1. Why Stories Matter

Your story matters. Your voice matters.

Think about it: the stories we tell (and the ones we don't) shape how we understand ourselves, our families, and our community. They carry laughter, lessons, and love. They remind us of where we've come from and give us strength for where we're going.

When you share a story — whether it's your own or one you've gathered from someone you love — you're doing something powerful. You're:

- Connecting the dots between generations, so the past can live on in the present.
- Healing by giving voice to memories and experiences that deserve to be heard.
- Guiding by passing on wisdom, values, and traditions to those who come after us.

Recording a story today means it will never be lost tomorrow. It becomes a gift — one that grows more valuable with time.

What You'll Find in This Toolkit

This toolkit is here to make the process simple, meaningful, and even fun. You don't need fancy gear or special training. All you need is curiosity, care, and a willingness to listen.

We'll walk you through:

- Simple questions and prompts to spark meaningful conversations.
- Best practices for listening with respect and kindness.
- Easy guides for recording — whether it's just your phone or a bit more setup.
- Consent and safety tips so everyone feels comfortable sharing.
- Ideas for saving and organizing stories so they last for years to come.
- Creative touches to make stories come alive through video, audio, or writing.

By the end, you won't just have recordings — you'll have living treasures that can be shared, revisited, and passed down.

A Gentle Reminder

- Everyone has a story worth sharing.
- It doesn't need to be perfect to matter.
- Listening deeply is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other.

This is the beginning of a journey — one that honors the past, strengthens the present, and creates a legacy for the future.

Because when we capture stories, we keep our voices alive.

Try This First Step

Before diving into the toolkit, try this tonight:

Ask someone you trust about a moment in their life that changed how they see things.

Let them speak. No steering, no fixing, no jumping in.

Notice what they emphasize. Where the emotion sits. What they leave unsaid.

Capture a few key points afterward. Not the whole story. Just the parts that stayed with you.

That's where real stories begin.

That's it! You've already begun.

2. Getting Ready

Before you hit record, a little preparation goes a long way. These steps will help you create an experience that feels comfortable, natural, and easy—for both you and the storyteller.

1. Pick Your Storyteller

Who's going to share their story? It could be a grandparent, a parent, a sibling—or you. There's no right or wrong answer. Start with whoever feels ready, or whoever's story you don't want to lose.

2. Choose the Space

Find a quiet, cozy spot where your storyteller feels comfortable. A kitchen table, a favorite chair, even a backyard on a calm day—all can work. The goal is a space where they feel relaxed and undistracted. Also make sure that the area is free of disruptive sounds.

3. Prepare Your Phone

Your phone is all you need. Just make sure:

- The battery is fully charged.
- There's enough storage space (delete old files if you need to).
- Notifications are silenced so you won't be interrupted mid-story.

4. Lighting & Sound Made Simple

- Light: Sit near a window for soft, natural light. Keep the light in front of the storyteller, not behind them.
- Sound: Pick the quietest space you can. Turn off TVs, music, and loud appliances. If you have headphones or a simple plug-in mic, even better.



5. Framing the Shot

Think of it like setting a picture frame:

- Place the phone at **eye level**, so your storyteller looks natural.
- Keep their **eyes in the top third** of the screen (this is called the "rule of thirds").
- Use a stable surface, or a tripod if you have one, to keep the image steady.



Pro Tips

- Do a **test recording** for a few seconds, then play it back to check sound and lighting.
- Offer a **glass of water** and a tissue nearby—it helps with comfort.
- Gently ask everyone nearby to **silence phones and devices**.
- A little imperfection is fine. What matters most is the story and the connection.
- Approach the session with respect, patience, and openness—this is a gift you're preserving.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

When preparing, remember that comfort is not only physical but also emotional. In Nikkei families, stories may surface that touch on painful histories of displacement or discrimination. Be sensitive to what may arise. Creating a space of respect, calm, and agency helps ensure that storytellers feel safe choosing what to share.

3. Asking Questions

Asking questions is how we invite stories to come alive. Think of it less like an interview and more like sitting with a friend over tea.

1. Start with Comfort

Ease in with simple warm-up questions:

- "What's your full name and when were you born?"
- "Where did you grow up?"
- "What foods or traditions remind you most of your childhood?"

2. Open the Door

Use open-ended questions that encourage storytelling:

- "Can you tell me about a time you felt especially proud?"
- "What was your childhood home like?"
- "Who influenced you the most when you were young?"

3. Follow the Thread

Stories often appear when you listen closely and follow up:

- "What happened next?"
- "How did you feel at the time?"
- "What do you remember most vividly?"

4. Respect the Pace

Some stories flow easily, others take time. Silence is not awkward—it often allows deeper memories to surface.

5. Use the StoryPrompts

This toolkit includes a StoryPrompt section with patterns of questions designed to help storytellers naturally share a full story arc—from setting the scene, to describing challenges, to reflecting on meaning. These prompts are fun, easy, and especially helpful if you're not sure where to begin.

Pro Tips

- Keep a short list of questions handy, but let the conversation flow naturally.
- Avoid interrupting or correcting details—it's their memory, their voice.
- Nod, smile, and use encouragers like "mm-hmm" or "that sounds important."
- If emotions arise, pause. Offer support and let the storyteller set the pace.
- Sensory details (smells, sounds, feelings) often bring a story to life—invite them gently.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

Stories carry both joy and pain. In Japanese Canadian families, some memories may touch on difficult histories such as internment, displacement, or discrimination. Be mindful of intergenerational trauma and respect when a storyteller chooses not to share certain details. Honour traditions, listen without judgment, and let the storyteller guide what feels right for them.

4. Capturing the Story

Once you're ready and the storyteller feels comfortable, it's time to begin. Think of this as pressing "record" on a memory that will outlast both of you.

1. Begin with Presence

- Start with a smile, a thank-you, and a few warm-up questions.
- Confirm consent one last time before recording.
- Let the storyteller know they can pause or stop at any time.

2. Hit Record, Then Relax

- Begin recording before the first question so nothing is missed.
- Don't worry about perfection—focus on listening.
- Keep your phone or camera steady and avoid fiddling with it once you've started.

3. Listen More Than You Speak

- Give your full attention.
- Avoid jumping in with your own stories unless invited.
- A nod or simple "I see" is often enough.

4. Flow with the Conversation

- Use your questions as a guide, not a script.
- Follow the storyteller's lead—if they go off track, it might lead to the richest stories.

5. Closing the Recording

- When the storyteller feels finished, thank them sincerely.
- Ask if there's anything else they'd like to add.
- Let them know how their story will be saved and shared.

Pro Tips

- Do a quick **practice run** with the storyteller to ease nerves.
- Place your phone in **airplane mode** to avoid interruptions.
- If recording video, sit close enough so the storyteller's face and voice are clear.
- Label the recording immediately with the same format:
  LastName_FirstName_Year_Topic
  (e.g., "Tanaka_Masako_2025_ChildhoodMemories.mp4").
- End with gratitude—your warmth will make the memory even more meaningful.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

Storytelling can bring up both laughter and tears. For Japanese Canadian families, certain memories may touch on histories of internment, relocation, or cultural loss. Approach with empathy and patience, and allow space for silence or emotion. Remind the storyteller that they are always in control of what they choose to share.

5. Archiving & Preserving

Recording the story is just the beginning. The next step is making sure it can be safely kept and enjoyed by future generations.

1. Save Immediately

- As soon as you finish, save the file and check that it plays back correctly.
- Make a backup copy right away—don't wait.

2. Name Your Files Clearly

Use a simple format so stories are easy to find later:
LastName_FirstName_Year/Date_Topic
Example: Kobayashi_Akiko_2025_SchoolDays.mp4

3. Store in More Than One Place

- Save one copy on your phone or computer.
- Save another in the cloud (Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud, etc.).
- If possible, keep a copy on an external hard drive or USB stick.

4. Organize Thoughtfully

Create folders for family members, topics, or dates. A little organization now will make sharing and revisiting stories much easier later.

5. Share with Care

Decide together how the story will be shared:

- Just within the family
- With a community archives or museum. *You may also consider government (municipal, provincial, national) or university archives.*
- Publicly online

**Always confirm what feels right for the storyteller.

Pro Tips

- Write a short note or description alongside each file—include who, when, and where.
- If you transcribe the story, save the text with the same file name as the video/audio.
- Consider making printed transcripts or photo books that accompany the recordings.
- Regularly check your backups to make sure files haven't been lost or corrupted.
- Share a copy with another trusted family member—don't let one device hold it all.

