

## **Conference 2008 - Handout**

### **On Writing Family Histories by Emil O. Hanson**

Select an individual

An individual that is inspired to write about their family, will select themselves to write about for their first history and that is a wise choice, as we know more about ourselves than anyone else. In writing your own history you will learn the important things that should be included in other histories. The information that was important and interesting in your history should be your outline for writing the histories of your parents, grandparents and other ancestors that you decide to write about later.

Your own history, however, is the only one that you can include the emotions and feelings you had about events and experiences, good or bad, in your life. With other histories you will only be able to provide whatever details you can find about the person and where they lived. You would be very fortunate to find letters and or stories that they had written that could be incorporated into your history of them. There are time lines professionally prepared that will give you historical facts and events that were taking place at the time your ancestors lived in a given community. These events from recorded history should be used selectively in describing their environment and the area events that probably affected their lives.

The size of your project will depend on how much you know or can find in your research about an individual and how interested you become in their story, as well as your writing skills. Some histories may be several hundred pages long and some will only be one or two pages long depending on the above circumstances.

Whether you are a prolific writer or not should not be the determining factor in whether you accept the responsibility to make sure an ancestor's life is not totally lost to their descendants, including your own. They say, "When a man dies, they bury a book!" Let us exhume as many of those books as we can. Ancestral histories are the only link that we have to the past and to those who broke the trail and bridged the rivers of life that we cross over every day, usually, with little thought to their hard work and bravery. The importance of writing our own story and the histories of our kindred dead is what will keep our memory alive and the memory of our ancestor's existence alive. Someone said that it puts clothes on their spirits so that we can see them in our minds eye and know who we should be grateful to for the preparations they made for our turn

on earth. Knowledge of our predecessors tends to humble us, as humility is a byproduct of a grateful heart. Humility is a virtue that we should all aspire to, in order to find that special peace of mind in this life.

By Emil O. Hanson

## IDEAS FOR WRITING YOUR LIFE STORY OR INTERVIEWING RELATIVES TO OBTAIN INFORMATION FOR PREPARING THEIR LIFE STORIES

**BIRTH:** When and where were you born? How was your name chosen? Ages of parents and any others in your family circle. Any interesting events at that time in your community or in the nation?

**CHILDHOOD:** General health conditions. Describe what you remember about your home and your home life. Did you have any playmates outside the family? Were you assigned any tasks to help in the home?

**RELIGIOUS TRAINING:** What do you remember about religious training in the home and in the Church. Did you have any opportunities for participation in religious activities? When and where were you baptized? How did you first get a testimony?

**ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:** What was your father's occupation? Did your mother help to contribute to the family income? Were children in your family given an allowance? Were you taught to build a savings account? What was your first employment experience?

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS:** If you had siblings, were you eldest, youngest, number 3, etc.?

Name your brothers and sisters, date and place of birth; if no longer living, give date and place of death and burial, cause of death. Describe your relationship with each brother or sister, any special memories.

**EXTENDED FAMILY:** Give grandparents' names, date and place of birth, marriage and death and burial. What were your impressions of them, how they lived, clothing they wore, lessons you learned from them? Describe their homes, occupations, interesting experiences. Did you have any favorite aunt or uncle? Did you have any cousins who were playmates (describe favorite activities)?

**CHURCH EXPERIENCES FROM BIRTH TO AGE 12:** By whom were you blessed: Did you wear heirloom clothing? Who baptized you and where? What do you remember about the event? Was the gospel practiced in an active way in your home-family prayers, scripture study, home evening, and father's blessings? Did you have any temple experiences as a child-go there to be

sealed to parents or attend a temple dedication? Describe changes you have observed in Sunday school or Primary while growing up-special activities or lessons you remember. If you converted to the Church at an older age, describe religious atmosphere in your home while young.

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THRU SIXTH GRADE.** Memories of school buildings, teachers, favorite teachers and friends, subject you enjoyed most. Special events, programs. Did you walk to school, take the bus, carpool? Did you eat lunch in a cafeteria, eat a sack lunch, or go home? Clothing you wore. Special memories of each grade, special events, music programs, spelling bees, sporting events.

**RECREATION, FRIENDS AND PETS:** Describe some of the games or activities you enjoyed. How did you spend Saturdays? Who were your special friends, and do you still keep in touch? Did you have any special pets-have you any special memories of them?

**HOLIDAYS.** What do you remember most about Christmas in your home? Did you decorate?

Did you buy gifts for others? Did you believe in Santa Claus? Did your family have special foods at Christmas? Did your family join with others for the celebration? Anything special about other holidays during the year?

