

Family Stories

a recording kit for keeping your family's memories

Voices, faces and photographs, before they are lost

For the family member who holds the phone, and for the elders whose stories are worth keeping.

Keep this kit on the table. Tick the checklist before each session. Keep the prompt card beside the teapot.

A note before you read

Every family has people who remember things nobody else does. When they go, those memories go with them.

That is why we made this kit. We want to help ordinary families record their elders' stories with nothing more than a phone, a cup of tea and a little patience.

Use what helps and skip what doesn't. Every family does this a little differently, and that is how it should be.

The Giritmit team

What is in this kit

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The plan in one line

Meet twice a month. That is twelve sessions in six months. Each session has one theme. One person asks, everyone else listens, and the phone quietly keeps it all. If twice a month does not suit your family, go at your own pace. The pace matters less than starting.

1. Why we are doing this

Your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles carry the whole story of your family. They remember the streets, the neighbours, the smells from the kitchen and the songs on the radio. Those memories are not written in any register. They are not in a certificate or a deed. When the elders are gone, the memories go too, unless we catch them now.

We will write some of it down. But words alone are not enough.

A voice carries more than words. So does a laugh. So does the pause before a name, and the way a sister says “no, that is not how it was!” The grandchildren will want to hear how Granny sounds when she tells a story. They will want to see her hands as she describes the kitchen.

So we record. Sound at the least. Video if we can. Faces and voices matter as much as words.

What we hope to end up with

- A small family library of recordings, safely kept and clearly named.
- The names: parents, grandparents, neighbours, streets, shops, villages.

- The elders' own words, in their own way of speaking, without anyone tidying them up.
- Something the grandchildren and great-grandchildren can listen to one day and say, "that was my family."

What matters most

This is not an exam, and nobody is being tested. If a memory is hazy, that is fine. If two people remember it differently, that is lovely. The sessions should feel like tea together, with a phone quietly listening.

2. Before each session

Tick these off. It takes about fifteen minutes. A little care here saves a great story from being lost to a flat battery.

- ☐ Charge the phone fully. Bring a charger and a power bank if you have one.
- ☐ Check there is enough space on the phone for a long recording. Delete old junk if not.
- ☐ Choose a quiet room. Switch the TV and radio off. Close the windows if there is traffic or a mower outside.
- ☐ Put the fan or aircon off if it is noisy. Switch it back on at the break.
- ☐ Light on the faces. Seat the speaker facing a window or a lamp, never with the window behind them.
- ☐ Put the phone on a stand, or prop it against a stack of books. Hold it sideways (landscape) if you are filming.
- ☐ Test for ten seconds. Record, play it back, and check you can hear the voice and see the face.
- ☐ Put tea, water and snacks within reach, so nobody needs to jump up in the middle of a story.
- ☐ Put old photos on the table. They are the best prompts you have.
- ☐ Switch the phone to Do Not Disturb, so no call breaks into a story.
- ☐ Have the prompt card (section 11) and a pen on the table.
- ☐ Tell everyone the theme beforehand, so they can think about it over the week.

A small kindness

Do not rush the first few minutes. Let everyone settle, have a cup of tea, and talk. Start recording when the room feels easy.

3. How to record: iPhone and Android

There are two simple ways. Use whichever is more comfortable for the speakers. Audio is easier. Video keeps the faces. If in doubt, record both.

Option A: audio only (the simplest)

iPhone: Voice Memos	Android: Recorder or Voice Recorder
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open the Voice Memos app (the one with red wavy lines).2. Tap the big red button to start. Tap it again to stop.3. Put the phone on the table, close to the speaker, about an arm's length away. A folded cloth under it stops table knocks.4. Keep the screen facing up so you can see the time running.5. Tap the title afterwards to rename it (see section 9).	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open the Recorder app (Google phones) or Voice Recorder (Samsung and many others). If you cannot find one, search "record" in your apps, or install a free voice recorder from the Play Store.2. Tap the big red record button to start. Tap stop to finish, then save.3. Put the phone on the table, close to the speaker, about an arm's length away, on a folded cloth.4. Keep the screen facing up so you can see the time running.5. Open the recording afterwards and rename it (see section 9).

