

#MyArmenianStory Question Guide

#MyArmenianStory is a USC Institute of Armenian Studies oral history project that collects Armenian life stories through crowd-sourced interviews. The purpose of the project is to record, gather, and document individual stories and reconstitute them as part of the national story. The idea is to discover and record family stories and more. Your mother, your aunt, your neighbor, your best friend – you can start anywhere. Everyone’s story is relevant, and together, they all make up the Armenian Story. You learn about your own story, while contributing knowledge about the Armenian Experience. #MyArmenianStory will create a resource base that reflects the scope and depth of the Armenian experience for researchers.

This is your interview. Please ask any question you want. We offer two question guides – a short one and a longer one. You can use either, or mix. Note that these questions may be adapted based on interviewee background. Encourage interviewee to give examples that explain their answers and to share related anecdotes and stories. Start questions with “Tell me about ...” and that will get them going.

Conducting the Interview

- Begin the interview recording by:
 1. Pressing record on whatever device you are using.
 2. Stating the date.
 3. Introducing yourself and your location.
 4. Introducing the interviewee and the interviewee’s location.
 5. Before beginning the first question, read the permission statement here and ask the interviewee to verbally indicate they agree by saying yes:
 - a. *By providing the information in this interview, I confirm that I give permission for this recording to become part of the USC Institute of Armenian Studies research collection, available to researchers, students, filmmakers, and scholars.*
- At the end of the interview, allow 10 seconds of silence before ending the recording.



#MyArmenianStory Question Guide (Short)

It might be useful to approach the interviewee's life history as various chapters of a book. Think of the following categories as the chapter headings and probe deeper for significant experiences, turning points, challenges, etc.

Early Childhood – place, dates, names, family, memories of everyday life and routines

Family Background and Roots – how far back can you trace family, how far back can you name them, their relationship to you; where are they from and when and why did they leave; family life, interactions, language, games, food, holidays

Moving from Country to Country – the journeys, the decisions about where to go, who helped, how they felt; life in a new country, integrating; what is ‘home’ or ‘back home’?

Community Life – life outside the immediate family. Church, schools, organizations

Education – elementary and high school life, memories, stories; college and university, choices, challenges, expectations

Marriage and Family – meeting spouse, wedding, early married life, raising children, expectations, challenges

Making a Living – choosing a career, starting a business, making choices, who helped, what challenges, what mistakes and successes

Armenia (for Diasporans) – early stories, impressions; visits, experiences

Western Armenian lands – visits, impressions, desires to visit

Thoughts about Future – expectations for self, for family, for nation

In addition, ask about thoughts and feelings about **Armenia and the Diaspora**.

There are three sets of markers to ask about:

Pre and post Genocide – memories passed down, stories, feelings

Soviet years or Diaspora years – experiences within diaspora communities in various countries; experiences within the Soviet system

Independent Armenia years – [For those who visited Armenia] interactions with independent Armenia, impressions, engagements, expectations; [For those who lived in Armenia] life changes in post-Soviet Armenia, memories of the independence years, social changes, new systems and rules

#MyArmenianStory Question Guide (Extended)

This extended question guide is filled with questions for all kinds of potential backgrounds. Please select those that apply and feel free to skip around. Although each bullet point includes multiple questions, ask them one by one, separately, when applicable, so the interviewee is not overwhelmed with several questions.

Early Childhood and Family Background

- Please state your name.
- How was your name chosen? Who chose it? Does it mean anything? Are you named after someone? Does it have any significance?
- When and where were you born?
- How many children in the family, and where are you in the line-up? What are the names of your brothers and sisters? Who chose their names?
- What was your day to day life like? What games did you play? With whom? What did you play with? What did you do when you were bored? What was your favorite food?
- How did your family celebrate holidays? Which holidays and celebrations were the most important? What types of dishes were prepared? Who prepared the food?
- Tell me about your parents, grandparents, and family background:
 - Where were they from, originally?
 - When did they move? Why?
- Your father's occupation? Your mother's occupation? Did you / do you contribute to the family income or help parents in their work in any way?
- What is/was your parents' religious background? How was religion observed in your home? Did you go to church regularly or only on special occasions?
- Would you describe your family as political? If yes, what were your parents' political beliefs? What political organizations were they involved in? If they were not involved in or interested in political organizations, why was that so?
- What do you remember about your grandparents? How involved were they in your life?
- What stories did you hear about earlier ancestors whom you never knew? Do you know where they lived? Did these stories impact you? How?
- Describe what your siblings were like. Who were you closest to? Why?
- Describe the house you grew up in.
- What were your family's economic circumstances? Did you have everything you needed? Did you travel? Did you feel rich or poor compared to your neighbors? Were you conscious of class?
- What were your duties around the house as a child? What were your brothers and sisters' duties? Did duties break down by gender?
- What did you think you were going to be in the future? What did your parents expect from you?
- What language(s) did you speak at home? Were there any language policies (for example, only Armenian at home)?