Cultural Sensitivity Note

Collecting and preserving stories is an act of respect. For Japanese Canadian families, some stories may carry the weight of trauma or silence across generations. Always confirm how the storyteller wants their story preserved and who they want to share it with. Preservation should honour both the story and the storyteller's wishes.

1. StoryPrompt Section: Asking Questions that Bring Stories Alive

Why Story Arcs Matter

Every culture, every family, and every person carries stories. What makes a story memorable — whether it's told around a kitchen table or in a movie theatre — is the shape it takes. This shape is called a story arc.

Joseph Campbell, who studied myths from all over the world, called this arc the **Hero's Journey**. It's the timeless rhythm of a person leaving what they know, facing struggles, finding allies, making choices, and returning changed. We are drawn to this pattern because it reflects life itself: all of us face challenges, all of us make decisions, and all of us grow through the journey.

Think of the stories we all know:

- In *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker leaves his home, faces danger, finds mentors and allies, and returns transformed into a hero.
- In Japanese culture, the folktale of **Momotarō (Peach Boy)** tells of a boy who sets out on a dangerous journey, gathers loyal companions, defeats demons, and returns home with peace and treasure for his people.
- The real life of **Miyamoto Musashi**, one of Japan's most legendary samurai, follows the same pattern: from his humble beginnings, through countless duels and hardships, to his transformation into a philosopher and teacher whose wisdom still guides people centuries later.

These stories endure not because of the facts alone, but because of the arc: **a beginning, a challenge, a turning point, and a return.**

Why This Matters for Our Family and Our Community Stories

When we capture stories from our families, we are doing the same thing. We are giving voice to the heroes in our own lineage — parents, grandparents, and ancestors who endured challenges, made choices, and created a better life for those who came after.

For the Nikkei community, this storytelling has a special power:

- It preserves the struggles and triumphs of generations past.
- It connects us to our families and cultural roots.
- It helps others outside the community understand our journey — not as something "different," but as something deeply human and relatable.

Imagine, for example, a Nikkei family's story of being uprooted during internment:

- Beginning: A child living an ordinary life on the coast, suddenly told they must leave their home.
- Challenge: Their family faces loss, injustice, and uncertainty in the camps.
- Turning Point: With resilience, they work together, learn new skills, and hold on to traditions.
- Return/Legacy: Years later, they rebuild their lives, and their children grow up carrying both the scars and the wisdom of that experience.

This is a Hero's Journey — just like Luke Skywalker, just like Momotarō, just like Musashi.

The Power of Shared Humanity

When we tell our family stories through this arc, we do more than preserve history. We tap into something bigger: our shared humanity. People from any culture can hear these stories and feel the same emotions — struggle, hope, love, triumph.

And when we listen to each other's stories, we begin to see that we are more similar than we are different.

That's the gift of this process. These stories not only connect your family to its heritage, but they also connect all of us to the greater human story.

Finding the Stories

Stories don't just come from facts or dates — they need gentle prompts and space to unfold. The Smithsonian Oral History and Folklife Interviewing Guides emphasize that there is no single set of questions that fits every family or community. Lists of prompts are best used as guideposts: they spark memories, but it's up to the storyteller to choose where to go.

Tips for drawing out stories:

- Start simple with names, places, and family basics. Build comfort before going deeper.
- Think in themes like childhood, migration, community life, celebrations, or lessons learned.
- Use memory joggers such as photos, heirlooms, or recipes to unlock rich details.
- Invite sensory memories — ask what something looked, smelled, or felt like.
- Leave space for surprises — often the most powerful stories emerge when you follow a tangent with curiosity.

You'll find in the following sections both structured question sets and flexible tools — like prompt cards, the Hero's Journey Quick Pick, and the Troubleshooting guide — to help bring these memories alive.

They come from questions that spark memories, emotions, and meaning. This section gives you a set of prompts — from simple openers to deeper follow-up questions — that help create a story arc: setting, challenge, decision, and triumph.

Use these like gentle invitations. You don't need to ask them all — choose what feels natural. And remember, the most important part is to listen with curiosity.

Here are a few other communities guides to get inspiration from.

https://densho.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Densho-Guide-to-Conducting-Oral-History-Interviews.pdf

https://www.historylink.org/Content/education/downloads/Densho_Student_Guide_to_Oral_Histories.pdf

https://selfevidentshow.com/oral-history-toolkit

1. Warm-Up Questions (Opening the Door)

These are light, fun, and easy questions to help someone relax and start talking:

- What was your favourite food growing up? Tell me about the foods you remember growing up with.
- Did you have a special place where you liked to play as a child?
- Who was someone you looked up to when you were young?
- What's a song, smell, or taste that always brings back a memory?

Follow-up: *"Can you tell me about a time that memory really came alive for you?"*

2. Family and Community Roots

These questions connect to heritage and belonging:

- What was life like in your family home?
- Describe the layout of the home as you walk in the front door.
- How did your parents or grandparents shape who you are?
- What traditions did your family keep alive?
- Was there a time when you felt especially proud of your family or community?

Follow-up: *"How do you see those traditions or values showing up in your life today?"*

3. Challenge and Resilience

Every family has faced struggles — these are often the most powerful stories.

- What was one of the hardest times you or your family went through?
- How did you get through it? Who helped you most?
- Was there ever a moment you thought you might give up, but didn't?
- How did those challenges change you or your family?

Follow-up: *"Looking back, what did that experience teach you about yourself?"*

4. Migration, Identity, and Belonging (Nikkei-specific prompts)

Many Nikkei families have stories of moving, rebuilding, and finding identity.

- What do you know about your family's journey to Canada (or another place)?
- What was life like during the time of internment or after the war?
- How did your family rebuild their lives and community?
- Have you ever felt torn between two cultures, and how did you navigate that?

Follow-up: *"What do you want younger generations to understand about that experience?"*

5. Triumphs and Celebrations

Balance the challenges with moments of joy and achievement.

- What is something you are most proud of?
- Was there a time you surprised yourself by what you could do?
- Can you share a story of a celebration, festival, or gathering that stands out?
- Who in your family or community inspired you most with their courage or kindness?

Follow-up: *"How does that moment continue to inspire you today?"*

6. Wisdom and Legacy

Stories often hold lessons. These questions help uncover them:

- What advice would you give to your younger self?
- What do you most want your children or grandchildren to know about you?
- What do you think people should never forget about our history?
- If you could leave one message for future generations, what would it be?

Follow-up: *"Why is that message important to you?"*

7. Story Arc Guide (Simple Flow)

If you want to shape a full story, here's a gentle arc you can guide someone through:

- Setting: "Can you paint the picture of where this story begins?"
- Challenge: "What was happening that made this time difficult or important?"
- Decision: "What choice did you or your family have to make?"
- Triumph/Outcome: "How did things turn out in the end?"
- Reflection: "What do you think this story teaches us today?"

Tip: Don't be afraid of silence. Sometimes the most powerful answers come after a pause.

Tools in This Section

- StorySeeds — a large bank of prompts, organized by theme.
- Hero's Journey Quick Pick — a simple 6-step path to shape any memory into a full story.
- Troubleshooting Guide — quick tips for when conversations get stuck.
- Prompt Sheets — downloadable, printable sheets you can carry into an interview.

StorySeeds: A Big List of Questions to Spark Memories

Hero's Journey Quick Pick Cheat Sheet

Use this when you want to help someone share a story that has real shape, meaning, and impact. You don't have to follow it word-for-word — just use it as a guide.

Step 1: Spark a Memory

Begin by inviting them to remember something specific.

- "Can you tell me about a time in your life that really stands out?"
- "What's a story your family tells over and over again?"
- "Was there ever a time when life suddenly changed for you or your family?"
- "Do you remember a moment that tested you — or made you proud?"

These are broad but **memory-anchored** questions. They'll surface a moment or fragment you can work with.

Step 2: Find the Challenge

Once they start sharing, lean into the challenge or tension.

- "What made that moment hard, important, or different?"
- "How did you feel when that was happening?"
- "What was at stake for you or your family?"

Step 3: Discover the Turning Point

Look for the decision or shift.

- "What did you (or your family) decide to do?"
- "Was there a moment you thought about giving up — or chose to keep going?"
- "What changed that helped you move forward?"

Step 4: Bring in Allies and Support

Every journey has helpers.

- "Who helped you through this time?"
- "Did anyone surprise you with their kindness or courage?"
- "Was there a piece of advice or support that stayed with you?"

Step 5: Draw Out the Outcome

Move toward the resolution.

