

## UMSL Life Review Project: Orientation Guide for Volunteers

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The UMSL Life Review Project provides opportunities for students to learn about aging in a personal way (i.e., by talking to people about their experiences, values, hopes, etc.) and for area seniors to record their life stories for future generations. Volunteer interviewees receive an edited DVD "Keepsake" Video after taking part in an interview. There is no charge to participate. Those wishing more than 3 copies of the DVD are asked to pay a nominal fee to cover the cost of reproduction.

The basic interview protocol (below) serves as a starting point for the process. The student interviewer and the volunteer interviewee discuss the interview ahead of time and develop a general plan of what to cover. Most interviews last 1-2 hours. Much can be covered in this time, and an important goal is to develop an outline of a person's whole life story.

The Project maintains a *Gerontology Video Library* (GLV) of brief clips highlighting different aspects aging and life experience (e.g., career and retirement, volunteerism, health and caregiving, personal values and beliefs, children and family life, attitudes about death and afterlife). It is normal for older adults to consider and reflect on such issues; this is the essence of doing a life review interview. Volunteer interviewees are asked to give consent for de-identified video clips (i.e., 2-5 minute segments, first name only) to be included in a password-protected electronic library for instructor use. Only University of Missouri faculty and teaching assistants have access to the GLV. Clips are shown to supplement lecture material and otherwise enrich the learning of undergraduate and graduate students.

The volunteer's support of the educational mission of the project makes it a win-win for both parties. Volunteer interviewees may ask that certain topics or segments not be included in the video library - that's absolutely fine and welcome. The student interviewer edits the Keepsake DVD and clips for the GVL, so he or she can be responsive to such requests. An important objective of the Project is that all benefit and feel comfortable in their participation. Dr. Meuser supervises the interview process, and questions about this requirement may be directed to him at the number listed above.

### Interview Protocol

A Life Review Interview can be both an enjoyable and a challenging experience. Many questions may be considered, but rarely would all be answered in a single sitting. Your comfort is of utmost importance. You don't have to answer any question or delve into any area which causes you discomfort. You can expect your interview to last about 1-2 hours.

As you prepare for the interview, consider how you have grown over the course of your life and the many things you have learned. This interview is an opportunity to learn about yourself, share your perspectives and values, and teach others at the same time.

The interview begins with three standard items (in italics below) that appear early in the edited Keepsake DVD:

- Looking at the camera, please say your *first name* (My name is \_\_\_\_\_), where you were *born/year* (I was born in \_\_\_\_\_ in 19\_\_\_\_), your *age* (I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old), and where you *live now* (and I live in an apartment (house, etc.) in \_\_\_\_\_).
- What 3-5 characteristics or adjectives describe you the best? (*Example: I like to think of myself as honest, hard-working, caring, and inquisitive.*)
- Why did you volunteer to participate in this interview today? What do you hope to gain from this experience?

The remainder of the interview is loosely structured around the themes and questions listed below. Over the course of the interview, we *do* want to capture the general story of your life (birth, early life, school, work, etc.), and the interviewer will help structure this. The rest will depend on you and what's important to you.

Most interviewees cover many/all of the themes below, but some in more depth than others. It is sometimes helpful to come prepared to your interview with notes (on this page is fine) or a listing of topics. The interviewer will ask you about important topics to cover (or not cover) at the start of the interview process. Since the interview is being video recorded, you can stop at any time and negotiate how to proceed

- **Your Current Life**
  - Tell me about your current life and activities.
    - Who are the 2-3 *most important* people in your life now?
    - What is your daily routine like? What brings you joy?
    - What are the most challenging aspects of your life today?
- **About You / Past Life**
  - Tell me about your family of origin - parents, siblings.
  - What stands out in your memory about growing up?
  - Who were the 2-3 *most important* people in your life when you were young?
  - (If married or widowed) How did you and your spouse meet? What was your early relationship like?
  - What joys and/or challenges occurred during your married life?

- (If you had children) Tell me about your child or children. What stands out in your memory about their growing up? What is your relationship(s) like today?
- (If applicable) What did it mean for you personally to become a parent? How did parenthood mold you as a person?
- We all experience losses in our life. Looking back at the first half of your life, what losses (deaths, other losses) stand out in your memory? What has grief meant in your life?
- **Career & Service**
  - What paying jobs did you hold in the past?
  - Did you consider any as a career or vocation?
  - Was volunteerism a part of your experience, then or now? How so?
  - Did you serve in the military? If so, what branch and position? What was your experience like? How did it mold you as a person?
  - (If applicable) What impact did retirement have on your sense of yourself and personal security?
- **Health**
  - How would you describe your health today? Do you function in handling daily life tasks much as in the past, or are there limitations now?
  - Have health problems been challenges at other times during your life?
  - Have you ever experienced a period of significant anxiety or depression? If so, would you be willing to share a bit about this experience? What helped you through it?
- **Caregiving**
  - Have you served as a caregiver, now or in the past?
  - For whom did you provide care? For what reasons?
  - How does/did serving as a caregiver enrich your life?
  - What challenges do/did you face as a caregiver? What is/was the hardest part for you?
- **Spirituality**
  - What role has faith played in your life?
  - What are the roots of your faith? Has your faith changed over time.
  - What values do you hold especially dear or meaningful?
  - Has your faith helped you to overcome challenges and/or get through some difficult times?

- **Death & End of Life**
  - How as death impacted the second half of your life?
  - What losses stand out as particularly meaningful or challenging?
  - What do you believe about death and what may come after?
  - Does death frighten you?
- **Life Review**
  - On balance, are you satisfied with how you have lived your life?
  - Are there any significant regrets?
  - What 2-3 accomplishments are you most proud of? Why?
- **Looking to the Future**
  - What do you expect the next 5-10 years to bring in your life?
  - What are your hopes for yourself and those closest to you?
  - If you could share just one piece of advice to enrich the life of a young person, what would it be?
- **Other Thoughts & Comments**