

The  
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

Principles

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## Interviewing Techniques 1A

One of the most often questions we are asked is how to break into writing. Our answer? Practice...practice...PRACTICE!

Between the two of us, we have over 50 years of professional writing experience. But we just didn't "luck" into it; we also had many years of practice before we sold our first articles.

Since the holidays are upon us, we thought it would be fun to do a two-part series on interviewing skills. But in this instance, we want you to use your family members as your guinea pigs!

Interviewing your loved ones has many advantages. First and foremost, you'll be recording your family history for generations to come. Next, you'll be interacting with family members and learning new things. Last, you'll be practicing the all-so-important skill of interviewing.

The first part will be preparing for the interview. Part two—to come out in December—will show you what to do with your interview once it is completed.

- After a person (subject) has agreed to an interview, do your research! Learn and read everything you can about the subject, from doing smaller interviews with family members to looking at old photo albums to doing computer searches on family history.
- Once you begin your research, you'll start to get a feeling as to where you would like to take the story. Be sure to ask the subject for his/her permission to go that route before the interview. Both of you must feel comfortable with the direction and feel of the interview and story.

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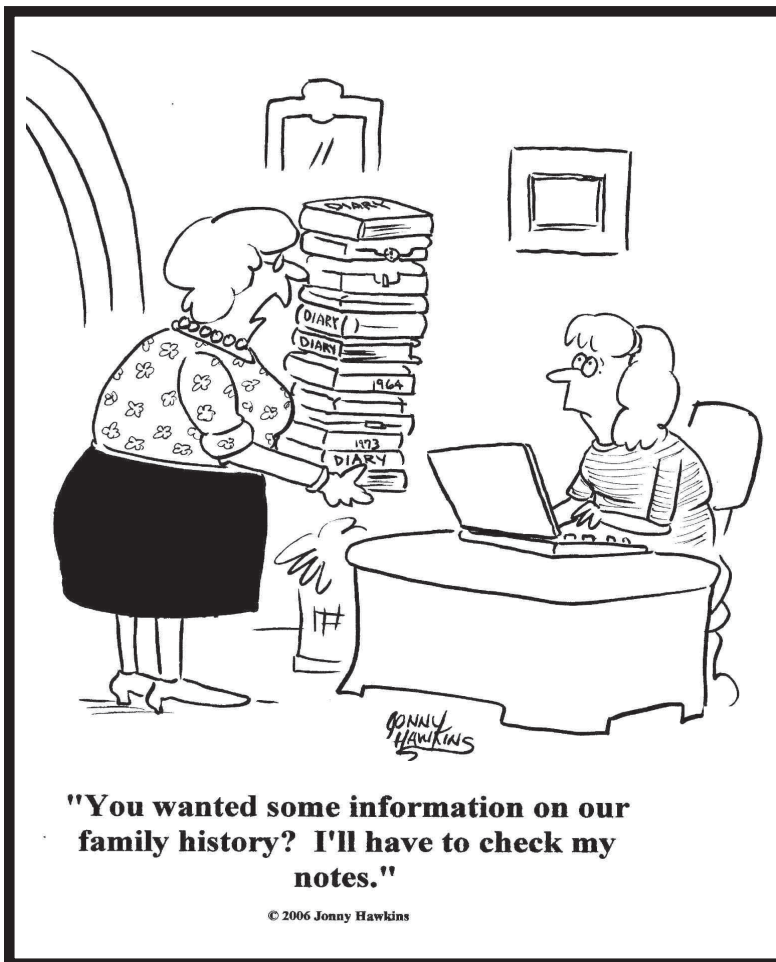
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- Before you begin the actual interview, ask your subject if you can tape it. While a few may be hesitant, most will appreciate your attention to detail. On your recording, be sure to verbally list the date, where the interview is taking place and the name of the subject; “Today is December 9, 2006 and we are in Bend, Oregon. I will be interviewing Betty Jones, and Betty has agreed to be recorded.” Then ask Betty to say her name and contact information (in case you need to reach her for clarification). THEN STOP RIGHT THERE! Rewind the tape and listen to the entire transaction; this is your only chance to make sure the recorder is working and both of you are clear and audible.
- Next are those important questions you created by way of your earlier research. Be sure to start with a few easy ones to “break the ice” and get your subject comfortable with the session. It’s okay to stray from your line of questioning if the mood takes you there, but be sure to lead the subject back to your questions. Here’s a good trick for those wayward conversations that get out of hand: Say Betty goes off on a tangent about the mail always being late...blah, blah, blah. If you’re only taking notes, set your pen down and lean back in your chair. If you’re taking notes AND recording, before you set your pen down, make a show of leaning over and looking at the index number on the recorder. Write the number on your notes, THEN set the pen down and lean back. For the real brave, just turn the recorder off. Betty will get the hint.



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- Always take notes, generally only short summaries. Good notes will accomplish three very important things: 1) If your voice recorder fails to function or the file or tape is corrupted, you still have something to refer to later; 2) Your notes will allow you to more easily locate specific portions of your interview on what could be a very long tape or digital file, and

