

Conducting Oral History Interviews

From an Undergraduate Student
Intern

With the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware
& the University of Delaware

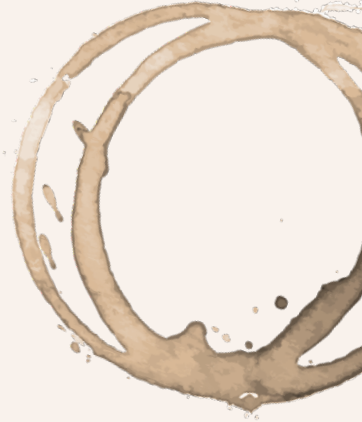
Presented by Rebecca Volk



“I think we fool ourselves and really negate a great deal of history if we think that the oral history of poetry is shorter than the written history of poetry. It’s not true. Poetry has a longer oral tradition than it does written.”

—Saul Williams

*The Importance of Oral
History*





Brief Introduction

The use of oral history is having a direct encounter of, not only someone's personal story, but of human history. It brings a powerful cognizance that we cannot gain from a written textbook, and it is such a special opportunity to hear a piece of history directly from a personal standpoint, through someone's life story.

The Jewish Historical Society aims to do this through oral history interviews from Delaware's Jewish community and is continuing to expand its oral history collection.

Fall 2019 Interviews



Oral History Class with (back row, left to right) Gail Pietrzyk, archivist for the Jewish Historical Society of Delaware, historian Roger Horowitz, and University of Delaware students Jordan Spencer, Fiona Sia, Jacob Budd, Benjamin Glazer and (front row, left to right) Dalia Handelman, Dale Weiss, Laura Mays and Megan Heston. Pre-pandemic photo by Evan Krape.



University of Delaware sophomore Dalia Handelman meets with Faith Brown to talk about her life in Wilmington, her travels to Israel and her view of the world. Brown was one of 10 senior members of Delaware's Jewish community interviewed by Handelman this summer in a project done in partnership with the Jewish Historical Society under the direction of Roger Horowitz, who teaches history and Jewish Studies at UD and directs the Hagley Library's Center for the History of Business, Technology and Society.

The Jewish Historical Society of Delaware aims to provide a more personable approach on the history of Jewish Delaware in collaboration with the University of Delaware to expand its collection of the community's interviews.

To the left: the 2019 JHSD Oral History Project with the University of Delaware

Oral History Interview Breakdown

01

Before the Interview

Preparation: research, developing questions, release forms, and planning

02

During the Interview

Audio recording equipment, key points for interviewing, setting up for the interview

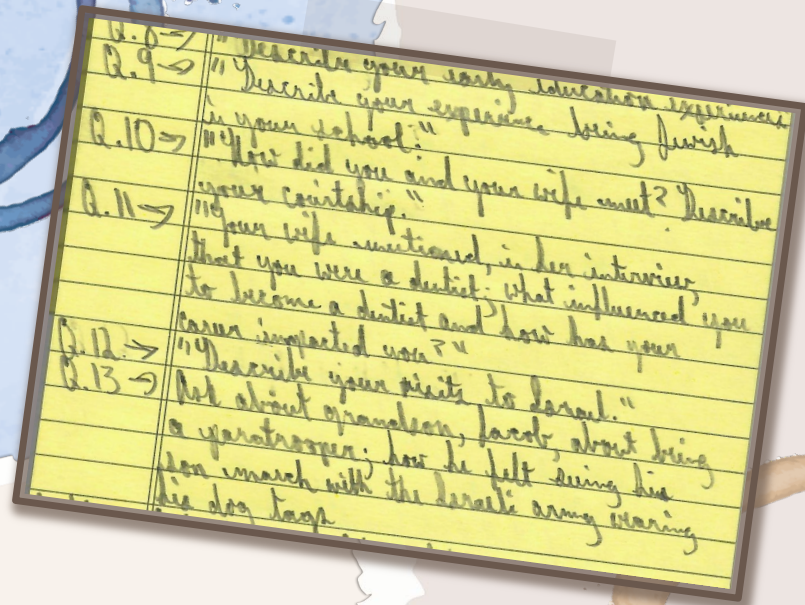
03

After the Interview

Uploading, preserving, and transcribing

01

Before the Interview



- Q.9 → "Describe your early education experiences in your school."
- Q.10 → "How did you and your wife meet? Describe your courtship."
- Q.11 → "Your wife mentioned, in her interview, that you were a dentist. What influenced you to become a dentist and how has your career impacted you?"
- Q.12 → "Describe your visits to Israel."
- Q.13 → "Not about Operation, Jacob, about being a paratrooper; how he felt during his son march with the Israeli army wearing his dog tags."