Option B: video (voice and faces)

iPhone: Camera	Android: Camera
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open Camera and slide to Video.2. Turn the phone sideways (landscape).3. 1080p is enough. To check: Settings, Camera, Record Video, choose 1080p HD at 30 fps. It uses far less space than 4K.4. Get close enough to see faces clearly. Do not zoom. Move the phone or the chair closer.5. Tap the red button to start and stop.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Open Camera and choose Video.2. Turn the phone sideways (landscape).3. Full HD (1080p) is enough. In the camera's video settings, choose FHD 30 fps. Skip 4K: it fills the phone and is hard to share.4. Get close enough to see faces clearly. Do not zoom. Move the phone or the chair closer.5. Tap the red button to start and stop.

Good habits for both

- Keep the person's face in the middle of the picture, with a little space above the head.
- Use a stand or prop the phone up. Wobbly hands make for a tiring video.
- Turn on Do Not Disturb (iPhone: Focus; Android: swipe down and tap Do Not Disturb) before you begin.
- Do not move the phone about while it records.

Keep each recording small

One story, or ten to twenty minutes at most. Then stop, save and start a new one. Short files are easier to name, easier to share and easier to find again. If a story runs long and is going well, do not interrupt. Let it finish.

Say this at the start of every recording

Read this out loud, calmly, before the first question:

"Today is [date]. We are in [place]. The speakers are [names]. I am [your name], and I am recording. Today's theme is [theme]."

This one sentence will save years of confusion. In twenty years, nobody will remember which Saturday it was or whose lounge it was in. The recording will tell them.

4. When the family is far away

Many families are now spread across countries, for example South Africa, the UK and Australia. Distance does not have to mean the stories are lost. Here are two ways to bring everyone in.

Way 1: Ask the family a question (the easiest across time zones)

- One person sends a question to the family group. For example: "What do you remember about Granny's kitchen?"
- Everyone answers in their own time, with a voice note or a short video.
- Keep each answer to one memory.
- Say your name and where you are at the start.
- Voice notes and videos sent on WhatsApp can usually be forwarded or saved to the phone. Then you can upload them to the family archive (see section 9).

Way 2: A live family call that you record

- Use an app that can record calls. Zoom: the desktop app can record to your computer on its free plan. Google Meet: recording needs a paid Google Workspace plan. Check this before the call.
- At the start, tell everyone you are recording. Get a yes from each person.
- One person hosts and asks the questions. The others take turns.
- Keep the call to 30 to 45 minutes.
- Afterwards, the host downloads the recording and uploads it to the family archive (see section 9).

Please note: WhatsApp cannot record calls

WhatsApp has no built-in way to record calls. On most phones, screen-recording a WhatsApp or FaceTime call does not capture the other people's voices. If you want to keep a call, use Zoom or Meet. Or ask each person to send their story as a voice note afterwards.

A tip about time zones

Pick a time that works for everyone. For example, Sunday morning in South Africa is Sunday morning in the UK and Sunday evening in Australia. Check each place before you fix the day.

5. Consent, kindly done

These are your own family, so this is not a legal matter. It is a matter of respect. Everyone has the right to say what is kept and what is not.

Before the first question, read this line aloud on the recording, and wait for a yes from each person:

The consent line

"Is it alright if we record this so the family can keep it?"

Our promises

- **They can change their mind at any time.** If someone says "don't keep that bit," you stop, and you delete or cut that part. No questions, no argument.
- **Private by default.** The recordings belong to the family. They stay with the family.

- **Nothing goes public without asking.** Not on social media, not in chat groups outside the family, not on video sites. If you ever want to share a story more widely, ask the person who told it first, and ask again each time.
- **Names of other people.** If a story mentions someone who is alive and might not want it told, check with them or leave the name out.
- **It is fine to say “I would rather not.”** Nobody has to answer any question.

If someone is tired or upset

Pause the recording. Make tea. Sit with them. There is always another day.

6. How to ask

Good listening is more important than good questions. The best interviewer is the one who says the least.