- "What happened in the end?"
- "How were things different afterward?"
- "What do you remember most about that time now?"

Step 6: Anchor the Meaning

Finish by helping them reflect.

- "What did that experience teach you?"
- "What lesson do you want your children or grandchildren to learn from this?"
- "How did that moment shape the person you became?"

Pro Tip: Listen for "story signals."

- Emotional words (*scared, proud, ashamed, relieved*) → follow up with "Tell me more about that feeling."
- Phrases like *"That's when everything changed"* → zoom in and ask what changed.
- Mentions of people (*my grandmother always…*) → ask why that person mattered so much.

These signals are like treasure markers. Follow them and you'll find the heart of the story.

Troubleshooting: When Conversations Get Stuck

Sometimes, storytellers may give short answers, drift off-topic, or struggle to share. That's normal. Here are some tips:

1. If they give one-word answers

- Try asking for a specific memory:
    - "Can you tell me about a time when that really happened?"
    - "What did it look like, sound like, or smell like?"
- Use sensory prompts:
    - "What do you remember seeing or hearing most clearly?"
    - "If you close your eyes, what detail comes back first?"

2. If they wander off-topic

- Gently bring them back with curiosity, not correction:
    - "That's a wonderful story. Can I ask how it connects to the time you were talking about earlier?"
    - "That reminds me of something you mentioned before — can you tell me more about that?"

3. If they seem stuck or unsure what to share

- Offer them choices:
    - "Would you rather tell me about your childhood, or about your work life?"
    - "Do you want to share a story of a challenge or a celebration?"
- Try contrast prompts:
    - "What was the happiest time you remember? What about the hardest?"
    - "Who made you feel safe? Who challenged you most?"

4. Finding the gems

As you listen, look for:

- Emotional words ("I was scared… relieved… proud…") → follow up with: *"Can you tell me more about that feeling?"*
- Turning points ("That's when everything changed…") → follow up with: *"What made it change? What happened next?"*
- Relationships ("My grandmother always…") → follow up with: *"What do you think made her so important in your life?"*

Tip: Think of yourself as a treasure-hunter. The goal is not to collect every detail, but to notice the golden moments — the emotions, the turning points, the lessons — and invite the storyteller to expand on them.

This way, even a hesitant or talkative storyteller can still land on a memorable, meaningful Hero's Journey story.

1. Warm-Up Questions (Opening the Door)

Gentle, playful questions to help someone relax and begin sharing.

- What was your favourite food growing up?
- Did you have a favourite toy or game as a child?
- Who was your best friend when you were little?
- What was your favourite subject in school?
- Was there a chore you hated doing as a kid?
- Did you ever get into mischief? Can you tell me about it?
- What was your favourite place to play?
- Did you have a pet? Tell me about them.
- What was your favourite holiday or celebration?
- Did you have a favourite teacher? What made them special?
- What song reminds you of your childhood?
- Was there a meal your parents or grandparents always made?
- What was your favourite season of the year, and why?
- Did you have a bedtime story or family tradition you loved?
- Can you remember a funny moment that still makes you laugh?
- Did you have a nickname growing up?
- What was the first movie you remember seeing?
- Did you ever have a secret hiding place?
- What made you feel safe as a child?

- Did you ever imagine what you wanted to be when you grew up?
- What was the first trip or adventure you remember taking?
- Did you ever collect anything (stamps, cards, toys)?
- What clothes did you love to wear?
- Did you ever have a favourite book or comic?
- What's one memory of joy or laughter from your childhood?
- What is your earliest childhood memory, and how old do you think you were?
- Can you describe your childhood home in detail?
- Did you ever have an imaginary friend or a favourite stuffed animal?
- How did you learn to ride a bike (or scooter), and who taught you?
- Were there any local parks or playgrounds that were important in your childhood?
- What was your proudest achievement in school?
- Did you ever have a school uniform? How did you feel about it?
- Did you ever experience a school tradition (sports day, cultural day, etc.) that you loved?
- Did you play Japanese games (like kendama or marbles) or Canadian ones, or both?
- What Japanese or Canadian holidays do you remember most clearly as a child?
- Did you grow up speaking Japanese, English, or both at home?

2. Family and Community Roots

These invite stories about belonging, heritage, and the people who shaped you.

- What was life like in your family home?
- How did your parents or grandparents meet?
- What traditions were most important in your household?
- Did you have a family recipe that has been passed down?
- What was mealtime like in your family?
- Who was the storyteller in your family?
- What role did faith, religion, or spirituality play in your home?
- Did your family speak more than one language?
- What do you remember about your grandparents?
- Did your family ever gather with other Nikkei families? What was that like?
- Was there someone in your family who kept the community together?
- Did you celebrate Japanese festivals or Canadian holidays, or both?
- Was there an elder who influenced you deeply?
- What values did your parents or grandparents emphasize most?
- How did your family express love and care for one another?
- What did your family do for fun?
- Did you feel more connected to your Japanese side or Canadian side — or both?
- What role did neighbors and community play in your life?
- Did you ever feel different from the children around you? How so?

- What was a moment you felt proud to be part of your family or community?
- Were there times you wished you knew more about your ancestry?
- Did your family have heirlooms, photos, or keepsakes?
- What was a typical Sunday (or day off) like in your household?
- Did you ever hear stories about Japan from your parents or grandparents?
- What do you think your family's greatest strength has been across generations?
- What do you remember about your parents' lives before you came along?
- Did you and your siblings get along as children?
- How did your family handle chores, and which ones were your responsibility?
- What sayings or mottos did your parents or grandparents often repeat?
- Did your family move houses? How did that affect you?
- Were there ever family secrets or stories you learned later in life?
- What did your grandparents tell you about life in Japan or pre-internment Canada?
- Did your family gather with other Nikkei families, and what do you remember about that?
- Did your parents or grandparents keep Japanese recipes alive, and do you still cook them?
- What role did music, Japanese or Canadian, play in your home?

3. Challenge and Resilience

Moments of struggle often reveal strength, courage, and lessons.

- What was one of the hardest times your family faced?
- How did you or your family get through it?
- Did you ever feel scared about the future?
- Was there a time you thought you might give up, but didn't?
- Who supported you most during hard times?
- Did your family ever lose something important? How did you rebuild?
- Was there a time when others treated you unfairly?
- Did you ever experience bullying or discrimination?
- What was it like to start over in a new place or community?
- Was there a time when money was very tight? How did you manage?
- Did your family ever have to make a sacrifice for survival?
- Can you share a memory of a parent's or grandparent's strength?
- What gave you hope during difficult times?
- Did you ever feel alone, and how did you overcome it?
- Was there an event that changed your family forever?
- Did you ever have to work very hard as a child or teen?
- Was there a time when you surprised yourself with your own resilience?
- Did you ever find joy even in the middle of hardship?
- How did your family keep traditions alive during tough times?

- Looking back, what did those challenges teach you about life?
- Was there ever a time your community came together to help each other?
- Did your family ever face injustice or exclusion?
- What do you remember about moving into or out of the camps?
- How did you or your family adapt to loss or change?
- What advice would you give others about getting through hard times?
- What family rules seemed strict at the time but make sense now?
- What was your biggest fear or worry as a child?
- Did you ever experience a setback early in life or school, and how did you recover?
- Was there a time you had to swallow your pride for the greater good?
- How did your family cope with being relocated or losing their home?
- Did your parents ever share stories about internment or rebuilding after?
- How did your family or community support each other during hard times?

4. Migration, Identity, and Belonging (Nikkei-Specific)

- What do you know about your family's journey to Canada?
- Did your family talk about life in Japan?
- What did your parents or grandparents leave behind when they moved?
- How did they adjust to their new home?
- What was life like before, during, and after internment?
- Do you remember the first time you realized your family had a different story than others around you?
- Was there ever a moment when you felt caught between two cultures?
- How did your family keep their Japanese identity alive?
- Was there pressure to "fit in" as Canadian?
- What traditions did your family continue after moving?
- What was the first language you spoke at home?
- Did you ever feel embarrassed or proud of your heritage?
- How did your family talk about being Japanese Canadian?
- Did you ever visit Japan? What was that experience like?
- Did your parents or grandparents ever wish they had stayed in Japan?
- What do you think was the hardest part of migration for your family?
- Did you ever feel excluded because of your heritage?
- Was there a moment when you felt deeply connected to your Nikkei identity?
- How did your family rebuild their lives after internment?
- What was lost — and what was carried forward — through migration?

