

*CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORIES*  
*A MERE INTRODUCTION*



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## **HOLD HARMLESS CLAUSE**

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## JUST A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

The theory of oral history, like any other history theory, has changed over the years and continues to do so, as new thoughts and concepts from historians emerge on a sporadic, yet persistent basis.

The very method of interviewing differs from interviewer to interviewer. Some interviewers prefer walking into an interview armed with a full set of questions; intent on sticking to that set of questions – and only that set of questions - no matter where the interviewee's responses may lead. Other interviewers do very little research and allow the interviewee to pick, choose, and change topics at will.

The majority pursue a road somewhere in the middle; preparing but not so much, as to miss interesting and valuable tidbits that the interviewee may offer. Oral history is not an exact science and probably will never be, simply because it involves decision-making processes, which vary with the individual interviewer and to some extent, the interviewee.

The practice of oral history, in some form or another, goes back a long, long time. It is probable that societies have passed along stories about each other, to each other, from generation to generation, since human beings could first speak. Three thousand years ago, for example, scribes of the Zhou dynasty in China collected the words of the people for the court historians.

In Western society, the use of oral material goes all the way back to early Greek historians Herodotus (in his history of the Persian Wars) and Thucydides (in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*). Each made use of oral reports from witnesses in their works.

In the United States, early oral histories can be traced to the mid-19th century, when California and Wisconsin historians and librarians began an organized effort to collect interviews from early settlers of the West and Midwest.

During the time of the American Civil War (1861-1865), journalists relied heavily on interviews, when ironically, historians were moving away from them. In 1868, President Andrew Johnson, facing impeachment by Congress, gave the first presidential interview, in an attempt to present his case to the public.

Oral histories flourished with the undertaking of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s, which hired unemployed writers to interview and chronicle the lives of thousands of former slaves and recent immigrants.

When the United States entered World War II (1942-1945), President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered all military branches and civilian agencies of the government to prepare records of their wartime experience. At this time, the term “oral history” was attached to interviewing.

The discipline really came into its own in the 1960s and early 1970s, when inexpensive tape recorders became available to document such rising social movements as civil rights, feminism, and anti-Vietnam War protests. The modern procedure of systematically tape-recording interviews owes its origin to Allan Nevins, Pulitzer Prize winner, from Columbia University. [See *Doing Oral History*, pp 1-3.]

## WHY ORAL HISTORY?

Okay, enough about the history of oral history! What exactly is so darn important about “oral history”, anyway? What is it and why should we care about its existence?

Quite simply, an oral history creates an historical document; a written transcript of a person’s life.

During an oral history interview, the interviewee explains what he or she saw, did, felt, and thought before, during and after the events, circumstances, and situations that he or she experienced at one time in his or her life. The interviewee may provide background information about other individuals or opinion as to what other people did, thought, and felt. Details about geological locations or places provide additional historical and social value.

Basically, oral histories record life experiences. Interviewers listen and learn from these interviews or human pieces of insight. History is assembled from these pieces and no one piece is any less important than any other piece. Each piece is as unique as the person who is telling the history. Interviewers have a role and a responsibility in making sure that these pieces are not lost.

Oral history is the gathering of personal memories through recorded interviews. The memories related are experienced firsthand. Oral history is not hearsay, not folklore, and not necessary all interviews.<sup>1</sup>

Oral histories are the collection of eyewitness recollections about the lifetime of the interviewee or "narrator."

An important oral history concept is that individuals are part of the greater society. The individual person is shaped by society and, in turn, that individual shapes society by his or her actions or inactions.

Oral histories offer a snapshot of another person's life, as he or she interacts with persons or events that occurred during that life.

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<sup>1</sup>Pure oral historians may object to the use of the term “oral history” to describe every interview, regardless of whether it was recorded by tape or handwritten. There is a real distinction between a researcher who interviews people for his/her own purpose, to derive information for his/her own book and that of a pure oral historian, who accumulates stock for researcher use.

Oral histories have become more important because of the communication revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. People living now are so much less likely than their forebears of 100 years ago to leave behind written documents, especially of an intimate sort. Phone calls, e-mail, and text messaging have taken the place of mail and concern for privacy issues have resulted in paper shredders taking space in almost every home. People do not write in diaries, as they once did; instead using web pages such as MySpace or Facebook. Even “paper” photographs are becoming scarce, with the wide use of digital cameras, web cameras, and camera phones.

However, the tape recorder and video camera do allow people who would have once written letters or diaries, to leave autobiographies. In this way, oral histories cast a new light on written records and signify that they must be interpreted in a new way. Oral histories, by countering current theories on people or events, can lead to additional investigation and research.

Oral histories allow people to tell their tale, when they may not be able to write it or voice it at the time. Oral histories encourage and enable ordinary citizens to leave an autobiographical account of their lives.

Oral histories, as a compliment to written documentation, can be used to study ordinary people as well as the elite and collectively, those oral histories may provide a story or theory on their own.

Oral histories allow us to “feel” the facts that can only be provided by the one who lived with them. We become emerged in the emotion of the story. And that is the human story.

## WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY, ANYWAY?

Oral history interview tapes and transcripts are archival and historical documents. An oral history interview generally consists of a prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee about his or her life experiences and recording the exchange on audio or videotape.

Oral history does not include random taping and does not refer to sound recordings that lack the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. An oral history is not a television or radio interview.

The tapes of the oral history interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. The interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, placed on exhibition, or other form of public presentation.

An oral history transcript reflects as closely as possible the actual words, speech patterns, and thought patterns of the interviewee.

“Oral history” refers to the collecting of an individual’s spoken memories of his or her life, of people known, and of events witnessed or participated in.

An oral history becomes an oral history only when it has been recorded, transcribed, and made available to researchers. An oral history is a material record of detailed, candid, and complete information.

Often, oral histories can cast a new light on written records and signify that they must be interpreted in a new way. Oral histories, by countering current theories on people or events, can lead to additional investigation and research.

Oral histories allow people to tell their tale, when they may not be able to write it or voice it at the time. Oral histories encourage and enable ordinary citizens to leave an autobiographical account of their lives. They can be used to study ordinary people, as well as the elite and collectively, oral histories may provide a commentary, story, or theory on their own.

In this regard, oral histories can be historically valuable in collective numbers. Collected stories from a group of interviewees regarding the same topic, reinforce individual accounts and show commonality between the lives of the group’s members. Collected oral histories serve as verification, interpretation,

and explanation of our cultural, social, political, economic, and religious ways of life.

Oral histories allow us to “feel” facts that can only be provided by the one who lived the life. We become emerged in the emotion of the story.

HOWEVER, both the interviewer and the researcher must realize, that the interviewee IS human, therefore, imperfect and possibly unreliable, especially under stressful circumstances.

People forget details. Or, they may deliberately give the story they want told or the one that they think the interviewer is looking for. They may fabricate pieces of the story to fill in gaps. They may also unknowingly become influenced by the memories of others.

People remember what THEY think is important.

People remember what was exciting and significant to them and speak from their own points of view. No two people will tell the same story, even if they were standing side by side, when the event occurred.