Do

- **Ask open questions.** “Tell us about...” and “What was it like when...” invite a story. “Was it nice?” invites only a yes.
- **Let the silence sit.** When they go quiet, they are probably remembering. Count to ten in your head. Smile. Wait.
- **Follow the feeling.** If their voice changes, ask gently: “What did that feel like?”
- **Ask for names.** Who was there? What did people call them? What was the shop called?
- **Ask for places, smells, sounds and prices.** “What did the kitchen smell like?” “What did it cost?” “What did you hear from the street?”
- **Ask for the funny stories too.** “Is there a funny story about that?” The laughter is as precious as the memories.
- **Say “tell me more.”** It is the most useful sentence you will use.
- **Let one person ask.** One person asks, the others listen. Everyone else waits for their turn.

Please don’t

- **Don’t correct their memory.** If one person says it was a green door and another says blue, say “Oh, tell us about the door.” The difference is part of the story. Make a little note: “door colour – different memories.”
- **Don’t finish their sentences.**
- **Don’t say “you already told us that.”** A story told a second time often has new details.
- **Don’t argue or fact-check on the spot.** You can look things up later, without any hurry.
- **Don’t push on a painful subject.** A gentle “would you like to carry on?” is enough.

If an elder speaks another language

Let them speak it. A story told in the language it was lived in carries things that translation loses: the sayings, the blessings, the songs. Do not ask them to switch to English to make things easier for you. Ask afterwards for a short translation, in their own words or from a younger relative who understands. Record the translation as a separate file, and name the two files so they stay together.

When grief or hard memories come

Some memories are painful: loss, illness, poverty, a forced move, a war, a family quarrel. Go slowly. Let them lead. If their voice shakes, do not rush to fill the silence. Offer water or tea. Say, "We can stop here, and come back to it another day, or never." Never press for details. Being there is enough. After a heavy session, stay a while and talk about something light.

Remember

We are not collecting facts. We are collecting people.

7. Twelve session themes

Twelve sessions, twice a month, six months. Each theme has questions to choose from. You do not need to ask them all. Pick the ones that fit the day and let the stories lead you. If a session wanders to another theme, let it wander. Come back to the missed questions another day.

Some questions touch on history, migration or hard times. Ask them as questions only. Every person may remember things differently, and some may not remember at all. That is fine.

Session	Month	Theme
1	Month 1	Parents and grandparents, and where the family came from
2	Month 1	The home you grew up in
3	Month 2	The neighbourhood and neighbours
4	Month 2	Food and family meals
5	Month 3	School
6	Month 3	Faith, festivals and traditions
7	Month 4	Weddings and celebrations
8	Month 4	Work and money
9	Month 5	Hard times
10	Month 5	Music, films and fun
11	Month 6	Brothers and sisters, and cousins
12	Month 6	What you want the next generation to know

Session 1: Parents and grandparents, and where the family came from

Have ready: any photo of parents or grandparents.

1. What were your mother's and father's names? What did people call them at home?
2. What was your mother like? What did she say again and again?
3. What was your father like? What did he do all day?
4. Do you know where your grandparents were born? Who told you?
5. Where did the family come from, before the place you grew up? Do you know how and why they moved?
6. What do you remember being told about the journey, or about the first years in a new place?
7. What was the name of the village, town or region the family came from? How was it said at home?
8. What languages did your parents speak at home? And to each other?
9. Which sayings, blessings or songs did your parents pass on?
10. What did your parents want for you? What did they worry about?

Session 2: The home you grew up in

Have ready: a sheet of paper, so someone can sketch the floor plan as they talk.

1. Can you walk us through the house, starting from the front gate or door?
2. How many rooms were there? Who slept where?
3. What was the kitchen like? What did you cook on? Where did you sit when you ate?
4. What was in the yard or garden? Plants, trees, animals, a vegetable patch?
5. Who else lived in the house, or very near? Aunts, uncles, cousins?
6. What were the chores? Who did which?
7. How did you get water, light and warmth? How did you keep cool in summer?
8. Where did the family sit in the evenings?
9. What smells do you remember from that house?
10. What was your favourite corner or hiding place?

Session 3: The neighbourhood and neighbours

Have ready: a map of the area, if there is one, to point at.

