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.

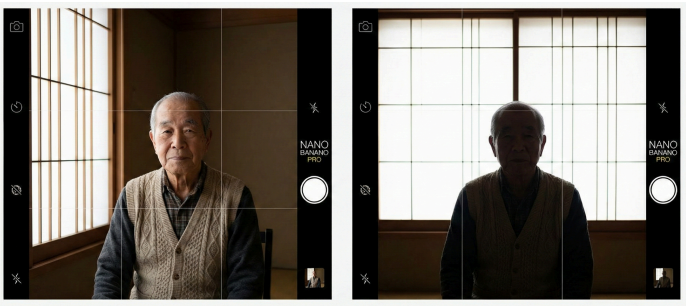
3. Prepare Your Phone

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.



Do **Don't**

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.