- Do you think your family's sacrifices are understood by others?
- Was there a story of courage passed down about survival or starting over?
- How did being Nikkei influence your education, work, or relationships?
- Do you feel more Japanese, more Canadian, or both?
- What do you most want future generations to understand about this journey?
- Did you ever experience culture shock in a new community or school?
- Did your parents ever wish they had stayed in Japan?
- What did your family bring with them when they were forced to move or migrate?
- Did you feel pressure to hide or change parts of your identity growing up?
- Have you ever made friendships or relationships across cultural divides?
- Did you ever visit Japan — what was it like to see the country your family came from?
- How did your family balance keeping Japanese traditions while fitting into Canadian society?
- What part of being Japanese Canadian makes you most proud?

5. Triumphs and Celebrations

Balancing hardship with joy, pride, and victories.

- What is something you are most proud of?
- Did you ever win an award, medal, or recognition?
- Was there a time you surprised yourself with success?
- Did you ever achieve something people thought you couldn't?
- What was your happiest childhood memory?
- Did your family celebrate birthdays, weddings, or anniversaries?
- Was there a festival or community event that meant a lot to you?
- What was the best gift you ever received?
- Was there a tradition that brought your family together in joy?
- What was your wedding like?
- Did you ever graduate or finish school against the odds?
- Did you ever start a business, craft, or project you're proud of?
- Was there a story of kindness that stands out in your life?
- What was the proudest moment of being a parent or grandparent?
- Did you ever travel somewhere that filled you with joy?
- Was there a time when your family celebrated despite hardship?
- Did you ever see someone in your family honored in public?
- What traditions made holidays or gatherings special?
- Was there a special family reunion you remember?
- What achievement do you want people to remember you for?

- Did you ever perform in music, sports, or art?
- What was your proudest work accomplishment?
- Did you ever build or create something with your hands?
- What was your proudest contribution to your community?
- How do you like to celebrate your culture today?
- Tell me about your wedding day (or how you imagined it).
- What was the birth of your children like for you?
- How did you celebrate becoming an adult (e.g., 18, 21, or another milestone)?
- Did you ever win an award or honor that was especially meaningful?
- Did you ever perform in sports, arts, or music, and how did it feel?
- What community events made you feel proud to be part of the Nikkei community?
- What Japanese or Nikkei festivals (Obon, Powell Street Festival, etc.) do you remember most vividly?
- Did your family celebrate Oshogatsu (New Year)? What traditions did you follow?
- Did you ever celebrate even during hard times in the camps or afterward?

6. Wisdom and Legacy

These help distill the meaning of the story.

- What advice would you give your younger self?
- What is the most important lesson you've learned in life?
- What do you most want your children or grandchildren to know about you?
- What do you think people should never forget about our history?
- What do you think makes life meaningful?
- Was there a saying or proverb your parents repeated often?
- What is your favourite Japanese saying or teaching?
- How do you want to be remembered?
- What has been your guiding principle in life?
- What gives you hope for the future?
- What do you think the world needs more of?
- If you could pass down one tradition, what would it be?
- Was there ever a moment of wisdom from an elder that shaped you?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What do you wish you had thanked someone for?
- What role has forgiveness played in your life?
- How do you define strength?
- What do you think the younger generation struggles to understand?
- What has brought you the most joy in life?
- What does being Nikkei mean to you today?
- What lesson do you think the world can learn from the Nikkei story?

- What keeps you grounded when life feels uncertain?
- What legacy did your parents or grandparents leave you?
- What legacy would you like to leave for future generations?
- What message would you like to say directly to your family now?
- What guiding principle or philosophy has helped you most?
- Have you ever changed your mind about a strongly held belief?
- How do you define "living a good life"?
- Do you believe everything happens for a reason, or do we make our own luck?
- How do you hope your children and grandchildren will carry on your values?
- What advice would you give your teenage self?
- What wisdom did your parents or grandparents pass down from their experiences in internment or migration?
- What Japanese saying or proverb carries the most meaning for you?

7. Grab Bag: Pick & Choose Questions

Here are extra questions to mix in anywhere:

- What smell always reminds you of your childhood?
- Did you ever feel like an outsider?
- What's one small act of kindness you'll never forget?
- What invention changed your life?
- Was there a time you felt truly free?
- What was your first job?
- Who was your first crush?
- What was the hardest goodbye you've ever said?
- What's the best piece of advice you ever received?
- Did you ever keep a secret you've never told before?
- What is the bravest thing you've ever done?
- Who do you wish you could thank right now?
- What's a story about laughter that always makes you smile?
- Did you ever feel connected to nature in a special way?
- What do you want people to know about your generation?
- What was the funniest mischief you ever got into as a child?
- What's the most embarrassing moment you've ever experienced?
- What was your first job, and what did you do with your first paycheck?
- What invention or change in technology changed your life?
- What was your most surprising or spontaneous life decision?
- Did you ever have a travel mishap that turned into a funny story?

- What is one story from your family that always makes everyone laugh?
- Did you ever learn a Japanese cultural tradition that others around you didn't know?

The goal isn't to ask every question — it's to find the ones that spark memory, emotion, and meaning. The pauses, the laughter, and even the tears will be part of what makes the story come alive.

Nikkei
national museum
& cultural centre
日系文化センター・博物館

Hero's Journey Quick Pick Card

Use this guide to shape any memory into a full story.
You don't have to ask every question — just follow the flow.

Step 1: Spark a Memory

Start broad. Invite a moment to come up.

- "Can you tell me about a time that really stands out in your life?"
- "What's a story your family always tells?"
- "Was there a moment when everything changed?"

Step 2: Find the Challenge

Every good story has a struggle.

- "What made that time hard or important?"
- "How did you feel when it happened?"
- "What was at stake?"

Step 3: Discover the Turning Point

Look for the decision or shift.

- "What choice did you or your family make?"
- "Was there a moment you almost gave up — or kept going?"
- "What changed that helped you move forward?"

Step 4: Bring in Allies

Heroes always have helpers.

- "Who helped you through this time?"
- "Did anyone surprise you with kindness or courage?"
- "What support made the biggest difference?"

Step 5: Draw Out the Outcome

Show how things turned out.

- "What happened in the end?"
- "How was life different afterward?"
- "What do you remember most now?"

Step 6: Anchor the Meaning

Finish with reflection.

- "What did that experience teach you?"
- "What do you want future generations to know from this story?"
- "How did this shape who you are today?"

Quick Tips

- Listen for story signals: emotions, turning points, or mentions of key people.
- Zoom in: ask about feelings, choices, and changes.
- Keep it human: pauses, laughter, and tears are part of the story.

With these 6 steps, even a small memory can become a memorable Hero's Journey story.

Troubleshooting Card: When Stories Get Stuck

Sometimes people give very short answers, drift off, or feel stuck. That's normal. Use these gentle prompts to keep the story alive.

One-Word Answers

- Ask for specifics:
  "Can you tell me about a time when that really happened?"
- Use senses:
  "What did it look/sound/smell like?"
- Invite detail:
  "What happened next?"

Going Off-Topic

- Bring them back gently:
  - "That's a wonderful story. How does it connect to what you said earlier?"
  - "You mentioned ___ before — could you tell me more about that?"

Feeling Stuck

- Offer choices:
  "Would you rather tell me about your childhood, or about work?"
- Try contrasts:
  "What was the happiest time? What about the hardest?"
- Use time frames:
  "Can you tell me about 'the first time' or 'the last time' you remember that happening?"

Finding the Gems

Listen for:

- Emotions: "I was scared… proud… relieved…" → *"Can you tell me more about that feeling?"*
- Turning points: "That's when everything changed…" → *"What made it change?"*
- Key people: "My grandmother always…" → *"Why was she so important?"*

Remember: Your role isn't to collect every detail, but to notice the golden moments and invite the storyteller to go deeper.

Together with the Hero's Journey Quick Pick card, this ensures every conversation has depth, flow, and meaning.

Standard Interview Consent Form

Project Name: _____ Date: _____

Interviewee (Storyteller) Name: _____

Interviewer Name: _____

Introduction
Your memories, experiences, and stories are a vital part of the Japanese Canadian Nikkei community. By recording and preserving them, we ensure that future generations can understand our shared struggles, triumphs, and everyday life. Thank you for trusting us with your story.

What Will Happen

- Your story will be recorded (audio and/or video).
- It will be preserved so future generations can listen and learn.
- You can decide how and where your story is shared.

Your Choices (please check any that apply)

☐ My story can be kept in the archive for future generations.
☐ My story can be shared publicly (website, exhibits, education, publications).
☐ My story can be shared only within the Nikkei community/museum.
☐ Please do not share my story publicly until the year _____.
☐ I would like my family to have a copy.