1. What was the name of your street? Who lived on either side of you?
2. Which shops or markets did you go to? What did you buy there? Who ran them?
3. Where did the neighbourhood meet: a square, a well, a temple, a church, a corner shop?
4. What was the place like early in the morning? And at night?
5. Which walking routes did you take: to school, to the shops, to visit family?
6. Do you remember any floods, fires, droughts or storms? What happened on your street?
7. Who were the people everybody knew: the baker, the hawker, the water-carrier, the one who knew everyone's business?
8. What sounds do you remember from the street?
9. Where did the children play?
10. If we walked down your street together today, what would you point out?

Session 4: Food and family meals

Have ready: a notebook, so someone can write down quantities as they describe them.

1. What were family meals like? Who cooked? Who helped? Who sat where?
2. What did your mother (or father, or grandmother) cook that nobody else could cook the same way?
3. Did your family fast or avoid certain foods on certain days? What did you eat on those days?
4. Which dishes were only for special days or festivals?
5. How did they measure? By hand, by eye, by the cup? Can you show us with your hands?

6. Where did the ingredients come from? Who ground, pounded or preserved them? What did the kitchen smell like?
7. What did food cost? Do you remember what a loaf of bread, or a bag of rice, cost?
8. What did you eat after school? What did you take for lunch?
9. What was your favourite dish? Was there a dish you hated?
10. Which dish do you still make exactly the way your mother did?

Session 5: School

Have ready: any school photo, report card or certificate.

1. Which school did you go to? What was it called, and what did it look like?
2. How did you get there? Who walked with you?
3. What did you wear? What did you carry? What was in your lunch?
4. Which teachers do you remember? Kind, strict, funny?
5. What lessons did you love? Which did you dread?
6. What games did you play at break?
7. Who were your friends? What were their names? Do you know what became of them?
8. Did anyone have to leave school early? Why?
9. Did you learn anything outside school, like a language, prayers, a craft or sewing?
10. What was your best day at school? And your worst?

Session 6: Faith, festivals and traditions

Ask, don't assume. Every family, and every person, may have kept different traditions, or none.

1. Did your family practise a faith? Did you pray at home, at a place of worship, or both?
How did you get there?
2. Which festivals did your family keep, and how? Which were the biggest in your house?
3. How did you prepare for the big days: special food, clothes, cleaning, decorations?
4. Who led the prayers or the rituals at home? Where in the house were they held? At what time of day?
5. Is there a prayer, hymn or song you remember? Would you say or sing a line for us?
6. What did the place of worship look like, sound like and smell like?
7. Were there vows, fasts or promises that someone in the family kept?
8. Were there customs about birth, naming, coming of age or death? What do you remember of them?
9. Who in the family knew all the customs and could say what was right?
10. Which customs do you hope the grandchildren will keep?

Session 7: Weddings and celebrations

Have ready: wedding photos, an invitation, a piece of jewellery.

1. Whose wedding is the first one you remember? What was it like?
2. If you are happy to tell us: how did you and your husband or wife meet, or how was it arranged?
3. What do you remember of your own wedding day, and the days before it?
4. Who made the clothes? Who cooked? How many days did the celebration last?
5. What songs, rituals and blessings do you remember?
6. What was the food? Who served it? How many people came?
7. What gifts were given? What did people bring?
8. What other celebrations did the family have: birthdays, naming days, a 21st?
9. Who were the characters at every function: the one who danced, the one who gave advice, the one who ate the most?
10. Is there a funny thing that happened at a wedding that the family still talks about?

Session 8: Work and money

Have ready: an old payslip, receipt or coin, if anyone has one.

1. What was your first job? How old were you? What did you earn?
2. What did your father and mother do for a living?
3. Did anyone in the family work on the land, in a factory, in a shop or from home? What was a working day like?
4. What did things cost? Bread, milk, a bus fare, a cinema ticket, a pair of shoes?
5. Who looked after the money at home? Did you hand your pay over?
6. Did you save for anything? What was it?
7. Did anyone sew, bake or sell things from home to make extra money?
8. How did people get to work? Walk, bus, bicycle, train?
9. What was the hardest job you ever did? What was the best?
10. What did work teach you that you would like the grandchildren to know?

Session 9: Hard times

Go gently. Everyone is free to skip any question or to stop at any time.

1. Were there times when money was short? How did the family manage?
2. Do you remember times when someone in the family was ill? Who looked after them?
3. Do you remember droughts, floods, storms or other disasters? What happened? Who helped?