Memories may be nostalgic; interviewees may enhance the good and block out the bad or vice versa. Everyone thinks about people or places with a certain bias. Sometimes, interviewees do not want to commit their negative thoughts or comments to paper, for fear of appearing unpleasant, jealous, bitter, or resentful. They may even worry about reprisal or retaliation from others.

The interviewer may also facilitate unreliability. Interviewers themselves may be subjective, asking deliberate questions, which reflect one particular side of “the story”. Interviewers may also consciously or unconsciously fabricate the transcript, with excess editing.

The general practice of oral history encourages an unanalyzed interview - interviewers do not generally question the interviewee’s statements; they are merely recorded.

However, an oral historian (and researcher) should evaluate a possible interviewee’s background (knowledge and experience) to weigh the potency of the interview.

If the oral historian wants to publish the interview, he or she should seek to substantiate the interviewee's testimony, with documentation or related oral histories, since he or she cannot visit the scene, as the interviewee remembers it.<sup>2</sup>

While some oral historians prefer to include a brief introduction of the interviewee in the publication and present the oral history without further comment, the interviewer has the ultimate task and responsibility of ensuring to the best of his or her ability that the published interviewee is credible.

No matter what the ultimate intention, the interviewer **MUST** remain objective, before, during, and after the interview.

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<sup>2</sup> A transcript is NOT considered a publication.

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEW?**

### **Think about...**

What is your objective or focus or topic for the project?

Who will be interviewed and why? What is so very important or unique about this particular person - what characteristics set this individual apart from the rest of society?

What do you know about this person already? What do you need to know?

Will you be able to obtain the information that you need for the project in the time limit?

How will you make contact with your interviewee?

Do you have a predisposed notion of the interviewee's character or personality? If you do, then find another interviewee, because your lack of objectivity will influence both the reliability and the integrity of the interview.

### **Arranging the interview...**

Make contact with the interviewee immediately (preferably by phone)

In contacting (telephoning or e-mailing) the person whom you wish to interview, make clear to him or her:

How his or her name was obtained by you,

Who you are and where you are calling from (Ex: CSUCI),

Why you are calling (Ex: to conduct an interview for your oral history class or for the CSUCI Archives), and

Why you feel that his or her life and experiences are important to your project (Ex: contributing member to Ventura County). This will bring in the particular topic/event/person that you want to discuss.

## **You will also want to mention...**

The time limit - normally one hour and a half.

The need for the interviewee's permission to record and make available to researchers, the tape recording and transcript.

The donor agreement and consent form and what signing those documents means (Ex: that CSUCI Archives will retain the original and copyright).

The return of the transcript to the interviewee for corrections and signing.

Where you will conduct the interview – decide mutually.

When you will conduct the interview – decide mutually.

## **Tips for contact...**

Make contact early with your interviewee. This is especially important if you contact him or her via e-mail.

Don't allow yourself to run out of time – if you don't hear back from your potential interviewee within a week, then contact him or her again. If still no response, find another interviewee.

## **A checklist...**

Confirm the meeting time and date - TWICE - once by letter or e-mail 2 weeks before the interview and again, by phone 1 week before.

Get your consent form and donor agreement ready.

Prepare your outline of questions. Find a notepad to bring with you.

Check the tape recording equipment. Become familiar and comfortable with it. Bring extra tapes and batteries.

Locate resources, such as articles, books, or other documents re: the topic that you can discuss with the interviewee.

## **It's all about conduct....(Really.)**

Always remember that the interviewee is doing you a favor, so:

Dress appropriately.

Show up on time.

Always be polite.

Send a "thank-you" letter afterwards.

## **Conduct with class...**

Chat briefly with your interviewee - introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the project, review what you want to specifically discuss, and mention the time limitation. Ask if he or she has any questions before the taping begins.

You should also indicate that if the interviewee wants to discuss something off tape, to let you know immediately. If the interview stops for any reason (discussion, bathroom break, etc.), turn off the recording. You want to establish a rapport with your interviewee. This will allow the both of you to feel comfortable during the actual interviewing process.

## **Be sensitive to delicate issues...**

Know the physical limitations of the interviewee and accommodate them.

## **Remind the interviewee about:**

The time limit.

The consent form and donor agreement and what signing them means (Ex: that CSUCI Archives will retain the original and copyright). [See Forms chapter and Appendix.]

The return of the transcript to the interviewee for corrections and signing.

## RECORDING YOUR INTERVIEW

**Begin each interview session with the following information on tape:**

"This is an interview with \_\_\_\_\_ (state full name, then **spell out names**), which is being conducted on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (place of interview - **spell out if unusual**). The interviewer is \_\_\_\_\_ (state full name, then **spell out names**). Today, we will be discussing: \_\_\_\_\_ (topics or subjects)."

Mark each cassette box and each cassette label c l e a r l y with the name of the interviewee, the date and place of the interview, and, if more than one tape is used per session, write "Tape 1 of \_\_\_\_ (total number)" on the box and label.

Subsequent tapes and tape sides should similarly be identified; otherwise, confusion will occur during the transcribing process when trying to sort out tapes and sessions. Always remember to punch out the tabs on top of the cassette, once the tape is recorded on both sides, so that the tape cannot be altered.

For record-keeping purposes, each interview submitted should be accompanied by a documentation sheet, which notes the following information:

1. Name of interviewee
2. Name of interviewer
3. Place and date(s) of interview
4. An abstract or synopsis of the interview commenting on the highlights of the interview.

During the course of the interview, the interviewee might mention the names of other possible interviewees. These names should be jotted down and attached to the cassette or interview sheet.

## THE INTERVIEWER'S ETHICS

What are your ethical and legal responsibilities as an interviewer?

### **You must:**

Explain the project.

Explain the donor agreement and consent form.

Explain the transcript signing process.

Be courteous and polite.

Conduct your interview with sensitivity. Conduct your research with sensitivity.

Remember to obtain specific permission before conducting interviews with people who knew/know the interviewee.

Remember that confidential records also require specific permission.

Keep in mind that the interviewee is a person, with feelings and thoughts and there are some things that she or he may not want to discuss or have published.

Not commit any crime relating to the oral history interview.

### **When in doubt – don't:**

If you feel awkward or uncomfortable in asking for sensitive or potentially damaging information, then don't ask. Your hesitation reminds you that there is a human being with feelings, sitting right across from you. You are an oral historian, not a journalist or a detective. Details are important, but maintaining a respect for privacy is even more important. Sometimes, interviewees simply need a moment to compose themselves for sensitive discussions or they may actually be evaluating your behavior as a decision-making factor in whether to talk openly about specific individuals or events.

Keep cool and do not press for information that is not willingly given. You must earn the trust and respect of your interviewee.

**Keep in mind that character defacement could open a box of libel or slander issues.** If the interviewee brings up potentially sensitive or confidential information – stop the recording and ask if he or she has a problem with the information going on record for other people to read. If the answer is “yes”, you can take the information, but place it under confidential seal. If the answer is “no”, you can continue with the interview and transcribe it. **HOWEVER**, consider all possible legal concerns, **BEFORE** allowing that particular portion of the interview to be heard or read by researchers (see page 31).