AI & Digital Processing Consent

To help us organize, summarize, and analyze the stories we collect, we may use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., transcription software, NotebookLM, etc.) to process the recordings and transcripts.

I agree that (please check):

☐ My interview data (audio, video, transcript) may be processed using AI tools for the purpose of organization, summarization, and research analysis.
☐ My interview data should not be input into any AI tools; please process my story using manual methods only.

Your Rights

- You can stop the interview at any time.
- You can choose not to answer any question.
- You can withdraw your permission later if you change your mind.

Signature of Storyteller: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Interviewer/Facilitator: _____

Date: _____

Recording & Media Release Form

Project Name: _____Date: _____

Participant Name: _____

Introduction

Japanese Canadian history has often been passed down through personal stories. Photos, videos, and recordings help bring these stories to life for future generations. This form ensures you have a say in how your image and voice are used.

I understand that photographs, video recordings, and/or audio recordings may be taken during this project. I give permission for the following uses:

☐ Educational use (schools, workshops, community programs)
☐ Museum/Archival exhibitions (in person or online)
☐ Website and social media related to this project
☐ Printed materials (books, newsletters, articles)
☐ Research use by students, scholars, or community members
☐ Other (please specify): _____

AI & Digital Processing Consent

To help us organize, summarize, and analyze the stories we collect, we may use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., transcription software, NotebookLM, etc.) to process the recordings and transcripts.

I agree that (please check):

☐ My interview data (audio, video, transcript) **may be processed** using AI tools for the purpose of organization, summarization, and research analysis.

☐ My interview data **should not** be input into any AI tools; please process my story using manual methods only.

I understand that these recordings will become part of the project record. I will not receive payment for their use, and I may request limits or restrictions at any time.

Signature of Participant: _____Date: _____

Archiving & Donation Form

Project/Archive Name: _____Date: _____

Storyteller Name: _____

Introduction

The Nikkei community has a long tradition of protecting and passing on its heritage. By donating your recorded story, you are ensuring that your voice becomes part of a permanent record of Japanese Canadian life, so that it will not be forgotten.

I choose to donate my recorded interview and related materials to the above project/archives.

Copyright & Ownership

☐ I keep copyright to my words but give permission to the archives to preserve and share them.
☐ I assign copyright of my interview to the archive.

Access Level (please check one)

☐ Open to the public immediately
☐ Restricted to family/community only
☐ Closed until the year _____
☐ Other restrictions: _____

I understand that my story may be preserved for future generations, even beyond my lifetime.

Signature of Storyteller: _____ Date: _____

Minor Consent Form

Project Name: _____Date: _____

Minor's Name: _____ Age: _____

Introduction

Young voices are an important part of our Nikkei story. This form ensures that parents and guardians are comfortable with how their children's memories and experiences are recorded and shared.

I am the parent/guardian of the above-named child. I give permission for my child to take part in an interview and to be audio- or video-recorded.

I agree that (please check):

☐ My child's story may be used in educational programs and exhibits.
☐ My child's story may be archived for future generations.
☐ My child's name **may** be used.
☐ My child's name **should not** be used (please use initials or pseudonym).

AI & Digital Processing Consent

To help us organize, summarize, and analyze the stories we collect, we may use artificial intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., transcription software, NotebookLM, etc.) to process the recordings and transcripts.

I agree that (please check):

☐ My child's interview data (audio, video, transcript) **may be processed** using AI tools for the purpose of organization, summarization, and research analysis.

☐ My child's interview data **should not** be input into any AI tools; please process my story using manual methods only.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____
Date: _____

Child's Signature (if old enough): _____
Date: _____

Translator / Interpreter Consent Form

Project Name: _____Date: _____

Translator/Interpreter Name: _____

Introduction

Many Nikkei stories are told in Japanese or in a mixture of languages. Translators and interpreters help bridge generations and cultures. This form ensures accuracy and respect for the storyteller.

As a translator/interpreter for this project:

- I promise to provide an accurate and faithful translation of the storyteller's words.
- I understand that the stories I hear are private and may be sensitive.
- I agree to keep all information shared during the interview confidential.

Signature of Translator/Interpreter: _____ Date: _____

Facilitator / Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement

Project Name: _____ Date: _____

Volunteer/Facilitator Name: _____

Introduction

Volunteers and facilitators play a key role in helping preserve Nikkei heritage. This form is a promise to handle stories with the dignity, care, and confidentiality they deserve.

As someone helping with this project (recording, editing, archiving, or assisting storytellers):

- I will treat all participants with respect.
- I will not share, copy, or distribute any recordings, transcripts, or materials outside of this project.
- I understand that the stories belong to the storytellers and must be handled with care.

Signature of Volunteer/Facilitator: _____ Date: _____

***Please note that this Oral History Interview Release Form is provided as a sample for educational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for seeking personalized legal advice from an attorney licensed to practice in your jurisdiction.*

Oral History Interview Release Form

This Oral History Interview Release Form (the "*Release*") is made as of _____, 201_____ between I, the undersigned individual interviewee ("*I*" or "*me*"), and you, the undersigned interviewer ("*you*" or "*your*").

The goal of our interview is to document my oral history by recording a discussion about my life experiences. By signing this Release, I am giving you both the right to record the interview and the option to share the interview with others for non-commercial, personal and educational purposes, such as teaching, research, criticism or commentary.

1. *I can be interviewed.* In consideration for the opportunity to participate in the interview and your oral history project, I hereby grant to you and your designated representatives, agents, assigns, licensees and successors (including any people who help you to edit and share the interview) the following perpetual, irrevocable, worldwide and sublicenseable rights and permission:

   (a) to interview me and to make aural and visual recordings of such interview (the "*Interview*"); and
   (b) to use, reproduce, edit, prepare derivative works based upon, distribute, publish, publicly display, transmit or broadcast the Interview in or by means of any format or media now known or later invented; and
   (c) to use my name, likeness, voice, image and biographical information ("*Attributes*"), in or by means of any format or media now known or later invented, solely as a part of or in connection with the Interview.

2. *You own the Interview.* I understand and acknowledge that you own all rights, title and interest, including all intellectual property rights, in and to the Interview that incorporates the Attributes. I also understand that you are under no obligation to use or share the Interview or Attributes.

3. *You will use the Interview in a responsible manner.* You will use the Interview and Attributes solely for non-commercial, personal and educational purposes, such as teaching, research, criticism or commentary, and not for any defamatory or derogatory purposes. I waive any right that I may have to inspect or approve versions of the Interview that use the Attributes as contemplated in this Release.

4. *I'm not getting paid.* I agree that I will not receive any monetary payment for the rights or permissions granted by me under this Release.

5. *Other legal stuff.* I waive, release and agree not to assert or bring any claim, demand, action or suit, in law or equity, against you arising out of or relating to this Release, the Interview and Attributes, including any claims for invasion of right of privacy, right of publicity, defamation or copyright infringement. This Release will be binding upon me and my heirs, legal representatives, successors and assigns. I understand that I may not seek any injunctive or equitable relief from you (such as termination of this Release or cessation of the usage or distribution of the Interview and Attributes).

I represent and warrant that I have the full right to enter into this Release, that I am authorized to grant all rights set forth herein and that the use by you of the Interview will not infringe any copyright or other proprietary rights of any third party. I agree that you may freely assign or transfer this Release and the rights and permissions granted herein. This is the complete and binding agreement between you and me and supersedes any other discussions or understandings I may have had with you about the Interview and Attributes. If any provision of this Release is invalid, the other provisions will remain in effect to the maximum extent permitted by law. This Release is governed by the laws of the State/Province of _____, without regard to conflict of law provisions. This Release cannot be modified except by a written agreement signed by both you and me.

I have read, understand and agree to the above statements, and I understand that by signing this Release, I am waiving certain rights.

Acknowledged and agreed by me:		*You*:*	
Print Name:	_____	Organization:	_____
Signature:	_____	Signature:	_____
Address:	_____	Print Name:	_____
	_____	Title:	_____
		Address:	_____

**If the above signatory is under 18 years of age, the parent or legal guardian of such person must sign below:*
I am the parent (or guardian) of the minor child signing above and I hereby consent to the foregoing on behalf of such minor child and personally join in the representations set forth above.

Signature: _____ Print Name: _____

Gear + Tech Setup Guide (No-Cost to Affordable Options)

This guide helps you capture interviews and stories that look and sound clear, cinematic, and natural — even if all you have is your phone.