Background Research

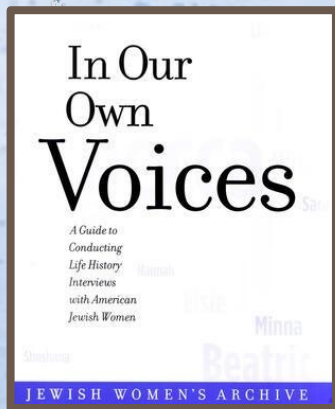
While there are n't always sources available, it is always help ful to learn the background of a community's history. I was able to do so with Toni Young's book on Wilmington's Jewish community (pictured to the left), which provided me insight about the community's beginnings and development over the years.










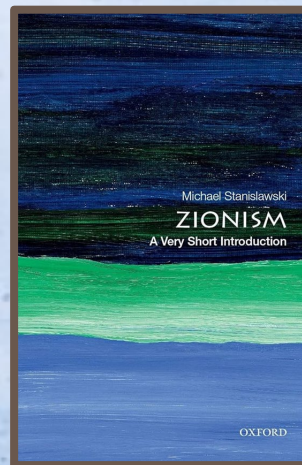
Becoming American, Remaining Jewish

The Story of Wilmington,
Delaware's First Jewish Community,
1879-1924

Other Sources for Background Work



 <p>Marilyn Levin</p> <p>Listen You Can Help 7:07:02</p> <p>Interviewed by Fiona Sia on December 16, 2019.</p>	 <p>Danna Miller Levy and Roger Levy</p> <p>Listen 1 Listen 2 Listen 3 Listen 4 1:27:18 in four recording files</p> <p>Interviewed by Jacob Budd on December 9, 2019.</p>	 <p>Martin Mand</p> <p>View You Can Help 9:02:11</p> <p>Interviewed by Benjamin Glaser on November 12, 2019.</p>
 <p>Shelly Mand</p> <p>Listen A Listen B 7:16:57</p> <p>Interviewed by Megan Heaton on November 19, 2019.</p>	 <p>Richard and Mercy Margolin</p> <p>Listen You Can Help 5:10:45</p> <p>Interviewed by Jordan Spenser on October 23, 2019.</p>	 <p>Diane Sklar</p> <p>Listen You Can Help 5:46:42</p> <p>Interviewed by Laura Marks on November 11, 2019.</p>
 <p>Judy Zucker</p> <p>Listen You Can Help 89:00</p> <p>Interviewed by Dale Weiss on November 4, 2019.</p>		



Learning How to Ask Good Questions

Through years of experience conducting interviews, oral historians have learned a great deal about what kinds of questions elicit the richest stories. The general rule is that open-ended questions tap into the narrator's willingness of remembrance, eliciting events with a distinct voice and narrative flow. Closed questions, on the other hand, tend to result in brief, factual responses.

Examples of closed questions include:

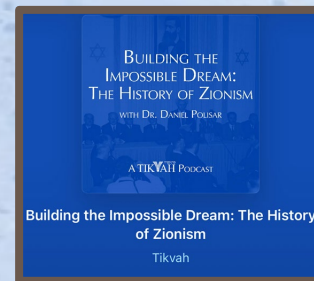
- What year were you born?
- What were your parents' names?
- When did your family come to this country?
- What high school did you attend?

Open-ended questions often begin with the following words and phrases:

- Why?
- Can you describe...?
- Tell me about...
- What was that like?
- How did you feel when...?
- What were your expectations about...?
- What challenges did you face when...?

If it is not always possible to ask open-ended questions, and occasionally you do need to clarify a factual issue, in the one-to-one period, instead, you ask a closed question to elicit a factual or specific response, and then follow that with an open-ended question that will allow the narrator to elaborate on her response.