4. Do you remember any time when laws, politics, war or unrest changed how your family lived? How did you hear about it, and what did people say?
5. Was your family ever made to leave a home, a street or a country? What was that day like?
6. What did you take with you? What did you have to leave behind?
7. How did it feel to leave? Where did you go?
8. Who helped you, and who was lost to you afterwards?
9. What kept the family going in difficult times?
10. Is there anything you would like us to understand, that we might not know?

It is fine to stop

These memories may be painful. If anyone becomes upset, pause the recording. Offer tea. Say, "We can stop here, and come back to it another day, or never." Nobody has to answer. Nobody has to explain. Being there is enough.

Session 10: Music, films and fun

Have ready: a phone with a speaker, in case a song comes to mind.

1. What did you listen to on the radio? Do you remember any programmes?
2. Which songs do you remember best? Would you sing a line for us?
3. Who sang or played an instrument in the family or the street?
4. Which films did you see at the cinema? Who were your favourite stars?
5. Did you have a gramophone, records or a cassette player? Whose were they?
6. Where did you go for fun? The beach, the river, the park, a visit to cousins?
7. What games did you play: cards, board games, skipping, football, cricket?
8. How did you dress up? What were the fashions and hairstyles?
9. Did you dance? When and where?
10. What song would you like us to remember you by?

Session 11: Brothers and sisters, and cousins

This one is for laughing. Let them talk to each other, not only to the phone.

1. Who was the eldest? Who was the youngest? Where did you come in?
2. What was each of your brothers and sisters like as a child?
3. What pranks did you play? Who got caught?
4. What did you fight about? How did it end?
5. Who was the favourite? (And who thought they were?)

6. Who looked after whom? Who got the bigger share?
7. Did you share clothes, a bed or a bicycle?
8. Who was the best cook, the best singer, the funniest, the bravest?
9. Which cousins did you spend the most time with? What did you get up to?
10. Tell each other, in front of us, what you love about each other.

Session 12: What you want the next generation to know

A gentle last session. Take your time, and have tissues nearby.

1. If a grandchild asked you what mattered most in life, what would you say?
2. What do you hope they will remember about the place you grew up?
3. What values did your parents give you? How did you pass them on?
4. What advice would you give a young person today?
5. What mistake did you learn most from?
6. What are you proudest of?
7. Which family traditions do you hope we will keep: recipes, festivals, prayers?
8. What would you say to a great-grandchild who has not been born yet?
9. What are you most grateful for?
10. Would you like to say a few words to each grandchild by name? (Record these separately, one short file each.)

Make it yours

Every family has stories no general list can know. Add your own questions about your family's history, migration, language and places. For example:

- Why did the family leave the place they came from, and who made the decision?
- What name did the family use for the old home, the old village or the old country?
- Which words, dishes or sayings exist only in your family?
- Which places matter to your family: a house, a field, a shop, a grave, a street?
- Which family stories do you suspect are not quite true, and who tells them best?

Write your own questions on the lines below, or in the margin of this page.

8. The old photos session

Old photographs are the best doorway into a memory. One photo can start an hour of stories. Plan at least one session around them, and keep photos on the table at every other session too.

Photographing an old print with your phone

- Lay the print flat on a table or the floor. Smooth it gently. Do not bend it.
- Use daylight, near a window. Sit so that your own shadow does not fall on the photo.
- No flash. Flash makes glare on shiny prints and can fade old paper.
- Hold the phone straight above the print, parallel to it, not tilted. Use both hands, or rest your elbows on the table.
- Get the whole print in the frame, with a little table around the edges.
- Take the full photo first. Then take a close-up of faces, writing or small details.
- Check the picture is sharp and all four corners are there. If not, take it again.
- A scanning app can straighten and crop for you. Google PhotoScan (Android and iPhone) or the Notes app on iPhone (Scan Documents) both work well. Keep the untouched original photo as well.

Handle with care

- Wash and dry hands first. Handle the print by its edges.
- Never write on the back of an original in pen. Pens bleed through, and ink damages the photo. Use a soft pencil only, and write lightly. Or write on a small slip of paper and tuck it behind the photo.
- No sticky tape, glue, paper clips or rubber bands. Keep prints dry, flat and out of the sun.

