

How to discover your client's story

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The details of your client's story will empower its presentation and your confidence in delivering that emotional message effectively. Accessing those details will benefit both you and your client. Both folklore specialists and storytellers use questions to discover details that enliven, delight, and document daily lives of characters both mythical and real and the questions they use can help lawyers discover and tell the stories of their clients' lives to judges, juries, and other tribunals.

Folklore Sources

From the Smithsonian Institution comes a number of sources and guides that aid in the collection, documentation, preservation, and presentation of folklore. Many of them include interview questions and hypertext links to other sources online. Seeking the Source, online at <http://smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/seeking/seekhome.html>, is a good overview that includes a focus on getting material from primary sources like family members. Suggestions of questions to ask, interview tactics, prudent ethical rules, and presentation ideas are available as well. The detailed guide is the /Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide/, online at http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide.aspx. This (more complete) guide includes forms to use and a glossary.

To get started quickly, you may want to get the short questionnaire at http://www.ehow.com/how_2181918_list-questions-family-history-interview.html.

You may frame your interview with a biographical approach using the questions at <http://oldfashionedliving.com/bioquestions.html>, add a family-oriented approach with questions from <http://www.searchforancestors.com/scrapbook/interview.html>, and go deeper with the long questionnaire at <http://genealogy.about.com/cs/oralhistory/a/interview.html>.

Storytelling Sources

Professional storytellers and people who speak on business topics take advantage of the lifetime of conditioning and acculturation we all share in the acceptance of messages from stories. That is why they mine their own lives and the lives of those with whom they are trying to connect for familiar stories, legends, and other narrative tools already deeply planted in their audience's conceptual garden. These tools are relevant to lawyers because lawsuits are stories.

A source for questions that focus on family-oriented stories is <http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/roots/family.html>.

August House, online at <http://www.augusthouse.com>, is a specialty publisher of materials for storytellers (among other specialties). These materials include guides to the effective gathering, conceptualizing, presenting, and marketing of stories and storytelling. Of particular relevance here is the book *Telling Your Own Stories (For Family and Classroom Storytelling, Public Speaking, and Personal Journaling)*, by Donald Davis (copyright 1963). By a series of prompts, relevant people, places, and occurrences in your client's life may be probed for data that may help you present your case more effectively. There is a focus on the practical building blocks of memorable stories such as beginning that commands attention, a flow that is compelling, a premise that encapsulates the conflict at issue, and the verbal and conceptual management of emotion throughout the process.