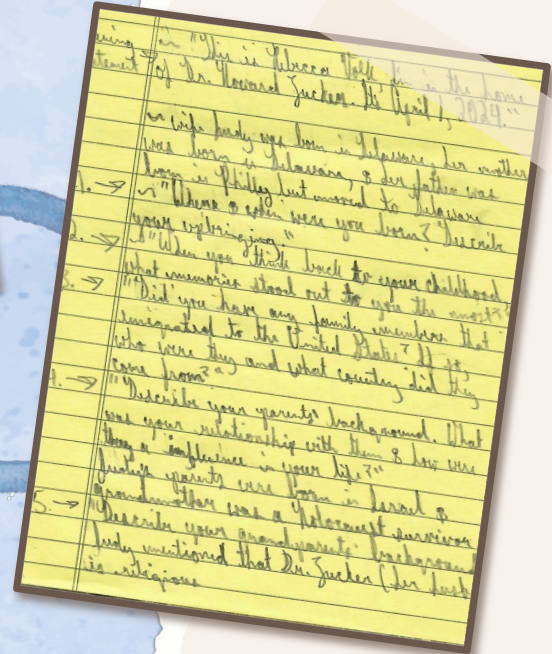
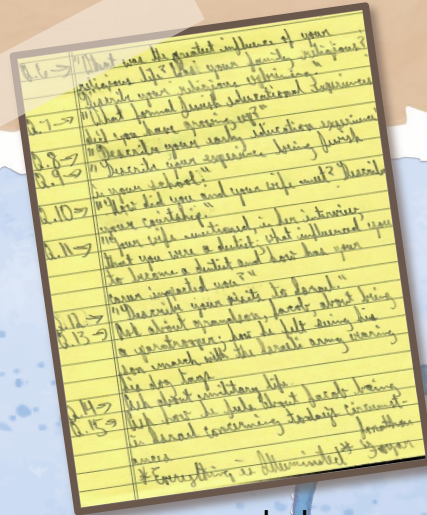
CLOSED QUESTION	OPEN-ENDED QUESTION
What was your mother's name?	Describe your relationship with your mother when you were growing up.
When did you move to the new house?	How did you feel about moving to a new house and a new neighborhood? Describe your experience.
When did you get married?	As a young woman, what were your expectations regarding marriage and how did that affect your decisions?
When did you graduate from medical school?	Tell me what it was like being one of three women in your first school class.
Did you attend services regularly when you were a child?	What role did synagogue attendance play in your family when you were a child? How would you describe women's roles in public worship at that time and how did you feel about it?



Developing Your Questions for the Interview

While closed - ended questions are useful, open - ended questions are used more often, as they provide the interviewee more opportunity to fully tell aspects of their life and/ or experiences. It is also vital to keep in mind to ask any follow up questions from the interviewee, as well as allowing for some silence and making sure the questions are narrowed and focused on the subject.

To the left: my written questions for an interview in Spring 2024





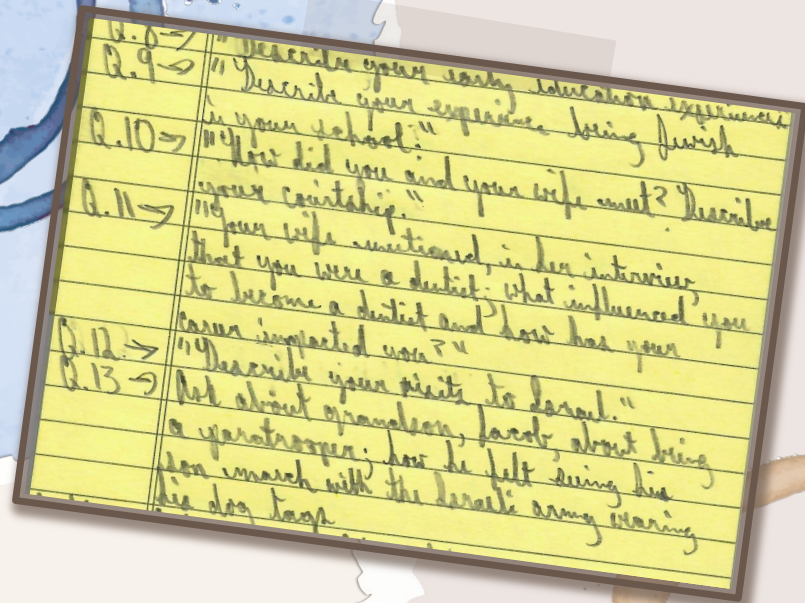
What to Include in Release Forms:

