AFTER A DEATH:
35 Questions to Ask to Prompt Memories of a Lost Loved One

MODERN HEIRLOOM BOOKS
by Dawn Roode
Getting Started

When gathering memories for stories to include in a legacy or tribute memory book, it can be helpful to have some prompts. The 35 questions that follow should provide fodder for writing, conversing, and sharing memories about your lost loved one.

Gather your family around the living room with a box of old pictures and a laptop full of digital photos of the person who has died, arm yourself with this list of questions, and let the reminiscing process begin.

Don’t feel self-conscious about using this list as a tool—at the most emotional times in our lives, such as losing someone we care about, any little thing that can help us along the path of grieving is a good thing.

Be kind to yourself.

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Record your memories.

1. Use a mini audio recorder or the voice recorder app on your phone to capture the conversations about your loved one. Make sure everyone is seated close enough to be captured by the microphone.

Place a copy of the question sheet nearby so anyone can glance at it when they want.

using question prompts
Let conversation flow naturally.

Use the questions to prompt storytelling, but don't rely on them like a school assignment.

Rather, go with the natural course of conversation, allowing the group's memories of your loved one to flow and meander as they will—it's the memories themselves, not the answers to any questions, that you want to capture.

This is just the beginning.

Realize that you will never get through all of these questions at once, and you are not meant to. Some of them may have no relevance to your experiences with the deceased, and one question may prompt an entire evening of reminiscence—that's good.

If your loved one was a vibrant and funny person in life, it stands to reason that tributes about them after their death should be infused with humor. 

*It's okay to step outside your grief and remember them with a smile, even a laugh.*

Happy memories provide comfort and help us heal, and will be a balm to the soul when you pull out this tribute book to visit with your lost loved one someday in the future.
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to Prompt Memories of a Lost Loved One

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DECEASED:
• How would you describe the deceased?
• What is your favorite memory of the deceased?
• What did you call them—any nicknames or terms of endearment?
• Did he or she have a pet name for you?
• Is there a particular lesson learned from the deceased?
• How long did you know the deceased?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DECEASED’S CHARACTER:
• What do you think the deceased valued most in life?
• What words would you use to describe his or her character?
• How would you describe the deceased’s personality?

QUESTIONS THAT ELICIT MEMORIES ABOUT YOUR LOST LOVED ONE:
• How did you meet?
• What is a particular time you recall the deceased was especially joyful?
• A time he or she was embarrassed?
• What is your earliest memory of this person?
• What was the deceased’s laugh like?
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• Was he or she chronically late or early?
• Do you have any funny stories about times you spent together?

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS THAT ALLOW FOR STORYTELLING:

• Do you remember any favorite stories about childhood that the deceased loved to tell?
• Do you remember stories he or she would tell about:
  » military
  » college
  » getting married
  » becoming a parent
  » going to prom
  » learning how to drive

• Did the deceased ever discuss big decisions they made that impacted his or her life?
• Were there any major changes to the deceased’s life that affected them in big ways?
• If you knew they could drop by and visit tomorrow, what would your ideal day spent together look like?
35 Questions to Ask
*to Prompt Memories of a Lost Loved One*

SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT OR SILLY QUESTIONS THAT MAY SURPRISE WITH WHERE THEY LEAD CONVERSATIONALLY:

- What was the deceased’s favorite color?
- Favorite flower?
- What type of music did the deceased listen to?
- Was there a piece of clothing or something else the deceased wore that you found characteristic of them?
- Did he or she have a signature saying?

QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THE DECEASED IMPACTED YOUR LIFE:

- How did the deceased impact your life?
- How will you honor the deceased's memory?
- What do you wish you had said to them before they died?
AFTER A DEATH:
How to Make the Process of Going Through Your Parents’ Photos Easier

a free resource from

modernheirloombooks.com/toolkit
Actively remember.

Want to continue your journey of healing reminiscence?

Visit our blog for more tips & insights, including:

- The Tyranny of the Family Heirloom: creative ways to preserve the heirlooms that matter
- The Healing Power of Remembrance
- How to Use Photographs as Prompts for Writing Life Stories

modernheirloombooks.com/new-blog

Hire us.

Our expert interviewers, editors, and designers will transform your memories into a beautiful heirloom that reveals even more than you had imagined.

If you only get as far as piling up those boxes of photos, no worries: We’ll walk you through the whole process!

Set up a free consultation to learn how we can work together.

Call MHB founder Dawn 917.922.7415

or email dawn@modernheirloombooks.com

next steps
Thank you for embarking on a journey of reminiscence & memory preservation with us.
Our Story

Modern Heirloom Books, founded by magazine publishing veteran Dawn M. Roode (Vogue, Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar, Parenting), is the best resource for helping you preserve and share your stories exquisitely.

We expertly curate your “stuff”—old photos from boxes, digital family photos from phones and hard drives; hone your memories; elicit stories that surprise and delight; and design a coffee table book that is graphically and narratively evocative.

Dawn’s compassionate and interested interviewing style makes subjects not only feel comfortable, but excited about sharing their stories.

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