
50

Questions to Ask Before It's Too Late

A guide for capturing the stories
your family can't afford to lose

By Severen Henderson



Why I Made This

I've spent over 20 years in the fire service. You learn fast that life can change in a single call.

The people we love carry stories we assume we'll always have time to hear. Sometimes we don't get that time.

The hard part isn't caring. It's knowing what to ask. "Tell me about your life" is too big a question, and it usually gets you a shrug. But ask someone what their kitchen smelled like on a Sunday morning, and you'll be there for an hour.

That's what this is. Fifty questions that actually open people up, grouped so a conversation can build instead of stall.

Use them at the dinner table. Use them on a long drive. Record the answers on your phone if you can. Just don't wait for the perfect moment, because that's the moment that never comes.



How to Use These

- | **Start small.** You don't need all fifty. Three good questions and a real answer beats a rushed interview.
- | **Ask the follow-up.** The first answer is the summary. The second answer is the story. When someone says "it was hard," ask what made it hard.
- | **Let the silence sit.** People need a second to find the memory. Don't rush in to fill the gap.
- | **Record it.** Your phone's voice memo app is enough. You'll want their voice later, not just the words.
- | **Go in order or don't.** The sections build from easy to deep on purpose, but follow the conversation where it goes.



Section One:

Where It All Started

Easy questions that open the door

1. What's your full name, and is there a story behind how you got it?

 2. Where were you born, and what was that place like back then?

 3. What did your childhood home look like? Walk me through the front door.

 4. What did the house smell like on a normal weekday?

 5. Who else lived there with you?

 6. What did your parents do for a living, and how did they talk about their work?

 7. What's your earliest memory?

 8. What did you do for fun before you were old enough to work?

 9. Who was your best friend growing up, and what happened to them?

 10. What was the neighborhood like? Who else lived on your street?

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Section Two:

Growing Up

The years that shaped how they see the world

11. What kind of student were you, honestly?

 12. Was there a teacher who changed something for you?

 13. What was the first job you ever had, and what did it teach you?

 14. What did you want to be when you grew up?

 15. What's the most trouble you ever got into as a kid?

 16. What was happening in the world when you were a teenager, and how did it reach you?

 17. What music did you play over and over?

 18. When did you first feel like an adult?

 19. What did you believe back then that you don't believe now?

 20. Who did you look up to, and why?

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Love and Family

The people who mattered most

21. How did you meet your partner? Tell me the whole thing, not the short version.

22. What did you think the first time you saw them?

23. What was the hardest year of your marriage, and how did you get through it?

24. What surprised you most about becoming a parent?

25. What do you remember about the day I was born?

26. What did you worry about as a parent that you never said out loud?

27. What traditions did you keep from your own family, and which ones did you drop on purpose?

28. Who in our family should I know more about?

29. Is there anyone in the family you lost touch with, and do you wish that had gone differently?

30. What do you hope your kids or grandkids remember about you?

Section Four:

Work and Purpose

What they built and what it cost

31. What work are you proudest of?

 32. What job did you hate, and what did it teach you anyway?

 33. Was there a moment you almost gave up on something that mattered?

 34. What's something you built that nobody knows you built?

 35. Who gave you a chance when you hadn't earned it yet?

 36. What did success mean to you at 25, and what does it mean now?

 37. What did you sacrifice that you'd sacrifice again?

 38. What did you sacrifice that you wouldn't?

 39. When did you feel most useful?

 40. If you'd had the money and the freedom, what would you have done instead?

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Section Five:

The Hard Questions

Ask these when the room is quiet

41. What's the hardest thing you've lived through?

42. What did you learn about yourself in that season?

43. Who did you lose that you still think about?

44. What's something you've never forgiven yourself for?

45. What's something you forgave someone else for, and how did you get there?

46. What are you most afraid of?

47. What's a decision you'd make differently?

48. What do you know now that you wish you'd known at 30?

49. What do you want said about you when you're gone?

50. What have I never asked you that you've been waiting to tell me?

Don't Let the Answers Disappear

Here's what usually happens. You have the conversation, it's a great one, and six months later you can remember that it mattered but not what was actually said.

Answers turn into stories when someone writes them down. That's the whole reason I built Tellyng.

Tellyng walks you through guided questions like these, then helps shape your answers into real chapters. No writing experience needed. It's for the person whose story deserves to outlast the conversation, whether that's your mother, your father, or you.

Start your story free at tellyng.com



Severen Henderson is a first responder of over 20 years, a published author, and the founder of Championized. He writes about finishing the work that matters at championized.com.