- Main details of the oral history project
- What exactly will be archived and collected with authorization of the participants
- The process of the interview (i.e., editing, transcribing, recutting, etc.)
- Copyright and licensing
- Where the recorded interview (s) will be stored for preservation
- Authorized consent
- Biographical information of participants (name, contact information, and any other information)

*Also include a recording form that has the following: date, time, location, participant's name, and any other vital source of information

02

During the Interview



Q. 8 → "Describe your early education experiences in your school."
Q. 9 → "How did you and your wife meet? Describe your courtship."
Q. 10 → "Your wife mentioned, in her interview, that you were a dentist. What influenced you to become a dentist and how has your career impacted you?"
Q. 11 → "Describe your visits to Israel."
Q. 12 → "Not about Operation, Jacob, about being a paratrooper; how he felt during his son march with the Israeli army wearing his dog tags."



Before Recording the Interview...

- Test equipment to ensure that it functions properly
- Make sure that everything needed is there
- Always have extra batteries and other technical equipment needed
- Set up the space comfortably before the interview



Audio Recording Equipment Used on No Budget:

- Zoom Call
- Smart Phone (Android or Apple)
Voice Recording
- Earphones with attached
microphone



Audio Recording Equipment Used on a low budget:

- Tascam Digital Voice Recorder (around \$80 - \$160; also available at the university's campus library for rental use)
- Zoom H2n Voice Recorder (around \$180 - \$235)
- Blue Yeti USB Microphone (around \$100; also available at the university's campus library for rental use)



When Having Virtual Interviews:

- Make sure the sound quality is clearly audible
- Always use any headphones with built-in microphones if available
- Encourage interviewee to use the best quality equipment if available to them
- Regarding Zoom:
 - there are 40 minute meetings with a free account
 - can record audio only and video files
 - transcription services are included in a paid account if doing so



Key Factors for Interviewing:

- Explain the functions of the equipment with the interviewee for familiarity
- Always have necessary and important documentation for interviewee to fill out (the recording and release forms)
- Find an appropriate space to have the interview in; rooms that do not have background noise, high ceilings, tile or wood floors, or noisy appliances, are highly suggested for better sound quality
- Even though this is an interview, make sure to have all attention on the interviewee and listen to what they have to say
- It's always helpful to have a notepad and pencil/pen to write down any quick notes or follow up questions for the interviewee

03

After the Interview





**Always have some kind of post
interview plan before recording**


-



For copies and filing...

The more copies you have, the more likely the files will be kept safely.

On another note, always create a new, separate folder for each interview.






With audio files...

It is always best to transfer the files the same day as the recording to avoid any possible issues with saving them.

Always use common type files such as MP3 (or MP4) and WAV.





When naming and filing...

Always be consistent of in the naming and folder structure for the purpose of organization. Make sure to label which files have been edited.

The naming factors should have the following:

- No spaces, use underscores instead
- Always include the date of the interview in the format of year (4 numbers)_month (2 numbers)_day (2 numbers)
- Include the interviewee's name in this format: Last Name_First Name
- Label any edited files as "EDITED" at the end of the title

*As a side note: the master recording should never be edited.







For audio editing...


- Audacity is great to use as it is a free recording and editing software.
- To differentiate from the original file, add “_edited” to the file’s name.
- Soundbites from recording can be used in videos, podcasts, and museum exhibits (physical or online).
- Always export soundbites to MP3 format


***Important note: do not alter the interviewee’s words when editing.**





Different Forms of Accessibility

- **Transcription:** (1) A word - for - word textual representation of the audio content of the interview usually as a separate document.
 - **Captions:** (2) A word - for - word textual representation of the audio content of the interview, embedded with the audio file for real - time display.
 - **Indexes/Tape Logs:** (3) A high - level summary of an interview, includes timestamps and lists major topics discussed throughout the interview.
- 



Transcription Options with Low Cost

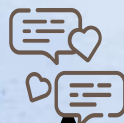
- **Zoom:** (1) Free account allows 40 minute meetings. Can record interviews locally and enable auto-generated captions. Additional features with paid account.
- **Otter.ai:** (2) Can generate captions/transcripts in real time; integrates with other tools; can upload files to transcribe. Free and Pro accounts (<\$10/month).
- **Podcastle:** (3) Free and paid accounts (<\$12/month). Allows for recording, hosting, downloading audio files and auto transcription.