**SPECIAL EVENTS OF CHILDHOOD.** Did your family ever move to another home? How-

did you feel about it? Describe favorite trips, vacations, experiences, accidents, broken bones.

**OTHER DETAILS OF CHILDHOOD.** Describe physical traits-large or small, did you have freckles? Describe your temperament. What childhood diseases did you have? Any worries or fears? How did you wear your hair? Wear glasses? Wear braces on your teeth? Any confinement to a hospital? How did you learn responsibility? Were you ever punished?

**TALENTS, HOBBIES, SPECIAL ACTIVITIES.** Did you ever take music lessons? If so,

how long did you practice? Did you have any other developmental lessons?

Special activities or learning opportunities, such as how to sew, cook, knit, and paint? Did you earn your spending money?

**FAMILY LIFE DURING CHILDHOOD:** What was the climate in your home, strict, permissive, happy, sad. What did you do for fun? Did you often have company, or did you visit relatives or friends frequently? Did you have any experience with adversity-divorce, death, and financial reverses? How did national wars affect your family? Describe your happiest and worst memory of childhood.

**ADOLESCENCE - AGES 12 TO 18.** Describe each school you attended-size, special

facilities, special classes you enjoyed (or detested), teachers you appreciated, special activities, opportunities, awards, lessons learned. Type of clothing you

wore—any fads and fashions. Feelings on graduation day.

**RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES DURING ADOLESCENCE.** At what age did your testimony

develop? Did you attend seminary? Name of ward(s), special youth activities, awards.

**POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION:** Name and location of the institution. How did you

choose your education field? Describe the classes you enjoyed most, also teachers. How did you pay for the schooling? A job, scholarship, grants? Special activities, awards. Describe graduation. Did you

take institute during the higher education period?

**FULL-TIME MISSION.** How you made the decision. Where and how you traveled for

training and service. Learn a language? Mission leaders, how you felt about them. Notable experiences.

**COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.** Describe courtship and proposal, marriage and reception.

If married in the temple, relate your impressions, feelings. Describe your honeymoon.

**EARLY YEARS OF MARRIAGE:** First home or apartment. Adjustments you needed to make in your way of life. Any additional college or training? Military experience? Buying your first car or first home. Any special challenges you faced and how you profited from these experiences.

**CHILDREN:** Describe birth and early development of each child. Abilities, problems, accomplishments.

**EMPLOYMENT:** Why you chose this field, how you got (each) job, were you ever fired? For

ladies, did you continue to work after your children were born? Special opportunities, rewards.

Did you learn some noteworthy lessons, such as concentrating on what you can give, rather than what you expect to get?

**RECREATION:** What kinds of fun activities do your family enjoy most? Describe some family

vacations that were most memorable. Have you had some "couple time?"

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Describe how you obtained and made a home. What fun activities do

you enjoy as a family-as a couple? What was your most memorable trip?

**HOBBIES AND TALENTS:** Music, talents, community service, genealogy, writing, cooking

What experiences have these brought into your life? Any special recognition or

awards?

**MOST DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES.** What were they? How did you profit from them? An}

advice you would like to share with dear ones resulting from these experiences?

**HAPPIEST EXPERIENCES.** Why, when, where? Lessons learned in the process.

**WRITE YOUR TESTIMONY FOR POSTERITY, LOVED ONES.**

Leaving a Legacy:

1. "I write the things of my soul for the profit and learning of my children
2. Descendants can find out what you did. They never knew how you fell
3. Answer who or what brought:
  - a. Comfort
  - b. Caused you stress
  - c. Guided you
  - d. Befriended you
  - e. Who received my care?
  - f. Who caused grief?
  - g. Who sparked fun?
  - h. Who shaped your beliefs?
  - i. Who brought out the best in you
  - j. Taught me.
4. Who are the five most important people in my life?
5. Before marriage you and prospective spouse should agree upon
  - a. Religion
  - b. Education
  - c. Money
  - d. Raising Children
6. Marriage Manual
  - a. Pleasures you've shared
  - b. Mutual achievements
  - c. Supported each other through difficulties
  - d. Things you would have changed or did change
  - e. Feelings of devotion
  - f. What helped in marriage to rise above hard times.
7. Parent manual.
  - a. Pleasures you've shared
  - b. The joy of achievements
  - c. Supported each other through difficulties
  - d. Things you would have changed or did change
  - e. What helped to rise above hard times.

8. In reviewing my life
  - a. My biggest surprise is...
  - b. Something I would do differently...
  - c. A regret I have...
  - d. My greatest joy has been...
  - e. I hope that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren...
  - f. My overriding concern is...
  - g. I have faith that...