## **AMERICAN HISTORY ASSOCIATION'S INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES**

1. Interviews should be recorded on tape, but only after the person to be interviewed has been informed of the mutual rights and responsibilities involved in oral history, such as editing, confidentiality, disposition, and dissemination of all forms of the record. Interviewers should obtain legal releases and document any agreements with interviewees.
2. The interviewer should strive to prompt informative dialogue through challenging and perceptive inquiry, should be grounded in the background and experiences of the person being interviewed, and, if possible, should review the sources relating to the interviewee before conducting the interview.
3. To the extent practicable, interviewers should extend the inquiry beyond their immediate needs to make each interview as complete as possible for the benefit of others.
4. The interviewer should guard against possible social injury to or exploitation of interviewees and should conduct interviews with respect for human dignity.
5. Interviewers should be responsible for proper citation of oral history sources in creative works, including permanent location.
6. Interviewers should arrange to deposit their interviews in an archival repository that is capable of both preserving the interviews and making them available for general research. Additionally, the interviewer should work with the repository in determining the necessary legal arrangements.

## **PART I: WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEWER?**

### **LISTENING!**

An interview is not a dialogue. The whole point is to encourage the interviewee to tell his or her story. Readers and interviewees don't really care about your knowledge, opinions, or experiences.

#### **Listen for cues and leads - material you aren't familiar with...**

Be alert and ready to follow up with additional questions.

Give your interviewee a chance to think of what he or she wants to say. Keep quiet and wait - count to ten slowly before asking another question.

#### **Silence is okay...**

Don't let your mind or your mouth race ahead to the next question. You will make your interviewee nervous. Time shouldn't be an issue to either of you.

Let the interviewee know you're listening – use little sounds or phrases such as, “uh-huh”, “I see”, or “wow”!. Nodding is also an option.

Feedback is essential but...don't interrupt a good story...even a bad one!  
Sometimes, the bad stories provide additional research material!

#### **Take notes...**

If the interviewee digresses off your topic, let him or her finish talking and then, either (a) ask follow-up questions (which may take you on an even better course of interview) or (b) guide him or her back as POLITELY as you can. “That's very interesting, but what do you think of this?” or “I have a question about...”

Additional information may be useful later, so take notes (either mentally or physically) if the interviewee says something that's not on your outline. You can come back to it later and probably should.

During or after the interview, note any usual names and ask the interviewee for the correct spelling.

## **Just Listen ...**

Never, EVER argue, challenge, or contradict the interviewee. You are there to collect as much information as possible.

Never put the interviewee on the defensive.

If you suspect that the interviewee is misremembering or has, in fact, contradicted him or herself, very politely state that YOU'VE misunderstood and can he or she clarify the issue for you... "Now, I thought..." or "I think I've misunderstood..." or "I've read/heard..."

## **PART II: WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEWER?**

### **RESEARCHING!**

Learn as much about the person and/or topic(s) as you can, so that you can ask intelligent and probing questions.

Let the interviewee know that you haven't just picked his or her name out of the phonebook by asking thoughtful and researched questions. This will make the interviewee feel special, as a unique contributor to your project. Your interest will encourage the interviewee to tell more tales.

### **Use an outline...**

Be prepared with an outline, instead of a formal set of questions. This will allow you to listen with more flexibility, while following your interviewee's stories. Your eyes will be off your notepad and on your interviewee's. Eye contact is very important in interviewing.

### **But - don't become too much of a guide...**

The purpose of an outline is to enable you to guide the interview along, usually on a chronological path. Your investigation and preparation will help refresh your interviewee's memory in the recall of historical events - dates, people, locations.

However, if you guide or restrict your interviewee's comments too much, he or she will automatically feel restrained and restricted. You will detect an immediate change in the demeanor, attitude, and even the physical expression of the interviewee, from casual to apprehensive.

While you maintain "control" over the interview with formatted questions, always stay flexible and alert to the interviewee's responses. The resulting interview will be more detailed and contain more unforeseen information, if you maintain a listening approach and are willing to adjust your line of questioning to the conversation's disclosures.

## **PART III: WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEWER?**

### **ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS!**

Before the interview, ask the interviewee to notify you immediately, if he or she feels that you missed (skipped over) something pertinent during the interview. This encourages interviewee participation and ensures that you receive more information than probably anticipated.

Ask open-ended questions, which require more of an answer than “yes” or “no”. Start many of your sentences with “Why” “When” “How” “Where” and “What”.

### **Think about your questions...**

Try not to require long, complicated answers (you will get them anyway).

Remember that some interviewees may not comprehend as well in hearing, as they do in seeing. If there is hesitation in a response, re-ask your question, choosing different wording. Generally, the interviewee should only have to answer one or two straightforward questions per response. For example, “What is your wife’s name?” “When were you married and where?” “Do you have children?” “What are their names?”

Don’t state your opinions in the conversation - ever. Ex: “I think Tom Jones was a real jerk.” This statement (a) inserts your obvious bias, (b) lends the potential for a mitigated response by the interviewee, and (c) places the interviewee in the uncomfortable position of having to agree or disagree with you.

Do not approach delicate questions with “I know” or “I think” such and such - instead - use “I understand/heard/read” or “I’ve been told” that...“Mr. Jones was a very hard man to work for...” Again, you do not want to insert your opinion into the equation.

Ask one question at a time. Be silent - and - wait for the answer.

Lead the interviewee into the event or person that you want to focus on, with a chronological time passage.

Don't worry if your questions aren't as beautifully phrased as you would like them to be. BUT, don't be too informal - use proper grammar, above all!

Interviewers must be sensitive to the feelings of the interviewee. Abruptly dismissing areas of his or her life that the interviewee brings up for discussion, is both rude and unwise. This unscheduled information may prove quite relevant to the interviewer's overall outline.

Remember that just because you aren't hearing the expected answer to your question, doesn't mean that you're not receiving relevant information. Automatic dismissal of volunteered information on the interviewer's part may mean the loss of important information and a missed opportunity for valuable research.

### **Begin with the familiar...**

As indicated above, interviewers need to spend some time establishing a rapport with the interviewee. This can be done (off tape) by making small talk and briefing outlining the topics that will be brought up during the interview.

A chronological biography or family history is the recommended procedure to begin the interview. It is an effective way to break the ice, since "family" is an easily identifiable and familiar subject. It also serves as an efficient introduction of the interviewee to the researcher. The biography should provide sufficient researchable information about the interviewee, in case additional documentation or evidence of the reliability of the content of the interview is needed.

This way of presentation also allows the interviewer to move smoothly along and work up to the central issue(s) of the interview - the particular points in life that the interviewer is most interested in capturing. In addition, it also enables the interviewer to understand the context of the issue(s) in the life of the interviewee and may provide data for further questions or research.

Ask short and easy family history questions: "Where were you born?" "What is your father and mothers' name...?" "How many siblings do you have?" Ask follow-up questions: "What are their names?"

## **Don't hesitate to ask...**

Be curious - ask the interviewee to explain things to you, when he or she is finished with a thought.