1. Phone/Camera Settings

Best practice from pros: Always start with the highest quality settings your device allows. You can't fix bad footage later.

- Resolution:
  - iPhone/Android: Set to 4K if available (1080p if storage is tight).
- Frame Rate:
  - Choose 24 fps for a "cinematic" look (what movies are shot in).
  - If you want super smooth motion (less "film-like"), use 30 fps.
- Orientation:
  - Always shoot horizontal (landscape) for archival and sharing.
- Stability:
  - Turn on stabilization if available.
- Focus/Exposure Lock:
  - Tap and hold on your subject's face until you see "AE/AF LOCK" — this stops the camera from constantly adjusting mid-shot.

2. Camera Placement

Golden Rule: Camera at eye-level, about 2–4 feet away.

- Framing:
  - Use the "rule of thirds": place eyes about one-third from the top of the frame.
  - Leave a little space above the head ("headroom"), but not too much.

- Angle:
  - Slightly off to one side of the interviewer (not staring straight into camera unless intentional).

- Stability:
  - No-Cost: Stack books, use a shelf, lean the phone against a mug.
  - Low-Cost: Small tripod with phone clamp ($15–$30).
  - Higher-Cost: Tripod with fluid head for DSLR.

Pro Tip:

Keep the background simple, uncluttered, and meaningful (family photos, books, cultural items).



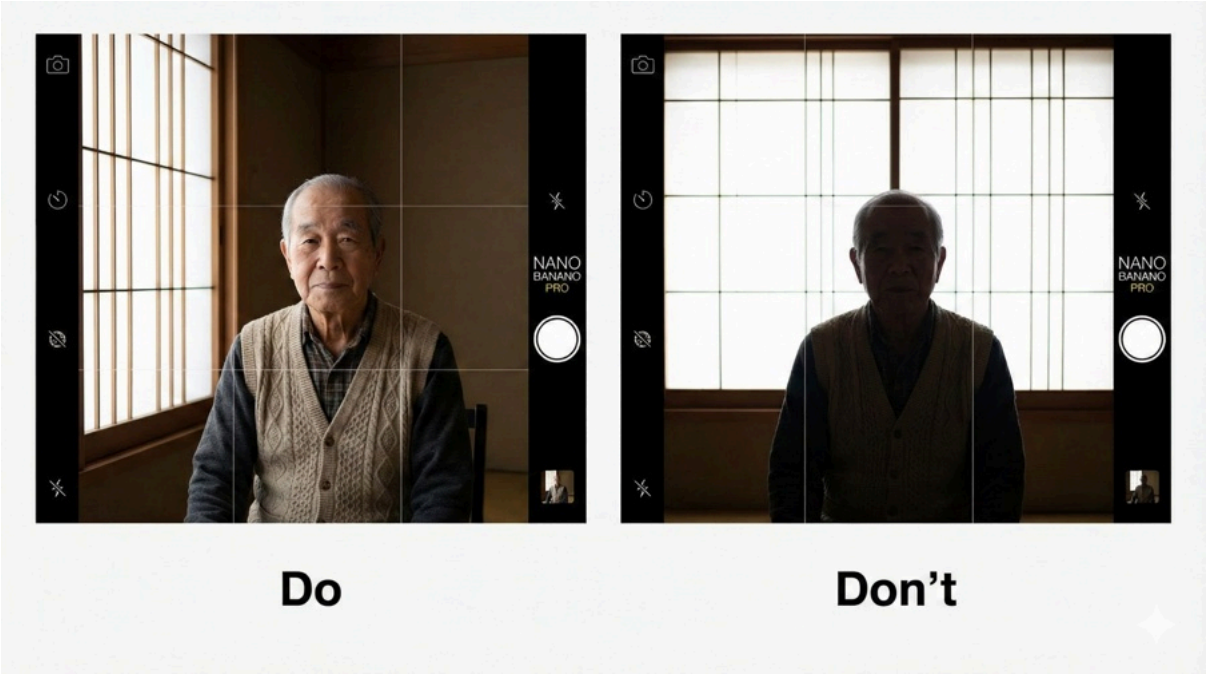
3. Lighting

Golden Rule: Light the face, not the background. Natural light > cheap gear > expensive gear.

- No-Cost (just your phone):
    - Place storyteller near a **window** with light on their face (not behind them).
    - Use sheer curtains or a white sheet to soften harsh sunlight.
- Low-Cost:
    - Ring light ($20–$40) placed just above eye level.
    - Clip-on LED light for phone ($15–$30).
- Higher-Cost:
    - Softbox lighting kit ($70–$150).
    - LED panel with dimmer for fine-tuning.

Pro Tip:

Avoid overhead lights (they cause dark shadows under eyes). Place main light about **45° to the side** of the storyteller.



4. Sound

Golden Rule: Sound is MORE important than video. Bad sound = unwatchable.

- No-Cost:
    - Move closer. Best sound comes from **3–4 feet max** away.
    - Use a quiet room (turn off fridge, A/C, phones).
- Low-Cost:
    - Clip-on **lav mic** that plugs into phone ($20–$40).
    - Position mic about **6–8 inches below chin**, hidden under collar if possible.
- Higher-Cost:
    - Wireless lav mic kit ($150–$300).
    - External recorder (Zoom H1n, ~$100) + lav mic.

Pro Tip:

Do a 10-second test recording and play it back with headphones before starting.

5. Troubleshooting

- **Shaky footage?** Use a tripod or prop the phone on stable surface.
- **Background too busy?** Shift subject or move camera closer.
- **Harsh shadows?** Use a sheet, white wall, or even a lampshade as a diffuser.
- **Echoey sound?** Add soft items (pillows, rugs, curtains).
- **Mic not working?** Check phone's mic input settings — some adapters (esp. iPhone Lightning dongles) need the right TRRS plug.

6. Quick Setup Recipes

No-Cost Setup

- iPhone/Android, locked focus/exposure.
- Phone propped up at eye level, ~3 feet away.
- Subject near a window with light on their face.
- Quiet room, no extra mic.

Low-Cost Setup

- iPhone/Android on small tripod.
- Clip-on lav mic into phone.
- Ring light at 45° angle.

Higher-Cost Setup

- DSLR or mirrorless on tripod.
- Wireless lav mic or external recorder.
- Softbox lighting for key light + LED panel for fill.

7. Cinematic Interview Tips (from the pros)

- Connection first: Chat before hitting record to relax them.
- Keep rolling: Don't stop after each question. Often the best gems come after a pause.
- Framing for story: Wide enough to capture body language, close enough for intimacy.
- Listen deeply: Don't interrupt. Nod, smile, and use short prompts ("uh-huh," "tell me more").
- Ask again, differently: If answer was short, repeat the question in another way.

Best-Practices Guide for Interviewing Elders

A Nikkei Japanese Canadian Resource

Why Elders' Stories Matter

For the Nikkei community, elders are living bridges to histories of immigration, resilience, injustice, and cultural survival. Many elders carry memories of:

- Pre-war life in fishing villages, farming communities, or Powell Street in Vancouver.
- Internment and uprooting—being forced from their homes, sent to camps, or relocated to sugar beet farms.
- Rebuilding—starting over after dispossession, often with nothing.
- Preserving culture—celebrating Obon, Oshogatsu, or Japanese Canadian picnics while adapting to Canadian life.
- Community resilience—judo clubs, baseball leagues, Buddhist temples, and Christian churches that became centers of belonging.

Capturing these stories preserves more than history. It preserves identity, dignity, and a sense of belonging for generations to come.

Preparing with Care

- Do some background research:
  Before visiting, learn basic timelines of Japanese Canadian history. Knowing terms like *Nikkei*, *Issei* (first generation), *Nisei* (second generation), and *Sansei* (third generation) shows awareness and respect.

- Clarify intentions:
  Be open about why you want to record their story.

  For example:
  "We want to preserve our family's story so that my children and grandchildren will always know where we came from."
  "The Nikkei Museum is helping families record their stories so they won't be lost."

- Plan the environment:
  A warm cup of tea, sitting at the kitchen table, or walking in the garden may feel more natural than a staged interview setup.

Showing Respect

- Start with gratitude: A simple bow of the head, a thank-you card, or bringing fruit (*mikan* oranges are traditional gifts) sets a tone of respect.

- Honorifics: Use "-san" unless invited otherwise. Elders may appreciate being addressed as *Obaasan* (grandmother) or *Ojiisan* (grandfather) when appropriate.

