

## Interview Guide

### Introduction

This is an interview about the *story of your life*. We like to get to know people by hearing their stories of things that happened to them in the past and things they hope to do in the future. There is no right or wrong here - just you sharing stories and answering a few other questions about your life.

The interview is broken down into specific sections and I'll ask questions as we go. The whole thing take about an hour or hour and a half. [Go over consent here.] I think you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

*[Interviewer note: remember to let the participant know that there will be **six stories** in the first section – and then say the number as you move through them]*

### A. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Let's start by hearing some specific stories from your life. It sometimes takes a minute or two to figure out which story to tell so take your time. Something will likely come to your mind and when it does, just go ahead and tell the story.

One thing to keep in mind is that we hope you can tell a story about things like a specific event and not more general things like "my high school years."

#### 1. High Point

Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in your story. Please describe this moment in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular story was so good and what it may say about who you are as a person.

#### 2. Positive Behavior

Please describe an event in your life in which you *did* something good. This could have been a smart decision you made or a kind act of yours. Think about a time that you did something that was a good thing to do. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you and your life?

#### 3. Turning Point

Looking back on your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- something that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular event in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life when you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

*[Interviewers: If needed, can say "Turning points are about change. Some change that made a difference in how you saw yourself or how others saw you. A turning point can also be an event that made some other big difference in your life.]*

#### **4. Religious or Spiritual Experience**

Think a bit about your religious life and all the experiences you have had that were religious or spiritual. Try to pull one episode out that seems important, that somehow stands out more than the other experiences. Something that was part of your religious life. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

#### **5. Low Point**

Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point. I am especially interested in hearing about a low point that shows how you deal with tough times. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a few words about how you handled what happened and how it shows how you cope with challenges.

*[Interviewer note: Can say that the event does not have to be the lowest point in the story but merely a bad experience of some kind.]*

#### **6. Not So Positive Behavior**

Although we try to live right and behave in a good moral way, most of us have also done things that we are not completely proud of. I wonder if you could tell me the story of a time you did something that was not such a good thing. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular behavior was not good and what the scene may say about you or your life.

### **B. Context: The Background of the Story**

#### **1. Setting**

Please say a little about the PLACE where you spent most of your childhood and adolescence. Was this a small town, a farm, suburban, or other? If you were in a neighborhood, describe the type of neighborhood. Were people mostly similar to one another or was there more diversity in things such as race and religious beliefs? Were there certain values that shaped this setting? Also, please talk about how you think this setting influenced your development into the person you are today.

*(Interviewers note: If subject had more than one childhood home, ask which seems "more important" in terms of impact on the overall life story. If they are unable to choose or moved many times, ask them to choose particular places (or transitions) that stand out now, looking back).*

## **2. Family Standing**

Within the setting you just described, did your family have a particular reputation? How was your family perceived by others within the community? Would you say that they were well connected with others in the community?

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

## **C. Future Script**

### **1. The Next Chapter**

Your life story includes key scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe how you see things going in your life in the next 10 to 15 years. What is going to come next in your life story?

*[If needed, can add: "Can you also say something about what you are looking forward to in the years ahead?"]*

## **D. Challenges**

This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life. I will begin with a general challenge, and then I will focus in on a current issue with which you are struggling.

### **1. Life Challenge**

Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be a major challenge you have faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did it develop? How did you address or deal with this challenge or problem? What is the significance of this in your own life story?

*[Interviewer note: make sure to probe sufficiently about the various ways the participant responded to this challenge; how this might have included emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses; how these might have changed/developed with time. We want to get as much as possible about their coping processes]*

### **2. Current Concern**

Think of a problem you are dealing with right now. Please describe what it is and how it is affecting you. How do you plan to address this issue? How do you think it will be resolved?

*[Interviewer note: See note above and make sure to get sufficient detail regarding the response about the life challenge. If report no current problems, can ask for a recent one]*

## **E. Values, Virtues, Vices**

### **1. Values**

What are some of the most important values to you? Think about the values in your life - moral values, family values, faith values - and talk about a few of them that are important to you and your life story.

Of those various values you mention, please choose one that seems to be the most important to you. Which value is this? Why is this one so important to you and to our understanding your life story? Please explain.

*[Interviews note: Different participants may begin in different places to respond to this but make sure that somewhere in their response – and your promptings – you get them to list a few different values and that you have them talk in some detail about one particular value.]*

*[Interviewers: If needed, can say "Values are the beliefs and principles that you live by. They are your own ideas about what is most important and how to be a good person."]*

## **2. Personal Strengths**

What positive characteristics do you have? These are things that have positively shaped your life story, parts of your personality or ways of behaving that you consider good and virtuous. Of those various personal strengths you mention, please choose one that seems to be the most important to you. Which strength is this? Why is this one so important to you and to our understanding your life story? Please explain.

*[Interviewers note: like with the above note, make sure to get scope (a few strengths) and depth (lots of detail about one of them)]*

## **3. Personal Weaknesses**

Most of us have certain characteristics that we would not consider positive or that keep us from being better people. Could you talk a bit about some of those qualities? Of those various negative characteristics you just mention, please choose one that seems to be the most obvious in your life. Why is this one such a part of who you are and what your life story is like? Please explain.

*[Interviewers note: Ditto the about two notes. Get scope (variety) and depth (one detailed)]*

## **Closing**

My basic goal in this interview was to get a sense of who you are by asking you to tell me your life story. I appreciate the time you spent with me and all the information you shared.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Thank you so much. We really appreciate your help. We are collecting all this information from many people so that we can learn how to help folks. We want to help people live better lives, happier lives. You have really helped us to do this. By sharing all this information, you are part of the process now. So, again, thank you so much.