Ask for spellings on unusual names.

Get a definition on words and phrases you aren't familiar with - or that you don't think the readers will be familiar with.

Ask the interviewee to describe people and places, and physical things, if not a common or well known item.

### A list of possible topics to begin the oral history

Childhood days - grandparents, parents, siblings, dramatic and specific occurrences or memories.

Education experiences.

Occupations and work life.

Religious experiences.

Community events and involvement.

Travel experiences.

Political involvement.

Special hobbies: art, music, dance, sports, books.

Experiences and involvement with war.

Memorable characters, events, and incidents.

Marital experiences: first date, wedding plans, children, grandchildren

These questions (and others like them) must be evaluated by the interviewer as relevant to the overall interview. If the interview revolves around family history, then family background must be explored in greater detail. If not, then a general background biography is sufficient.

It is sometimes difficult for an interviewee to describe a person. Ask about the person's appearance. From there, the interviewee is more likely to move into a character or relationship description. It is important to realize that the interviewee is remembering many years' worth of descriptions, so allow him or her the time to do so.

## **Establish specific data if possible...**

Try to establish where the interviewee was or what his/her role was in the event. “Where were you at the time of the [San Francisco] earthquake?” “Were you able to talk to any of the survivors?” “What did you do immediately after the earthquake?” “What are the most vivid memories that you have about that time?” “How did it affect people you knew?” “How did it affect you?”

If you find yourself at a loss for questions, remember that description is key. Pretend that you are writing a book and that the questions and answers of your interview are the only descriptors to the characters and places in your story. You want ask questions which will help the reader visualize the world as the interviewee knew it. Strive to obtain as many adjectives (words that describe people, places, or things) as possible.

People can be described physically, emotionally and by their actions, inactions, and reactions. Places can be described geologically, environmentally, and how they affected a person’s sense of well being.

## **AGAIN: Remind your interviewee at the beginning of the interview about...**

The time limit.

The consent form and donor agreement and what signing those documents means (Ex: that CSUCI Archives will retain the original and copyright).

The return of the transcript to him or her for corrections (if applicable).

## **PART IV: WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERVIEWER?**

### **CONCLUDING WITH A “THANK-YOU!”**

Look for a natural wrap-up question - something that causes or prompts the interviewee to reflect or draw conclusions upon his or her life, to compare recent events with the past, or to comment about specific events or individuals.

### **How you end an interview is just as important as how you begin it...**

Ask if there is anything else the interviewee would like to share. Was there something that you missed, that the interviewee feels would be an important contribution to the interview?

Let the interviewee know how important he or she is to the project and how much you appreciate the contribution and help.

Ask if he or she would please sign the donor agreement and consent form (if not already done).

Remind once again, that a transcript will be sent for editing. He or she will receive a final transcript for his/her records.

## THE BUSINESS OF FORMS AND LETTERS

**Remember: Oral histories are legal copyrightable documents. You must have a signed donor form, even if the interviewee wants to remain anonymous or wants the tape and/or transcript held in restriction or confidence.**

### **A Run-Down of the Forms:<sup>3</sup>**

The Oral History Donor Agreement -- The only form that you must absolutely, positively have!

I actually use two forms: The Release Form and Donor Agreement and the Informed Consent Form. Both of these are in the appendix and once you look them over, you will understand why I think that they are both necessary and vital.

I have two strong professional beliefs about conducting oral histories. (1) I want to make sure that the oral histories I collect are legal (and therefore, useable) in every sense of the word and (2) I want my interviewees to feel comfortable about giving their oral histories to me, this institution, and the general public at large.

Oral histories are very personal in nature and there is a great deal of vulnerability and yes, trust, involved, which I don't want to violate. It is very important that interviewees are given the opportunity to decide what part of their lives they want opened to the community and what they don't, and when.

Some will be completely comfortable opening everything up all at once and some will want to hold back tidbits, for a while. It's okay to let them have control over what is essentially theirs, to begin with. It's also very important that they understand how their oral histories might be utilized, once they've deeded them over to the institution. Open communication and the correct documentation will eliminate misunderstandings and potential problems in the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Forms may be found in *Oral History Manual* by Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, 2002.

The reason why we use a donor agreement in the first place is because Federal copyright law grants copyright protection for works created after January 1, 1978, for the life of the author, plus an additional 70 years.

So, if the interview has a possibility of either being published or donated to an archive for researcher use, a written release -- an ORAL HISTORY DONOR AGREEMENT -- is absolutely necessary or else, that interview can't be used, until after the death of the interviewee, plus 70 years. The agreement simply gives us permission to by-pass the law.

When you ask the interviewee to sign the donor agreement and consent form, keep the process simple and informal. Explain all aspects of the forms.

Bring the agreement up to the interviewee during the initial phone conversation and again, in your letter of confirmation of the interview. For example: "In order for me to legally transcribe your tape, open the transcript up for research, and deposit both with the \_\_\_\_\_ (Ex: CSUCI Archives), I have to produce a signed agreement by you, which states that you don't mind if someone else reads your transcript (or hears your tape)...." At this time, you can mention that the Consent Form allows for issues of confidentiality or anonymity.

### **You need permission...**

A person's unpublished words are his or her property and should NEVER be used without consent.

It is a legal necessity in order for you (and the archives) to open the transcript or tape for researcher use.

### **The transfer of rights...**

By signing the donor form, the right for reprint moves to the archives or department. Anyone wanting to re-publish the transcript in any part, has to obtain permission from the archives or department. *In this manner, the archives or department can protect the interviewee, by refusing such re-publication.*

The interviewee has the option of approving the tape to transcript process and the researcher reading or citing of the transcript, *BUT not of re-publication of the transcript by a third party.*

### The Biographical Information Form

- Is supplied with the tape and transcript for the archives.
- Is given to the interviewee to fill out.

### Interview Information Form

- Is supplied with the tape and transcript for the archives.

### The Initial Contact Letter

- Is only sent if the potential interviewee cannot be reached by telephone or e-mail.
- Not to be used, unless you have left enough time for a response.

### The Interview Confirmation Letter

- Is sent within first week of initial telephone call or e-mail.
- Confirms the date, time, and location of the interview.
- Details the topics you want to cover.
- Mentions the donor agreement.
- Provides contact information.
- Thanks the interviewee.

### The Thank You Letter\*

- Is sent within a week or two after the interview.
- Reminds the interviewee that his or her copy of the transcription will be coming for review/edits and signature **or** that a transcription will not be made.
- Includes a copy of the signed donor agreement and consent form.
- Leaves contact information.
- Thanks the interviewee.

\*[This language may be included within the Approval of Transcript Letter.]

### The Approval Of Transcript Letter

- Is sent to the interviewee after the transcript is completed.

- Contains a Transcript Approval Signature Page. This page asks the interviewee to sign the approval and return it. [It is merely a formality, since this language is also included in the donor agreement.]
- Encloses a copy of the transcript, with a self-addressed stamped envelope.