- Listen with patience: Japanese Canadians often express meaning indirectly or with pauses. Do not rush them to "get to the point."

- Cultural humility: Some elders may be modest about achievements. They may say, "Oh, nothing special." Encourage gently without insisting.

Asking Thoughtful Questions

Questions should invite storytelling, not one-word answers. Below are sample questions tied to Nikkei life and history:

Childhood & Family Life

- What games did you play as a child? Did you play *kendama* or *marbles*?
- What foods remind you most of your childhood? Who cooked them?
- Did your family celebrate Oshogatsu (New Year)? What traditions do you remember?
- Who in your family was the best storyteller? What stories did they tell?

Pre-War Communities

- What do you remember about Powell Street, Steveston, or other places where Japanese Canadians gathered?
- Did your parents or grandparents talk about why they came to Canada?
- What was daily life like in the fishing/farming/lumber communities?

Internment & Relocation (handled gently)

- Would you like to share what happened to your family during the war?
- Do you remember the day you had to leave your home?
- What was life like in the camps or on the farms?
- Were there moments of kindness or community during that time?

Rebuilding & Resilience

- How did your family start over after the war?
- What was it like to build a new life with so little?
- What role did sports, judo, or baseball play in bringing people together?
- Were there community leaders who inspired you?

Identity & Legacy

- What do you feel most proud of when you think of your life?
- What lessons would you like younger generations to carry forward?
- What Japanese values or traditions do you hope we keep alive?
- What advice would you give to your grandchildren or great-grandchildren?

Handling Difficult Stories

Some elders may carry trauma from internment, racism, or loss. Approach these stories with gentleness:

- Instead of "Tell me what happened," ask "Would you like to share what life was like for you then?"
- Respect "No." If they prefer not to speak, move on.
- If emotions arise, pause. Sometimes sitting in silence is the most respectful response.

Recording with Responsibility

- Consent: Always get clear permission. For museum projects, use written consent forms. For family use, verbal consent may be enough.
- Equipment: Phones work fine. Place them close but not intrusive.
- File care: Name files clearly: LastName_FirstName_Year/Date_Topic

  ex: "Yada_William_2025_ChildhoodMemories.mp3."
- Backup: Save to two locations (family computer + cloud).
- Respect edits: If an elder later says, "Please don't share that part," remove it.

Cultural Sensitivity in Practice

- Traditions: Some may want to open or close with a prayer or a song. Invite and record if they are comfortable.
- Language: Elders may switch between Japanese and English. Don't interrupt—those shifts carry meaning.
- Community first: Remember that these stories belong not only to individuals but to the Nikkei community. They are gifts, not commodities.

After the Interview

- Say thank you properly: Send a photo, card, or small gift afterward. This is culturally valued.
- Share copies: Give them and their family access to the recording. If it's for an archives, explain how their story will live on.
- Return: Visit again. Many elders have more to share once trust deepens.

Example Story Fragment

"When I was ten years old, they told us we had to leave our house in Vancouver. My father had just fixed the garden, and my mother had made manju the day before. We were sent to Slocan. I remember the cold winters, but also the kindness of neighbors who shared food. Even though we lost everything, we still gathered for Obon dances. That's how we survived—with community."

This kind of memory blends loss with resilience, which is central to the Nikkei story.

Your Role

As a listener and recorder, you are:

- A guardian of memory.
- A bridge between generations.
- A student of resilience.
- A companion in storytelling, not just an interviewer.

Final Thought

When you sit with an elder, you're not just gathering facts—you're participating in a sacred act of preservation. Each story you capture strengthens the Nikkei community, honours those who came before, and offers future generations both caution and inspiration.

Your role is simple, but profound: listen with heart, record with care, and give back with gratitude.

Research & Archiving: Keeping Family Stories Alive

Recording an interview is just the beginning. To make sure your family stories live on for future generations, you'll want to **research, organize, and safely archive** what you collect. This doesn't need to feel overwhelming — here's a simple path to follow.

1. Start With What You Know

- **Talk to family first**: Write down names, dates, and stories from parents, grandparents, or siblings.
- **Capture small details**: Even everyday memories (favorite foods, pets, hobbies, accidents, travels) help paint a fuller picture.
- **Choose one ancestor at a time**: Focus on building their story before moving to another.

2. Build a Family Story Map

- Create a **family tree** (paper, Google Slides, Canva, or a genealogy app).
- Add in what you already know: names, places, life events.
- Leave blanks for missing information — these become clues for your research.
- Tip: Use photos whenever you can. Seeing faces alongside names makes history come alive.

3. Expand With Archives & Records

There are many places to find missing pieces. Each can confirm dates, places, or uncover new stories.

Key Resources for Japanese Canadian families:

- Landscapes of Injustice Digital Database – wartime property and internment records.
- Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre – photos, documents, and artifacts (many online).
- Royal BC Museum Archives – birth, marriage, and death records.
- Library & Archives Canada – immigration, census, and citizenship files.
- UBC Geographic Information Centre – aerial photographs of communities that may no longer exist.
- Genealogy Quebec, Bibliothèque Québec, McGill Archives – especially useful for postwar families in Quebec.
- Ancestry.ca and FindAGrave.com – broader family history records (with caution about accuracy).

4. Cross-Check With Oral Stories

- Match records to memories: Does a census or archive confirm what your family has always said?
- Notice contradictions: Different spellings, dates, or places are common. Write them all down.
- Verify with family: Ask relatives to help confirm spellings of names and places.

5. Save + Share for the Future

- Transcribe interviews: Write them out — this makes stories searchable and easier to pass on.
- Label files clearly: Use LastName_FirstName_Year/Date_Topic

  ex: "Yada_Saraya_2025_ChildhoodMemories.mp4."
- Store safely: Keep copies on your computer, a USB stick, and in cloud storage (Google Drive, Dropbox).
- Give back: Always send a copy to the person you interviewed.
- Decide on sharing:
  - Family only (private).
  - Local museums or archives.
  - Online platforms like YouTube.
  - Discover Nikkei / Nikkei Album for the wider Japanese Canadian community.

6. Tips for Common Challenges

- Name changes/misspellings: Search different spellings and English versions of Japanese names.
- Missing neighborhoods: Some historic Japanese Canadian communities no longer exist. Look at local archives or aerial photos.
- Gaps in census records: People may not appear if they moved or were absent during the count.

7. Make It Personal

Remember: the "official record" is not the whole story. The little details — the family dog, a favorite hobby, a hidden medal, a garden planted in camp — are what make history real. Your family's stories matter, even if they don't appear in government files.

Digital Archive Organization Templates

A simple, thorough system for organizing interviews, photos, and documents so nothing gets lost and everything is easy to find.

Quick start

1. Pick a folder structure below and mirror it on your drive.
2. Rename files using the pattern under **File naming**.
3. Log items in **metadata_minimal.csv** (use **metadata_full.csv** if you want more detail).
4. Keep consent forms and usage notes with the archive and track them in consent_log.csv.
5. Make an access copy for sharing, keep the primary untouched.
6. Back up with the 3-2-1 rule.

ADVANCED Folder structures (choose one)

Option A: Simple

```
.
├── 00_Admin
├── 01_Source_Primary
│   ├── audio_primary
│   ├── video_primary
│   ├── photo_primary
│   └── documents_primary
├── 02_Working
├── 03_Derivatives
│   ├── audio_access
│   ├── video_access
│   ├── photo_access
│   └── documents_access
├── 04_Transcripts_Translations
├── 05_Metadata
└── 99_Delivery_Sharing
```

Option B: Project-based (per storyteller or project)

```
.
├── 00_Admin
├── 01_Project_Name
│   ├── 01_Source_Primary
│   ├── 02_Working
│   ├── 03_Derivatives
│   ├── 04_Transcripts_Translations
│   ├── 05_Metadata
│   └── 99_Delivery_Sharing
└── 90_Global_Metadata_and_Vocabularies
```

Option C: Archivist (year-based intake + logs)

```
.
├── 00_Admin
├── 10_Intake
├── 20_Source_Primary
├── 30_Working
├── 40_Derivatives_Access
├── 50_Transcripts_Translations
├── 60_Metadata
├── 70_Reference_Renditions
├── 80_Public_or_Sharing
└── 99_Archive_Logs_and_Reports
```

Tips

- Store camera or recorder originals only in the Source_Primary folders.
- Put anything you edit into Working. Export sharing copies into Derivatives.
- Keep transcripts and translations together.
- Keep CSVs and logs inside Metadata.