Disclaimer: (4) This information is provided for reference and is not an endorsement of any single solution. This is not an exhaustive list of possible solutions.

*Thank
you*



謝謝



Acknowledgment



תודה

شُكْرًا جَدِيدًا

Make sure to write and send a thank note to the interviewees for their participation and contribution to the oral history project.

- you

Grazie!

*Merci
Beaucoup!*

It's very important to connect to the people who shared their life stories and experiences, as well as letting them know that they are significant.



Будь паска!



Danke!

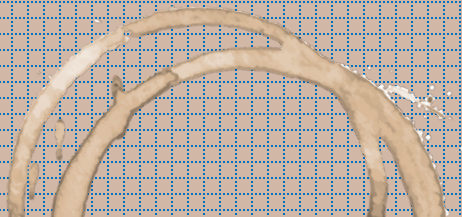
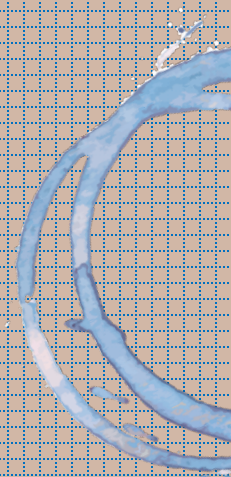
Gracias

Thank You!

DELAWARE

HUMANITIES

This tutorial is partially funded by the Delaware Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Resources & Photo Credits

Slide 1

- <https://jhsdelaware.org/>
- <https://universityranking.org/universities/university-of-delaware/>

Slide 2

- Quote: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/819635?ref=oral-history>.

Slide 4

- <https://jhsdelaware.org/collections/Oral%20History/exhibit/fall2019.html>
- <https://www.udel.edu/udaily/2019/august/driven-to-discover-dalia-handelman-oral-history-jewish-seniors/>

Slide 6

- My Questions Witten for the First Interview | 01 April 2024

Slide 7

- <https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-American-Remining-Jewish-Wilmington/dp/1611491894>

Slide 8

- <https://www.amazon.com/Zionism-Very-Short-Introduction-Introductions/dp/0199766045>
- <https://jwa.org/stories/how-to/guide>
- <https://jhsdelaware.org/collections/Oral%20History/exhibit/list.html>
- <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/building-the-impossible-dream-the-history-of-zionism/id1503377974>
- <https://www.moriahfilms.com/film-library/never-stop-dreaming.html>
- Guberman, Jayne K, Joyce Antler, and Nicki Newman Tanner. 2005. *In Our Own Voices : A Guide to Conducting Life History Interviews with American Jewish Women*. Brookline: Jewish Women's Archive.

Slide 9

- My Questions Witten for the First Interview | 01 April 2024

Slide 10

- John Caldwell and Amanda McCollum "Oral History Workshop (DE Humanities 2024)." University of Delaware Library, Museums, and Press. 2024.

Slide 11

- My Questions Witten for the First Interview | 01 April 2024

Slides 12 - 16

- John Caldwell and Amanda McCollum "Oral History Workshop (DE Humanities 2024)." University of Delaware Library, Museums, and Press. 2024.

Slide 17

- <https://www.facebook.com/JHSDel/>

Slide 18

- <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/toolkit/documentation-audio-documentation/>

Resources & Photo Credits Cont.

Slides 19 - 24

- John Caldwell and Amanda McCollum “Oral History Workshop (DE Humanities 2024).” University of Delaware Library, Museums, and Press. 2024.

Slide 25

- <https://etiquettejulie.com/writing-a-thank-you-note-in-five-easy-steps/>
- <https://gr.dreamstime.com/illustration/grazie.html>
- <https://www.domestika.org/en/projects/205196-gracias>
- <https://photos.com/featured/thank-you-in-chinese-blackred.html>
- <https://www.ukrainianlessons.com/you-are-welcome-in-ukrainian/>
- <https://www.alamy.com/handwritten-french-language-lettering-merci-beaucoup-thank-you-very-much-france-vector-calligraphy-phrase-thank-you-so-on-white-envel-image398681473.html>
- <https://www.istockphoto.com/vector/arabic-calligraphy-type-of-thank-you-shukran-jazilan-creative-vector-illustration-gml086208972-291435172>
- <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/492018328016857163/>
- <https://www.istockphoto.com/vector/thank-you-in-german-language-gml388627766-446209528>