## **THIS GOES WITH THE...**

### Transcript Edit Form

- Provides formalized space for the interviewee to indicate changes, additions, and/or deletions to transcript.
- Informs the interviewee that if the edit form isn't returned to the archives by a certain time, it will be assumed that everything in the transcript is correct.
- Asks him/her to return the transcript edit page.

Note: If the interviewee makes any changes to the transcript, then the tape itself must be placed in confidential status, as it is no longer an accurate representation of the oral history interview.

Once the transcript is finished, a copy of the transcript is mailed to the interviewee, along with the self-addressed stamped envelope, the Transcript Edit Form, and a copy of the signed Donor Agreement and Consent Form.

A Final Note: Be sure to read over the typed transcript, before placing it in the hands of a researcher. This is a good idea, particularly, if you provided the typist with instructions on what not to type from the interview. You will also need to check for typing errors and to ensure that no possible slander material exists in the document.

### **A Forms Checklist in Order of Use<sup>4</sup>**

Oral History Donor Agreement - Signed by interviewee and interviewer either directly before or after the interview. Is given with the tape and transcription to the holding institution. Interviewee receives a signed copy.

Biographical Information Form - Completed by interviewer, held at archive.

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<sup>4</sup> Forms may be found in *Oral History Manual* by Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, 2002.

Interview Information Form - Completed by interviewer, held at archive.

Initial Contact Form - Completed by interviewer, held at archive.

Interview Confirmation Letter - Completed by interviewer, sent to interviewee.

Thank You Letter - Completed by interviewer, sent to interviewee. [Language may be included within the Approval of Transcript Letter.]

Approval of Transcript Letter\* - Completed by interviewer, sent to interviewee with Edit Form and with copy of signed Donor Agreement and Consent Form.

The Transcript Edit Form\* - Completed by interviewer, sent to Interviewee for signature and return. Self-addressed stamped envelope included.

\* **If you do not intend to have a transcript done immediately or at all, then indicate this in correspondence to your interviewee, so that confusion does not arise in the future.**

One option to transcription is the creation of an index of the tape cassette. The index follows the digital counter of the recorder; notable topics coincide with their placement on the tape.

For instance: "President Richard Nixon's economic policy: Tape 1, Side 1, Counter Number 25-85."

## ISSUES OF LIBEL AND SLANDER...

### [THE FIRST AMENDMENT WON'T HELP YOU HERE!]

A donor agreement does NOT absolve you of all legal responsibilities, especially under libel, which is defined as, “written, printed, or pictorial statement that damages a person by defaming his character or exposing him to ridicule” (Am. Heritage Dictionary).

Slander is defined as, “1: the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another's reputation or 2: a false and defamatory oral statement about a person” by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

The beauty and uniqueness of an oral history interview is that it offers commentaries and opinions, which are by nature, biased and personal. In this regard, the stories of an interviewee are both a blessing and a curse.

On the one hand, the researcher is allowed to relive the life of an interviewee through descriptive remembrances, but on the other hand, the researcher must always keep in mind that opinions about persons and their involvement in scenarios of events are only that, opinions. It can be a tricky two step dance.

We love oral histories, because as first hand accounts, they include emotion, thoughts, and personality galore. But, when certain disparaging remarks are made by the interviewee against other persons, precautions should be taken by the interviewer to ensure that these particular comments are not passed on to the general public.

**As a rule of thumb, comments which allege criminal, civil, or moral transgressions, should be deleted from the researcher transcript, if such wrongdoings have not been proven in a court of law.<sup>5</sup>**

In California, tale bearers can be as liable as tale makers and a California court was recently called upon to decide a defamation issue arising from an oral history taken by the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley in the early 1990s.

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<sup>5</sup> If your institution has an Institutional Review Board (IRB), immediately become familiar with its policies and procedures.

*In Hebrew Academy of San Francisco et al, v. Richard N. Goldman*, 2005 Cal. App. LEXIS 765, the Court addressed issues of whether normal defamation “rules” applied to oral histories and if so, when a statute of limitations would begin to run on a potential cause of action.<sup>6</sup>

Firstly, the Court held that “a cause of action for defamation, based upon a statement in a book or newspaper, accrues when the book or newspaper is first generally distributed to the public. This application of the single-publication rule was an exception to the general rule that each (re)publication of a defamatory statement gives rise to a new cause of action for defamation. Actual knowledge of the alleged defamation is not a factor in determining when the statute of limitations will begin.

Secondly, the *Hebrew Academy* court took this rule one step further and provided that the single-publication rule applies not only to books and newspapers that are published with general circulation, but also to oral history publications, that are given only limited circulation and are not generally distributed to the public.

These rulings basically force California oral history programs to take editorial responsibility for all statements that are included in oral histories that are published (made available to the public) for up to one year. After that one year elapses, the statute of limitations will have run and the single-publication rule will apply.

### **You can have two transcripts to resolve a potential issue...**

When in doubt, produce two transcripts: (a) one which makes the statement(s) and is subsequently **put it under seal** for a number of years and (b) one which deletes those references and is held open for public research. Of course in this instance, the tape which contains the biased comments must remain confidential.

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions/documents/S134873.PDF>

## CONDUCTING A FAMILY HISTORY

There always seems to be one family relative who retains the family lore, who can identify every obscure photo in the family album, and who corresponds with the long-lost family kin.

Older family members, especially, are repositories of stories about the family's past: immigration or emigration, old neighborhoods, military service, marriages, births, and deaths, famous or infamous family members, culture, religion, political endeavors, education, social, and economic status.

Family histories tell not only the "who" and the "what" but the "why" - the motives and attitudes of the participants - their actions and reactions to the immediate world around them and beyond.

Families reflect their times and communities, so questions can be directed towards family life during the Great Depression, the Second World War, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, and other sociohistorical periods.

Oral histories can record a family's daily pattern of living: how the household was organized, how the family money was spent, who watched what program on television, who did what chores and when, who sat where at the dining table, and what types of meals were served. Data from individuals of a family tree can be combined to make generalizations about social patterns within the family, during certain time periods.

Traditional sources of family history, such as the family Bible, school diplomas, employment ID cards, letters, photo albums, military badges, athletic certificates, and scrapbooks provide preliminary research for the interview and can document its content.

Family pasts may include stories of feuds or other stressful incidents that may be painful to revisit, but vital for understanding family dynamics and ongoing or ended relationships.

Family members experience the same events, yet react and remember quite differently from each other – depending on their age, attitude, placement in the family, and expectations overall.

**Generally, a family history interview should begin at the beginning, as far back as possible, and continue in chronological date order. A brief biography of the interviewee should always be conducted within the interview.**

Specific methods to arrange family histories include:

*Topical:* focus on a particular historical event, such as World War II; a special family event, such as a wedding; or a place associated with the family over the years, such as a farm or neighborhood;

*Autobiographical:* one person's life history;

*Genealogical:* what the interviewee tells about ancestors;

*Skills or occupations:* descriptions and demonstrations of how things were done in the past;

*Social history:* includes ethnic culture, religious practices, gender roles, everyday life, et cetera; and

*Folklore:* favorite stories, songs, poems; local legends; games and other pastimes.

