

Photographs, Letters & Documents

How to turn family material into evidence and story rather than a box of unidentified paper.

This is preparation, not homework. You do not need complete dates, perfect memory, or a box of scanned records. Circle what helps. Leave the rest. Uncertainty is part of an honest history.

Before we speak

- Do not start by scanning everything. Start by identifying.
- Write names, approximate dates, locations and who owns the original.
- Mark uncertainty explicitly.
- Choose items that open stories rather than items that are merely decorative.

Gather only if it is easy

- Ten photographs you can explain
- Three items you cannot explain
- Letters with envelopes if available
- Certificates, diaries, clippings, maps or objects tied to a specific story

Prompts worth thinking about

- Who is just outside the frame?
- Who took the photograph?
- Why was this letter kept?
- What changed immediately after this document?
- Which image would be impossible to identify after you are gone?

Set your boundaries first

Before the interview, decide what may be explored, what should be handled carefully, and what is off limits. You can change those boundaries later. A useful history does not require surrendering privacy.

After the first conversation

No quotation is given before the first conversation. If the project is a fit, use the Story Mixer to show the balance you want - emotional depth, humour, intimacy, historical context, voice and boundaries. I then assess the actual scope and normally send a written quotation within 24 hours.

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