



THORNTON WILDER'S
The Bridge of San Luis Rey
and Our Town

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Oral History Interviews—guidelines and tips

I. Plan the Interview

- If you have a video camera or a tape recorder, practice using the equipment
- Label tapes with name, address, phone number of interviewee; date of interview

II. Prepare the Interview

- Find out as much as you can about the interviewee—birthplace and family, schools, jobs, marriages and children and record the relevant dates; you might be able to get this in writing from the interviewee with a question sheet before your interview
- Formulate questions tailored to the information
- Put some key questions on index cards, with room to write on each one; some ideas for categories of questions, and sample questions follow

III. Conduct the interview

- Be on time
- Remember that the idea is to get your interviewee talking, so use key questions as needed, but if not needed, keep quiet and don't interrupt—let the interview flow naturally from what is said
- Stay alert and show interest; use follow-up questions or questions related to what has already been said.
- Obtain permission signature from interviewee, with any limitations noted, on a form such as the one that follows here
- Be sure to clean up any materials you have and express thank you in leaving
- Follow up with a short mailed thank you note

IV. Preserve the interview

- If possible, type up the interview, both the questions and the answers (note: it takes from 2-4 hours to type a one hour interview).
- Save the typed interview in a word processing document, clearly labeled
- Make sure that any tapes have a clear label to match the word document, and are preserved safely

V. Some Sample questions; categories highlighted in **bold**

- What personal memories do you have of your **grandparents**?
- What ethnic traditions are still practiced in your family?
- What type of house did you live in during your **childhood**? Did you always have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephone? TV?

- In your **family relations**, were you oldest? Youngest? Middle? One of many or few? Who cooked the meals? How did you get your mail? Did you have any pets? How did you spend your evenings?
- What did your father do for a **living**? Did your mother work outside the home? Did you earn money? How? Did you raise your own vegetables? Meat? Eggs?
- On **special occasions**, what did you do? Sundays? Christmas? Birthdays? During blizzards? 4th of July? Last day of school? First day of school?
- Who were your **friends**? What games did you play? Kick the can? Anti I Over? What were your hobbies? Were you in 4-H or Scouts or youth groups at church?
- Where did you go to **school**? How did you get there? What did you do at recess? Did you have any mean teachers? What was your favorite subject?
- Where did you **shop**? How big was the town? Did you have a car? A bike? A horse? Did you ever **travel** on a train? A bus? Do you remember the first night you stayed away from home without your family?
- Who were your **idols**? What did you want to be when you grew up? What jobs did you have? Did you go to high school? School after high school?
- Where and when did you meet your **husband/wife**? Did you go on a honeymoon?
- What do you remember about **war? Elections? Presidents**? Were you or anyone you knew in the service?

VI. What to include in a Permission Form:

Interviewer's Name: _____

Interviewee's Name: _____

(please print)

_____ I grant permission to the Big Read program to use my interview in whole or in part.

_____ I agree that my full name will be used with my oral history.

_____ My interview may be used, but I do not wish to have my name used.

Interview-ee's Signature: _____

Date: _____

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