Interest in family history (or genealogy, its official term), seems to have taken on a life of its own in the past few years. In this regard, the internet has emerged as an extremely efficient research tool. [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), [Gen.roots](http://Gen.roots), and [Usgenweb.org](http://Usgenweb.org) are just some examples of excellent resources to examine, whether you are a beginning researcher or an old pro.

There are probably genealogical and historical societies (and clubs) which are located in your own neighborhood. They offer documentation, investigative assistance, and research services. Genealogical documentation and research guides can also be found at your local public library.

Remember, however, that family histories should be documented as much as possible, to lend authentication to the interview and the general rules of oral history professional and legal conduct must be abided.

## A COMMUNITY'S HISTORY

What exactly is “community history?” A community can be defined loosely as any group of people who share a common identity, organizational affiliation, or occupation. A “community” then, is not necessarily just a neighborhood, town, city, or county. A community could be a university, a social club, a veterans’ organization, a place of worship, or even a workplace. As such, communities differ considerably.

Oral historians help to broaden traditional notions of what constitutes a community’s history, by looking not only at its social or political structures, but at its historical development, economic growth, occupational and educational backgrounds, sexual orientation, and age, ethnic and religious compositions of its population.

Oral history projects help preserve lost communities, through the recordation of memories. Members of communities should be encouraged to document their past through oral histories, manuscripts, and photographs.

Some community members may be initially hesitant to share their memories, but over time and with demonstration of interest by oral historians, members soon realize how each person contributes to the community history, by sharing a little of his or her own family life.

Projects tend to achieve great success in neighborhoods with strong community organizations such as churches and synagogues, civic associations and social clubs. These organizations are more likely to take charge of finding interviewees, check up on the interviewer and interviewee, and ensure that the oral history was completed.

People may live in the same region, but actually be several miles apart and therefore, experience circumstances, situations, or events differently. Some cultures, religions, or ethnic groups have been deliberately left out of history books, giving them a sense of little contribution to their community’s history.

Oral histories emphasize how important each person’s experience is/was and that there is more common ground than not between communities. Through community oral histories, we see a particular portion of history as a story of many, not just a tale of one.

Some communities may be suspicious of oral history projects and consider them intrusive. Disturbing events of the past may discourage the community from welcoming oral historians. In this case, research is necessary to determine how to shift the focus of the project - perhaps onto another group or segment of the community, to encourage a comfortable relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

An oral historian must be sensitive to and understanding of the range of emotions and opinions that may encompass a community, especially one that has endured dramatic changes or situations. Residents may require a few years to calm their tensions, oppositions, and fears.

Often, people simply need time to disassociate themselves with the unpleasant event or individual. An oral historian must be willing to wait. Trust must be built between oral historians and communities, for successful oral histories to be obtained.

## ORAL HISTORY AND ORAL EVIDENCE

### HOW DO THEY WORK TOGETHER?

Oral evidence stems from the circumstances of an event and is not oral history per se. A police report taken from a witness of a crime is an example of oral evidence.

Whether written or oral, evidence must be convincing and verifiable. Both interviewer and researcher should treat oral evidence as cautiously as any other form of evidence. A statement is not necessarily truer if written down at the time, than if recalled later in testimony.

For instance, some interviewees' remarks are self-serving: they remember selectively, recall only events that cast themselves in a positive light, and always seem to get the better of their opponents.

Sometimes, the interviewee honestly cannot remember names, dates, and places, but will attempt to fill in the gaps with information that he or she thinks is correct, without informing the interviewer. And of course, sometimes, interviewees deliberately provide negative information as a means of revenge or retribution.

Interviewers themselves can be faulty for addressing only one side of an issue; ignoring diversity in the choice to interview people with similar opinions about a particular person or event.<sup>7</sup>

Oral history is a critical addition to oral evidence. A trained interviewer can guide an interviewee through events that he or she may not have thought about for years. Questions can prompt an interviewee to talk about occurrences that he or she may have skipped over, when the comments were originally written down. Thoughts, feelings, and perceptions may surface, other than just the facts.

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<sup>7</sup> These are problems that occur in oral histories, as well.

Properly done, an oral history interprets and defines written records that contain oral evidence. An oral history can also make sense out of decisions and events that stem from oral evidence.

### **PUBLISHING ORAL HISTORY**

An oral historian's goal (and that of a researcher) is to collect oral documentation that is complete, accurate, and reliable. If he or she intends to incorporate the oral history into a book or article, a higher sense of professional skepticism is applied.

In this regard, verification from other sources is absolutely necessary to evaluate contradictory material and enable the researcher to draw his or her own conclusions. In general, published oral histories are held to a higher standard of certification of authenticity.

Historians "reconstruct events...from a mixture of sources, balancing the reliability of one piece of data against another, arranging them in a coherent pattern to make sense out of what happened." [*Doing Oral History*, p. 104.]

As a rule of thumb, an oral history presented in a publication should not remain unaccompanied by other historical documentation. If written and oral information contradict each other, the researcher must dig deeper to determine which is more accurate, unless contradiction is the key to the issue.

Sometimes, interviewees will recall events in the form of past conversations ("...so, she said to me..."). People reconstruct dialogue not only in oral histories, but, in letters and diaries and the results can be treacherous for those wanting to publish the "truth".

Interviewers, when hearing such dialogue, should measure the conversation with what they already know (or don't know) about the subject and even the interviewee.

An oral history may be cited alone, depending on the information it provides, how it is arranged in the publication, and why it is utilized. A personal description, the expression of opinion, or the telling of a colorful anecdote allows the citation of the interview as a single source.

The more controversial the subject, however, the less the interview can remain trustworthy. It is always advisable to obtain written documentation or other oral histories to substantiate the focal oral history.

Authors will often use narratives to embrace oral histories. A “narrative” is generally understood as 'an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account'.

A narrative can be spoken or written, but as it is by definition a story, it is generally regarded as a prepared presentation. A narrative may contain oral histories, but it is not an oral history itself. Alex Haley’s *Roots*, is a prime example of a narrative.

When a tale is recited by both the interviewer and the interviewee, the chance is always present that the interviewer or editor may take liberties, by adding or deleting thoughts or actions (and notions of thoughts and actions), to make the story more appealing and exciting, but that would not occur in a pure interview publication.

Caution and awareness must be routinely exercised by the interviewer/writer when creating the narrative, as it is the interviewee’s story that is being recited - not the interviewer’s.

Should an oral history speak for itself, without interpretation? Some oral history publications literally speak for themselves - that is, with little involvement required from the author. Critics argue that this form of presentation is utilized merely to relieve the author of the burden of writing or research or responsibility of verification.

Another argument against this lack of author accountability is that the author’s own arrangement and choice of interviews may be offered within a biased and subjective staging, without forthright notice to the reader. Fans of this approach, however, argue that this “hands off” technique represents the purest form of oral history conduct.

As with any oral history and most certainly with this particular form, the burden clearly and definitively rests upon the researcher’s shoulders to authenticate the oral history before publication. “Caveat Emptor!” Let the Buyer Beware!

Most published oral histories have been edited, condensed, and highlighted. In some cases, the testimony may be rearranged for chronological and narrative purposes.