File naming

Pattern

LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_YEAR/DATE_TOPIC/THEME

Examples:
- Tanaka_Masako_2025_ChildhoodMemories.mp4
- Yada_Jaia_2025_ChildhoodMemories_Photo.jpg
- Tanaka_Masako_2025_ChildhoodMemories_Transcript.docx

Rules

- No spaces. Use underscores.
- Do not rename primaries after cataloging. Rename before logging.
- Keep access copies clearly labeled _access or versioned.

Metadata (Advanced)

Start with **metadata_minimal.csv** and add more fields later using **metadata_full.csv**.

Minimal fields

- record_id: short unique ID like NIK-20250823-001
- title: human-readable title
- primary_storyteller_name
- interview_date (YYYY-MM-DD)
- content_type (audio, video, photo, document)
- file_current_name and file_path
- consent_status and usage_rights

- topic_tags (semicolon-separated)
- notes

Helpful additions

- Languages, translator, interviewer, location, device
- Transcript and translation status and file names
- Checksum for primary files if you want integrity checks

Nikkei-aware tags
Use controlled vocabularies included in the pack for era and topics. Example era tags: Pre-war, Internment, Post-war Resettlement, Redress Movement, Contemporary.

Consent and usage

- Log every form in consent_log.csv and store the signed PDF in 00_Admin or a Consent subfolder.
- Use simple statuses: consented, limited, restricted, denied.
- Add notes for restrictions or sensitive content. Tie this to sensitivity_level in metadata.

Quality and derivatives

- Keep the primary file untouched. Keep an access copy for sharing.
- Audio masters: WAV 48 kHz 24-bit if possible. Video primary files: keep camera originals.
- Access copies: MP3 for audio, MP4 for video, JPEG/PNG for photos, PDF for documents.

Backups

Use the 3-2-1 rule.

- 3 copies
- 2 different kinds of storage
- 1 copy offsite
  Test a restore each month.

Checklists

- Pre-interview: consent prep, charge devices, test audio and lighting, confirm name pronunciations.
- Post-ingest: copy primary files, rename, create access copies, fill metadata, log consent, back up.
- Monthly: test backup restore, spot-check metadata, export CSVs to an external drive.

What's included in the download pack (Advanced)

- CSVs: minimal and full metadata, file manifest, consent log, people template
- Controlled vocabularies: era, topics, sensitivity levels, usage rights, locations
- Naming guide and examples
- Folder trees
- Guides: backup strategy, checksums
- Checklists: pre-interview, post-ingest, monthly

Family Story Archive – Simple Starter Guide

Step 1. Make your folders

On your computer or phone, make one main folder called **Family Stories**. Inside, create these four folders:

- 01 Originals – put the raw recordings and photos here. Don't rename or edit them.
- 02 Sharing Copies – put the smaller versions you want to share (compressed video, PDF, etc.).
- 03 Transcripts & Notes – type out or store written versions of the stories here.
- 04 Consent & Info – keep signed forms (if any) or simple notes about who gave permission.

Step 2. Name your files simply

Use this pattern: LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_YEAR/DATE_TOPIC/THEME

- Person = last name_first name (ex: Tanaka_Mary)
- Date = YYYYMMDD (ex: 20250823) *at least the year
- Topic/Theme = (ex: Reading_Week)

Examples:

- Examples:
  Tanaka_Masako_2025_ChildhoodMemories.mp4
  Yada_Jaia_2025_ChildhoodMemories_Photo.jpg
  Tanaka_Masako_2025_ChildhoodMemories_Transcript.docx

Step 3. Keep a simple log

Open a spreadsheet (Excel, Sheets, Google Sheets, or paper notebook).

Add these 5 columns:

- Date
- Person's name
- What it is (video, photo, transcript)
- Where it's saved (folder name)
- Notes (anything special, like "talks about moving to Vancouver")

Step 4. Back it up

Follow the "2 copies" rule:

- Keep one copy on your computer/phone.
- Make one backup (USB stick, external drive, or cloud like Google Drive).

Step 5. Quick checklist

Before you record:

- Phone charged?
- Quiet space?
- Light in front of the person, not behind them?

After you record:

- Put the original file in 01 Originals.
- Make a sharing copy in 02 Sharing Copies.
- Write down a quick note in your log.

That's it. No complicated codes, no long forms — just four folders, simple names, a basic log, and one backup.

NotebookLM for Family Storybanking

Imagine having a place where all of your family's stories live together — a kind of digital scrapbook that you can search, explore, and use to spark new conversations. That's what NotebookLM can do.

NotebookLM is a free tool from Google that lets you upload your stories — interview video, audio, transcripts, letters, notes, even scanned photos — and then interact with them. It's like having a family memory assistant sitting right there with you.

How to Use NotebookLM for Your Storybank

1. Gather your stories

Start simple. Record a conversation with a parent, grandparent, or sibling. Don't worry about making it perfect — just capture the story. Then, use a free app like Otter.ai or the Recorder app on your phone to turn that conversation into text.

2. Upload to NotebookLM

Go to https://notebooklm.google/
Create a new "Notebook" in NotebookLM (for example: *The Yada Family Storybank*). Upload your transcripts, documents, or even family recipes and letters. Each upload becomes part of your living library.

3. Ask questions

Here's the fun part! You can now "talk" to your family archive. Type in questions like:

- *"What does Grandpa say about his first job?"*
- *"Find stories about childhood games."*
- *"Summarize Mom's immigration story."*

NotebookLM will pull the answers from the stories you've uploaded. It makes finding memories easy and quick — even if you don't have time to listen to a full two-hour interview.

4. Create family projects

Use what you find to make something special:

- A slideshow for a birthday or reunion.
- A short storybook for the kids.
- A "story of the week" email or group chat post.
- A timeline of your family's history.

Why Families Love This

- Keeps things organized: no more random files buried in your phone.
- Easy to share: you can copy and paste highlights into group chats or print them into keepsakes.
- Brings stories to life: instead of stories sitting in folders, they become a living, breathing family archive.

Other Simple Tech Tools to Try

- Day One Journal – a beautiful app for capturing quick notes, voice recordings, and photos.
- Descript – lets you edit audio like a Word doc (great for polishing interviews).
- Canva – turn quotes or family sayings into posters or social media graphics.
- Shutterfly / Blurb – print out family storybooks or photo albums.
- Private YouTube Channel – upload videos of interviews to share with family only.

Fun ideas to try:

- Add a **QR code** to a family photo that links to the story behind it.
- Create a **voice memo chain** in WhatsApp where each week, one person shares a memory.
- Make a **"This Day in Our Family's History" post** using highlights from NotebookLM.

The beauty of these tools is that they're simple and flexible. You don't need fancy gear. You don't need to be a tech expert. You just need to start — one story, one upload, one question at a time. Over time, you'll have something truly priceless: a living storybank your family can keep adding to for generations.

Other Tech Solutions to Make It Come Alive

1. StoryBank Apps

- Day One Journal (beautiful, simple journaling app — add voice, text, or photos).
- Notion (create a family "memory hub" with folders for each person, timeline view, tags).
- Evernote / Apple Notes / Google Keep (easy, free, shareable).

2. Transcription & Audio Tools

- Otter.ai: Automatic transcripts with speaker identification.
- Descript: Edit audio like a Word doc, add captions, and polish family interviews into short clips.
- Rev: Paid but very accurate transcription service for key interviews.

3. Story Sharing Platforms

- FamilySearch Memories (free, global archive run by FamilySearch — permanent preservation).
- StoryCorps App (guided questions + upload to the U.S. Library of Congress archive).
- YouTube Private Channels (upload family videos and interviews, set to "private" or "unlisted").

4. Creative Outputs

- Shutterfly / Blurb: Print storybooks or photo books.
- Canva: Turn quotes or stories into graphics or posters.
- iMovie / CapCut: Make short family story videos with background music and captions.

5. Long-Term Archiving

- **Google Drive / Dropbox:** Simple shared folders with naming conventions (e.g., "Interview_Person_LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_YYYY-MM-DD").
- **External hard drive + cloud backup:** For redundancy (one physical, one digital).
- **Internet Archive / Personal Websites:** For families who want something permanent and public.

6. Fun, Interactive Ideas

- **QR Codes on Family Photos:** Scan the photo, hear the story.
- **"Story of the Week" Newsletter:** Auto-generated from NotebookLM highlights.
- **Voice Memo Chain:** Family WhatsApp/Signal group where each week someone posts a voice note about a memory.

Together, these tools can transform the project from *recording stories once* into a **living, breathing family library** that gets used, shared, and passed down.