

The Hundred Questions

*Ten movements for sitting with your elders — from the Archive of Remembrance.
Do not attempt them all in one sitting; pick one movement per visit and let it breathe.*

I. The Beginning

Childhood — where every story starts.

1. What is your earliest memory — the very first thing you can see when you close your eyes?
2. What was the house you grew up in like? Walk me through the front door.
3. What did mornings sound like in your childhood home?
4. What were you like as a child — and who says so?
5. What games did you play, and who did you play them with?
6. What was your favorite meal as a child, and who made it?
7. What chore did you hate, and which one secretly made you proud?
8. Who was your best friend when you were ten? What happened to them?
9. What did you want to be when you grew up?
10. What smells or sounds take you straight back to being small?

II. The Place

Land, neighborhood, and the world they came from.

11. Where is your family from — as far back as you were ever told?
12. What do you remember about the town or land where you were born?
13. Who were your neighbors, and how did neighbors treat each other then?
14. Was there a church, a corner, a porch, a market — a place where everyone gathered?
15. If your family moved, why did they move, and what did they carry with them?
16. What was the journey like — who led it, and what did it cost them?
17. What place do you still dream about?
18. Is there land, a house, or a grave we should know how to find?
19. What has changed most about the place you came from?
20. If you could take me to one place from your youth, where would we go?

III. The People

Parents, grandparents, and the names above them.

21. Tell me about your mother — not her duties, her ways. What was she like in a room?
22. Tell me about your father. What did his hands do all day?
23. What do you remember of your grandparents — their names, faces, sayings?

24. Who is the oldest ancestor you ever heard named? What was said about them?
25. Who raised you, truly — and was it who was supposed to?
26. Which relative were you most afraid of, and which one could you not wait to see?
27. What did your parents argue about? What did they agree on completely?
28. Are there family names that repeat across generations? Where did they start?
29. Who in the family could tell a story better than anyone?
30. Who got lost to the family — moved away, fell out, disappeared — and what's their story?

IV. The Heart

Love, marriage, and the family they made.

31. How did you meet the person you loved? What did you notice first?
32. What was courting like in your day?
33. Tell me about the wedding day — or the day you decided there wouldn't be one.
34. What is the secret to staying — or the truth about leaving?
35. What did you learn about love the hard way?
36. What do you remember about the day each of your children was born?
37. How did you choose your children's names?
38. What was the hardest season of raising a family?
39. What did you want for your children that you never had?
40. Who broke your heart, and who mended it?

V. The Hands

Work, craft, and providing.

41. What was your very first job, and what did it pay?
42. What work did you do the longest? Describe one ordinary day of it.
43. What are your hands good at that nobody taught you from a book?
44. Who taught you how to work?
45. What was the proudest moment of your working life?
46. Were you ever denied work, pay, or respect you had earned? What did you do?
47. What did you do with your first real money?
48. What trade, recipe, or skill do you wish someone in the family would take up?
49. What was the hardest year, money-wise, and how did the family get through it?
50. If you could have done any work in the world, what would it have been?

VI. The Spirit

Faith, values, and what steadied them.

51. What did you grow up believing, and who taught it to you?
52. Has your faith changed across your life? What changed it?
53. Where do you go — in place or in mind — when you need steadying?
54. What song can still move you to tears? Sing a little of it.
55. What prayers, sayings, or blessings did the old people repeat?
56. What do you believe happens after this life?
57. When were you most afraid, and what got you through?
58. What is something you had to forgive? What is something you are still forgiving?
59. What tradition must this family never let go of?
60. What are the rules you have lived by — spoken or unspoken?

VII. The Storm

Hardship met, endured, and overcome — their victories deserve telling.

61. What is the hardest thing you have ever lived through?
62. What did the family survive that people today wouldn't believe?
63. What was happening in the world during your youth, and how did it reach your street?
64. Were you ever treated unjustly for who you are? What did you do with that?
65. What loss shaped you most?
66. What did you rebuild after it burned, flooded, failed, or fell apart?
67. Who showed up for you when it mattered? Who didn't?
68. What mistake taught you the most?
69. What do you know about surviving that you hope we never need — but should keep anyway?
70. Looking back at your hardest season: what would you tell the person you were then?

VIII. The Joy

Celebration, food, music — the sweetness of the life.

71. What did celebration look like in your family — holidays, reunions, Sunday dinners?
72. What dish is yours — the one only you make right? Tell me how, step by step.
73. What music did you dance to, and who taught you to dance?
74. What is the funniest thing that ever happened in this family?
75. What did you do for fun that cost nothing?
76. What was the best day of your life so far?
77. What gift do you remember receiving? What gift do you remember giving?
78. Which family gathering do you still talk about?

79. What always makes you laugh, no matter what?
80. When were you happiest — and did you know it at the time?

IX. The Wisdom

What the years have taught.

81. What do you know now that you wish you had known at twenty-five?
82. What advice did you ignore and later wish you had taken?
83. What matters much less than people think? What matters much more?
84. How do you make a hard decision?
85. What does a person owe their family? What does a family owe its people?
86. What have you changed your mind about across your life?
87. What should a young person in this family absolutely know about money? About people?
88. What is the kindest thing anyone ever did for you?
89. What are you most proud of that no one ever asks about?
90. What question do you wish someone had asked your grandmother?

X. The Charge

The inheritance — what they hand to those who come after.

91. What do you want your great-great-grandchildren to know about you — the ones who will never meet you?
92. What should this family be known for in a hundred years?
93. What name, story, or truth must not be lost when you go?
94. What do you want done with the things you treasure — the ring, the Bible, the photographs, the land?
95. Is there anything you have never told anyone that you are ready to tell now?
96. Who in the family should carry the stories after you? Tell them why.
97. What blessing would you speak over this family, if everyone were in one room?
98. How do you want to be remembered — in one sentence?
99. What are you still hoping to see?
100. Is there anything I should have asked that I didn't?

*Ask while you can. The years don't come back, but they can be kept.
Keep what you gather, freely, at honoredancestors.net*