Some oral histories are published without much in the way of introduction to the interviewee and some are published in parts or sections or even one-liner statements in response to a general theme. The noted oral historian, Studs Terkel, has been both praised and criticized for this type of approach to oral history.

Historians, in general, set out to obtain information using one of two methods. The first is to prove or disprove a theory or thesis. The second is to simply find out all they can about a chosen subject. From either, they write and as they do, they automatically discard information for various reasons.

Oral historians, on the other hand, should be encouraged to retain as much of the original interview as possible, for the simple reason that it's all we really have to connect us with the interviewee, on a personal level.

So, how much editing is acceptable for publication?

The question really becomes, how much editing is too much? Regarding the book, *American Dreams, Lost and Found*, one interviewee complained that the interviewer/author "applied his thoughts to my words and came up with a [new] version." [*Doing Oral History*, p. 102.]

Some editing and rearranging of interviews for clarification of tangible material may be appropriate, so long as the original meaning is retained. The ultimate goal is to sharpen the focus, without putting words or intentions in the interviewee's mouth (and onto the page) or altering the essence of what was actually said.

The choice of words, the dictation, the slang, even the pauses before answering questions in the transcript, all tell us more about our interviewee, they we could ever read in a book. So, while, it is perfectly acceptable (and probably very much appreciated by the researcher), that the third "um" or "ah" of every sentence is deleted from the transcript, oral historians should edit conservatively and conscientiously.

Adjectives can be tricky things and are generally best left alone to their original form. Deletions may be employed, as long as they are indicated in the standard manner of ellipses and the original transcript or tape is available for further researcher use.

Researchers should never edit or eliminate the interviewer's questions from the transcript or tape, once the oral history has been taken. Without the enumeration of the questions in the transcript, the basic dialogue of the oral history is lost.

Some subjects may not be discussed, because the interviewer asked nothing about them. Other subjects are brought up, because the interviewer wanted to know about them. By leaving the questions in the transcript, oral historians confirm what questions elicited which responses and those responses (or lack thereof) may facilitate the need for another oral history at a later date.

Adding to or severely editing an oral history really creates a false interview. When an author/interviewer mixes "possible" fact or conjecture with oral history, the oral history itself becomes watered down. The interviewer/transcriber has essentially added in his or her own opinion and thus, distorted the interviewee's version, without the reader knowing it.

The bottom ethical line is, if you present facts about your interviewee, make sure they are facts. Inference, assumption, speculation, and supposition from the interviewer do not make for a valid oral history.

Yes, it is true; there is always some bias on our part as interviewers. Bias begins with determining who to interview, what questions to ask, which interviews to include in what book volume, in which order, and how much of the original interview to publish.

In this way, it can be argued that even if the interviewer refrains from adding an overt interpretation or review into the transcription, he or she is still controlling the reading material.

At a minimum, the interviewer of an oral history subject should provide basic disclosure for the reader: background of the interviewee, why the particular interviewee was interviewed, and some analysis as to why the interviewee said what he or she said.

The additional information provided by the author conveys to the reader that the author actually cares about the integrity of the material presented and has done the research to ensure the accuracy.

When oral histories are cited in publications, the proper form of an oral history source is:

Beth Campbell Short [*name of interviewee*], interviewed by Margot H. Knight, 23 April-17 August 1987, transcripts [*or tape*], Women in Journalism Project, Washington Press Club Foundation, Washington, D.C. [*archives*].

## **A CONCLUSION, OF SORTS**

One of the most interesting characteristics about oral history is its distinct individuality as a contributor to the social science world of history. Its uniqueness, however, serves as both a help and a hindrance.

When exact rules are not present, problems arise because interviewers, feeling too comfortable with their freedom, neglect common sense, as well as mandated legal and ethical responsibilities.

On the other hand, the comfortable manner which we utilize in conducting our interviews allows us to obtain personal information that might not otherwise be voluntarily provided.

It seems then, that logically, we must meet in the middle.

Perhaps it is here where the Golden Rule should most apply. Treat your interviewee, as you would want to be treated. Be professional and conscious of your ethical and legal obligations. Your reputation and that of the institution that you represent, depends on it.

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## APPENDIX<sup>8</sup>

### SAMPLES OF:

1. Initial Contact Letter
2. Confirmation Letter
3. Release Form and Donor Agreement
4. Informed Consent Form
5. Thank You Letter (with correction form for transcript)
6. Thank You Letter (permission to open tape)
7. Thank You Letter (tape closed to researchers)
8. Transcription Correction Form

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<sup>8</sup> Additional forms may be found in *Oral History Manual* by Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, 2002.

## APPENDIX 1

January 16, 2008

NAME  
ADDRESS

Re: Oral History Program at CSUCI

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am currently a student at \_\_\_\_\_ (*school*) and am enrolled in a \_\_\_\_\_ (*subject*) class entitled, \_\_\_\_\_ (*title*). For my final class project, I am required to interview someone who is \_\_\_\_\_ (*criteria*). Would you be willing to allow me to conduct an oral history regarding your \_\_\_\_\_ (*experience/establishment of/participation in/activity in/with/about*)?

The interview will last no longer than two hours and can be conducted at either your home or at \_\_\_\_\_ (*other place where you feel comfortable*), at your convenience.

My interview must be conducted before \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*). Kindly advise me by \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*) if you are interested in conducting this oral history. My telephone number is \_\_\_\_\_ (*phone*) and my e-mail address is \_\_\_\_\_ (*e-mail*).

Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,

STUDENT  
PHONE NUMBER

## APPENDIX 2

January 16, 2008

NAME  
ADDRESS

Re: Oral History Program at CSUCI

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

As per our conversation on \_\_\_\_\_, I would like to confirm our oral history interview date of \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_ a./p.m to take place at \_\_\_\_\_. The interview will take one to two hours to complete. We can always stop at any point during the interview for breaks.

A tape recording of your interview will be made, with your permission. You will be asked to sign two forms: (1) a Consent Form and (2) a Donor Agreement. Copies of the forms are attached to this letter. **Please read them carefully.** A transcript may be made of your interview and if it is, you will receive a draft transcript of the interview and asked to edit and approve it for finalization.

Should you require additional information, have questions or comments regarding the oral history interview or the Donor Agreement and Consent Form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I thank you in advance for your courtesy.

Very truly yours,

STUDENT  
PHONE NUMBER

Enclosures

Copy of Donor Agreement and Consent Form

## APPENDIX 3

### Release Form and Donor Agreement

In consideration for the audio recording, editing, and preservation of my oral history interview by the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**] of California State University Channel Islands:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [**name of interviewee**], of \_\_\_\_\_, [**address**] hereby relinquish and transfer my audio interview to the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**], so that it may be transcribed and made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, or broadcast in any medium or form that the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**] deems appropriate, subject to the terms of the Informed Consent Form.

