

THE ART OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWING: A PRACTITIONER'S REFLECTIONS

Transcribed stream of consciousness reflection on oral history interviewing (written longhand by Stacy Torian on August 30, 2015 and digitally transcribed by her on July 19, 2017). Remarks inspired by Torian's own experience and the advice of other practitioners. Quoted and paraphrased advice is italicized.

Step into the person's life. *Dig deep, then dig deeper. Practice listening without speaking. Silence is your friend.* Practice saying the questions. Relish the experience. It is a journey, not a clear-cut destination. Meander. Meander with a purpose, but realize that where you end up may not be exactly where you expected to go, and the path that takes you there may not be the one you had envisioned. *Encourage through smiles, gestures, and expressions. It is OK to flub a question every once in a while. You are human and your interviewee needs to know that.* Watch for physical cues. *The twinkle in the eyes – you want to get to the source of that twinkle*, even if it is not the subject of the interview. Prepare. Trust the process. Do not try to control everything. Practice with the equipment. Practice your introduction and record yourself speaking. Critique yourself. If you are up to it, get a more experienced interviewer to critique you. Accept that you will probably make mistakes initially. It takes time to get good. *Begin with the easy questions and work your way into the tough stuff.* Peel back the layers, but try not to exploit. Find the balance. *Don't wear yourself or the interviewee out.* Remember what an honor it is to record someone's story. Treasure the gift.