Ask these four questions about every photo: who, where, when, what

1. Who is this? (Every person, left to right, by name.)
2. Where was it taken?
3. When was it, roughly? (Even “about the time we were at school” helps.)
4. What is happening in the picture? What do you remember about that day?

Record the answer right then

Take the photo. Then, straight away, record a short voice note with the person holding the print. Say: “This is the photo of...” and let them tell it. The photo and the voice note together are worth far more than either one alone.

Name the photo and its voice note the same way, so they stay together (see section 9). For example:

2026-11-08 – Granny and Aunty – school photo.jpg

9. After each session

Do these the same day, while it is fresh. A recording that is not named and not backed up is a recording you can lose.

- ☐ **Rename each recording.** Use this pattern: YYYY-MM-DD – who – topic. For example: 2026-11-08 – Granny and aunts – family meals.
- ☐ **iPhone:** in Voice Memos, tap the title to rename. In Photos or Files, tap and hold, then choose Rename. **Android:** open the recording in your recorder app or file manager, tap the three dots or hold the file, and choose Rename.
- ☐ Put all the files from one session in one folder for that session, inside a family folder.
- ☐ **Back up the same day.** Use iCloud, Google Drive or Google Photos, or any cloud you trust. Check that the upload has finished.
- ☐ **Make a second copy somewhere else:** a laptop, a memory stick or an external drive. Two copies, in two places, on the same day.
- ☐ **Send the files to the family keeper** (see section 10). Use AirDrop, a shared link or any way that works. Tell them which session it was.
- ☐ Fill in the one-line session log (section 12). Date, who, topic, how many files, anything to remember.
- ☐ Write down any questions you did not get to, so the next session can begin with them.
- ☐ Note any names, places or facts that need checking later. Do not check them in front of the elders.
- ☐ Phone or send a thank-you message to the people who spoke. They have given you a gift.

Please do not

- Do not delete the recording from the phone until both copies are safe.
- Do not edit or trim the original. Keep it exactly as recorded. If something must be cut, make a copy and edit the copy.
- Do not post anything online, or in chat groups outside the family, without asking (see sections 5 and 10).

Where the files live

One family folder in the cloud, with one subfolder for each session. Plus one second copy elsewhere. One person, the family keeper, holds the master collection.

10. Keeping it safe and private

These recordings are precious, and they are personal. Treat them the way you would treat a family heirloom.

- **Family only, by default.** Share the folder only with the people in your family who should have it. Use a link that needs a sign-in, not an open link.
- **Ask before sharing anything outside the family.** That includes social media, community groups, websites, local radio and archives. Ask the person who told the story, every time. If they have died, ask the family together.
- **Think about other people.** Stories mention neighbours, relatives and children. If a name or a detail could hurt someone who is alive, leave it out of anything that is shared.
- **Choose a family keeper.** One trusted person holds the master collection, keeps both copies safe and checks them once a year to make sure the files still open.
- **Plan for later.** Write a short note, or add a line to your will, saying who looks after the archive when you no longer can, and where the passwords and backups are. Tell the family where the note is kept.
- **Keep the passwords safe.** A cloud account that nobody can open is the same as lost recordings. Write the sign-in details on paper and keep them with your important papers.

11. The prompt card

Cut along the dotted line, or just keep this page on the table. Fold it in half if it helps.

FAMILY STORIES

Say first: date, place, who is speaking, who is recording.

"Is it alright if we record this so the family can keep it?"

The twelve themes

1. Parents and grandparents, and where the family came from
2. The home you grew up in
3. The neighbourhood and neighbours
4. Food and family meals
5. School
6. Faith, festivals and traditions
7. Weddings and celebrations
8. Work and money
9. Hard times
10. Music, films and fun
11. Brothers and sisters, and cousins
12. What you want the next generation to know

Six golden questions

1. Tell us more about that.
2. What did it look, sound and smell like?
3. How did that feel?
4. Who was there? What were their names?
5. What happened next?
6. Is there a funny story about that?

Let the silence sit. Don't correct. One person asks, the others listen. It is fine to stop.

12. Session log

Print as many copies as you need. One line per recording session. Keep the log with the family folder.

Date	Who was speaking	Theme / topic	Files (how many, names)	Notes / to follow up