By signing this form, I understand that I am conveying to the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**], all legal title and literary property rights that I have or may be deemed to have in my interview, as well as my right, title, and interest in any copyright that may be secured under the laws now or later in force and effect in the United States of America. My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of: reproduction, distribution, preparation, or derivative works, public performance, public display, as well as all renewals and extensions.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Signature of Interviewer]

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Signature of Interviewee]

## APPENDIX 4

### Informed Consent

1. I hereby agree to participate in an interview in connection with the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [and/or the University Archives] of California State University Channel Islands. I understand that I will be asked about \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I understand that the interview will be audio taped, may be videotaped, may be transcribed, may be duplicated, may be converted to another medium, and may be digitally reproduced for audio research. In the interview, I understand that I will be identified by name, unless I request confidentiality. I may also be identified by name in any transcript (whether verbatim or edited) or audio version of such interview. **I understand that if a transcript is not made of the audio tape, then the interview on audio tape will stand as is - without any editing.**
3. **I understand that I may choose to remain anonymous and if I do, my name will not appear in the researcher transcript or referred to in any material regarding or contained in the interview.** (Names will appear in original transcript.) In the case of choosing to remain anonymous, my interview will only be identified to the researcher by an internal oral history tracking number.
4. **I also understand that I may request that certain information given in the interview, remain confidential and restricted, if I choose not to remain anonymous.** This information will not be opened for researcher until \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I understand that the interview will take approximately one hour to two hours and may, upon my agreement, continue at another day and time.
6. I understand that I may withdraw from the project, without prejudice, prior to the interview and the execution/delivery of this document and the Donor Agreement, which is attached hereto.

7. I understand that a photograph of me may be taken or borrowed for duplication and that if I withdraw from the project, the photograph will be given to me.
8. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 9 below, I understand that, upon completion of the interview, the tape (and other mediums resulting from the tape) and content of the interview (and all rights thereto) belong to the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**] and that the information in the interview may be used by researchers, subject to Copyright law and paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 above.
9. The \_\_\_\_\_ Department University [**and/or the University Archives**] agrees that: (i) it will not use or exercise any of its rights to the information in the interview, prior to the signing of the Donor Agreement; (ii) the Donor Agreement will be submitted to me for signature prior to the interview; (iii) restrictions on the use of the interview can be placed in the Donor Agreement and/or Consent Form and will be accepted as amending the interview; and (iv) that if the cassette tape is transferred to another sound medium for preservation purposes, the entirety of the tape will be transferred, not merely portions.
10. I understand that I have the right to review and edit the transcript of the interview, before transcription begins. I understand that it is my responsibility to contact the \_\_\_\_\_ Department University [**and/or the University Archives**] to find out if the transcript has been transcribed, should I decide to make changes to the transcript at any time.  
(Transcriptions may occur within two weeks to an unspecified amount of time from the date of the interview, due to financial and resource issues.) Any restrictions as to use of portions of the interview indicated by me will be edited out of the final copy of the transcript.
11. I understand that, at the conclusion of this particular interview and upon signing the Donor Agreement, the audio tape, photograph, and at least one copy of the transcript will be kept in the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**].
12. If I have questions about the research project or procedures, I know that I can contact the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**or the University Archives**].

13. If I feel that I have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form or that my rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, I know that I can contact the office for the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**or the University Archives**].

**MARK ONE BELOW:**

\_\_\_\_ I agree to be identified by name in any audio tape, transcript, video tape, digitally reproduced medium, or in reference to any information contained in this interview.

**CONFIDENTIAL CLAUSE**

\_\_\_\_ I agree to be identified by name in any oral tape, transcript, video tape, digitally reproduced medium, or in reference to any information contained in this interview, but request that matters pertaining to

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**be placed in confidential status** until \_\_\_\_\_. This particular information will not appear in the research copy of the transcript and the original audio/video tape(s) will not be open for research use. The original tape(s) and transcript will retain the confidential information and will be placed in the \_\_\_\_\_ Department's [**and/or the University Archives**] custody.

**ANONYMOUS CLAUSE**

\_\_\_\_ I wish to remain anonymous in any oral tape, transcript, video tape, digitally reproduced medium, or reference to any information contained in this interview, that is held open for research use. I understand that the transcript only will be open for research use, identified by an internal Oral History tracking number. I also understand that the \_\_\_\_\_ Department [**and/or the University Archives**] will retain the original tape and transcript, which do identify me as interviewee.

Interviewer signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Consent date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 5

January 16, 2008

NAME  
ADDRESS

Re: Oral History Program at CSUCI

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you very much for your participation in the \_\_\_\_\_ **[name of class]** oral history project at \_\_\_\_\_ **[name of school]**.

A copy of the transcription from the tape is enclosed. Please review it carefully for accuracy. If you wish to make corrections, additions, or deletions to the transcript, **PLEASE DO SO ON THE ATTACHED SHEET NO LATER THAN \_\_\_\_\_**. A self-addressed stamped return envelope is provided for your convenience.

If you do not wish to make edits, then of course, you do not have to return the correction sheet. You do **not** need to return the transcript.

Your edits (if any) will be made on the final transcript, which will be held open for researcher use, unless you have indicated otherwise.

You understand and agree that preservation concerns may require the complete copying of the information on the tape to a more stable medium in the future.

I also include a signed copy of the donor agreement and consent form for your records.

Once again, thank you very much for your courtesy and cooperation in this endeavor. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

STUDENT  
E-MAIL/PHONE NUMBER

### Enclosures:

Stamped Addressed Envelope  
Transcript  
Correction Sheets  
Copy of Donor Agreement and Consent Form

## APPENDIX 6

January 16, 2008

NAME  
ADDRESS

Re: Oral History Program at CSUCI

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you very much for your participation in the \_\_\_\_\_ oral history project at California State University Channel Islands. At some point in the future, a transcript of your interview will be made and when that occurs, you will receive a copy of the transcript to edit. Once we receive your edits (if any), the transcript will be opened for researcher use, subject to prior restrictions outlined in the Donor Agreement, Informed Consent, or subsequent requests made by you.

Until such time as the oral history is transcribed, we would like to allow researcher use of an exact duplication of the tape. **If you do not wish us to allow this, please contact me immediately.**

I enclose signed copies of the Donor Agreement and Consent Form for your records.

Once again, thank you very much for your courtesy and cooperation in this endeavor. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

STUDENT  
E-MAIL/PHONE NUMBER

Enclosures:

Copy of Donor Agreement and Consent Form

## APPENDIX 7

January 16, 2008

NAME  
ADDRESS

Re: Oral History Program at CSUCI

Dear Mr/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you very much for your participation in the \_\_\_\_\_ **[name of class]** oral history project at \_\_\_\_\_ **[name of school]**. As we discussed, a transcript of your interview will not be made and the taped interview will stand as is, without edit. The tape **will/will not** be held open for research use.

You understand and agree that preservation concerns may require the complete copying of the information on the tape to a more stable medium in the future.

I enclose signed copies of the Donor Agreement and Consent Form for your records.

Once again, thank you very much for your courtesy and cooperation in this endeavor. Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

STUDENT  
E-MAIL/PHONE NUMBER

Enclosures

Copy of Donor Agreement and Consent Form

# TRANSCRIPTION CORRECTION SHEET

**INDICATE:**

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