family reunions or one-time occasions like birthday parties, Father's Day, weddings or funerals, this is a time when our family members come together. This presentation will give you tips and tricks to get your family members talking about family history, even if they don't want to!

Uncooperative Relatives

There is always that one relative (or more) that just doesn't understand why you are doing genealogy research. They ask questions like:

- "Why do you want to know all that stuff about our family?"
- "I don't know, that was too long ago to remember"
- "We just didn't talk about it"

One of the first things that you must realize is that not all our relatives have the passion and drive to research your family history. It's just not something they are interested in and so they don't know why you are interested in doing it. They can be downright uncooperative.

You Have to be Sneaky (But Nice!)

To get any information out of our relatives, you are going to have to be sneaky about it but nice and you can even make it fun! You're not going to do anything dishonest; you're just going to make them talk about family history without them knowing they are talking about family history.

- They know more than they think they know
- Get them started talking and they may not be able to quit
- As the family genealogist/family historian, it's your job to coax that information out of them with whatever means you can think of to use

Family Photographs

Most of us have family photographs. Why not use these to jog the memories of your family members?

- Bring photographs with you to the family event and start a discussion
- Discuss the photographs that are displayed at the family member's home
- Talk about the scenery in the photo, objects in the photo and the people, glean any piece of information you can

Home Movies

If your family has home movies, why not make viewing them part of the family get together. Gather the family members together in one place. Watch the movies and discuss among yourselves the people, places, and scenery in the movies.

- Arrange a special family gathering just to view family home movies
- Make the home movies part of the family event, birthday party, Father's Day, etc.
- Discuss the people, places, and objects in the home movies

Family Recipes

What is almost always at a family gathering? FOOD! Why not use that to your advantage:

- Ask your family members about family recipes.
- Who came up with certain food dishes, who cooked them?
- What do your family members remember about the food and the recipes.

Historical Events

Our family members have lived through historical events. These events could have happened in their local town, at the state level or at the national level. Use these historical events to obtain family information and the family member's thoughts and experiences during those events.

- “Where were you when JFK was killed?”
- “What was it like during the depression?”
- “What happened during the big flood?”

Family Traditions

Many of our families have family traditions that they observed during certain holidays, family reunions and other family events.

- Get your family members talking about those family traditions
- Ask who started those traditions
- Find out where those traditions originated

Shall We Play a Game?

Another tactic you can use to get your family members talking about family history is games. Sometimes at family reunions or at other happy family events, there are games played, why not play a “genealogy” game:

- Play a version of “The Newlywed Game”, come up with questions that you can ask each spouse that will reveal information about how they met, their wedding day, where they went on their honeymoon, etc.
- Play a version of “Who’s in My Line” originated by Russ Worthington. Come up with an ancestor that did something interesting and have your family members ask questions to try to figure out what that ancestor did.

How Do I Record All the Information?

Now that you have your family members talking, how do you record or capture the information they are sharing?

- Write it down. When you go to your family events, take something to write on and something to write with to record all tidbits of information that you can get from your family members.

-Use a recording device. Invest in a small recording device or use your cell phone to record your family members telling their stories or any tidbits of information. **DO NOT RECORD WITHOUT PERMISSION**

Collect Today for Tomorrow

Most of us are always looking for the old records, photographs, and ephemera for our ancestors. It is also important to collect records, photographs, and ephemera from TODAY! One day they will be considered “old records”.

- Take photographs at family events, download them to your computer, identify them, and add metadata
- Collect ephemera, such things as graduation programs, funeral home cards, wedding invitations, baby shower invitations, etc.

Remember: It's Not All Online, Contact or Visit an Archive Today!