

War, Shoah & Displacement: Preparing Carefully

For family material touched by persecution, war, hiding, camps, flight, military service or forced displacement.

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 force a complete chronology before the person speaks.
- Mark what is firsthand, inherited, documented or uncertain.
- Decide whether formal archival testimony should also be pursued.
- Set boundaries before difficult subjects are opened.

Gather only if it is easy

- Existing testimony references
- Wartime documents only if the family wants them used
- Maps and place names
- Postwar immigration and family-rebuilding records

Prompts worth thinking about

- What can be told now that could not be told earlier?
- Which ordinary detail makes the lost world real?
- Who helped?
- What is still unknown?
- What should descendants inherit besides catastrophe?

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.