- What kind of activities did the family do together? Were you close with your parents? Did you share your feelings with them? Why or why not? In what language? Were there language barriers among different generations?
- Were there any topics that were taboo or off limits in the family? Were they off limits because you were explicitly told so, or was it implied? Or did you personally just not feel comfortable talking to Armenian parents about certain things? Were language barriers an issue in discussing certain topics?

Community You Grew Up In

- Describe the community you grew up in.
- Who did you associate with? Did you associate with Armenians, non-Armenians?
- What activities were you involved in? Were you a member of any networks or organizations (political, cultural, professional, athletic)? What did these organizations do? What was your role? Did these activities shape your life? What impact did they have on you?
- Describe your neighborhood. Did you know your neighbors?
- Where did you go to school? Describe your school(s), teachers, classmates. How would you describe yourself as a student? Were there any language barriers? What did you wear to school? What was your overall experience at school? Who were your friends? Were they mostly Armenian, non-Armenian, or a mix? Were those relationships different? What are your most and least favorite memories from your school years? Did you have to memorize songs or poems at school? Do you remember them? If so, can you please sing/recite.
- What did you do after high school?

Higher Education (if applicable)

- What was your college experience like? Did you leave home? What degrees did you receive? What was your major? How and why did you choose it? What was your college experience like? Who were your friends? Were they mostly Armenian, non-Armenian, or a mix? What are your most and least favorite memories from your college years?

Business/Work

- IF APPLICABLE: When did you begin working? What did you do? Was it relevant to your prior education? Why/how did you end up at this job? Was it your choice? Did you like it? What was your relationship with your employers or employees? What other jobs have you done?
 - *If you moved to a new country:* When did you begin working? What did you do? Was it in the same field as your prior job? Why/how did you end up at this job? Was it your choice? Did you like it? What was your relationship with your employers or employees?
- IF APPLICABLE: When did you start your business? What made you choose that line of work? (Get details about how the business began)
 - Where did you get the money to start the business?
 - Did you know anything about the line of work before beginning?
 - What were some of the obstacles that you came across as you were growing the business?
 - Did your wife or husband help in the process? How so?
 - In what way did your background help -- or hurt -- your work success?
 - How did your line of work define you in the community?
 - Are you still working? Did your children take over the business? Why?

Marriage and Family

- Did you get married? When and where did you meet your spouse? What drew you to him/her? Describe your courtship? Was it typical of that time period? Were there any challenges? Was there any opposition to you getting married?
- When and how did you decide to marry? What was your wedding like? Was it typical of that time period?
- Did you have children? If so, how many children do you have?
- How did you choose your children's names?
- What was it like raising children? Were you scared? Were you involved in their education?
 - If you were raising your children in the diaspora, were there any specific challenges you experienced?
 - Did you want them to speak/learn/know Armenian? Why or why not?
 - How did you decide what school to send your children to? Was it important that your children take part in out-of-school activities? Why or why not?
 - What did you think about your children's career paths?
 - Tell us about when they began to date or think about marriage.
 - Did you have expectations of your children? Did they know you did?
- How much of your own history and personal experiences did you share with them? Why or why not? Did you feel like your children understood and related to you? Did you understand and relate to them?

Leaving Country of Origin (if applicable)

- When did you leave? Where did you go?
- What were the reasons for leaving?
- Who made the decision to leave?
- What was your mood like before leaving? Were your friends and family for or against you leaving? Why? What kind of discussions were you having with friends and family about leaving?
- What did you know about the country you were moving to? What were your impressions of that place? What made you think of this place in this way?
- Were you excited to leave? Why or why not?
- Did you have friends or relatives in the new country? Did they encourage you to join them?
- What were your sources of information about the new country?
- Were there other countries in the list of possible places to move to?
- What was the immigration process like? Was it difficult or easy?
- Did you have to go through other countries in transit before you reached your destination? How long did you stay in transit? What was that experience like?

Transition to New Country / Immigration (if applicable)

Adapt these questions to match the experience and circumstances of your interviewee. If the interviewee has moved countries/states multiple times, you should apply these questions to each transition.

- When (day, year?) did you arrive? Where did you land? Who greeted you? How old were you?
- Did the whole family come together or were they separated?

- What were you feeling on the day of your arrival? Why?
- Where did you stay the first few days/weeks?
- What was the transition to the new country like? How soon do you think you adapted to this place? Explain some of the struggles of being an immigrant.
- What were your experiences in school?
- Did you witness or face any discrimination? Explain.
- Were there language barriers? What did you do to overcome them?
- Was there any point during the transition that you thought of going back? Why?
- Were you communicating with people from the country you left? How? Why? What were the conversations like? What was the main method of communication?
- Describe some of the hardships you encountered. What did you miss most about the country you left behind?
- Describe some of the best moments you had during this transition.
- Was there an established Armenian community? If so:
 - Describe the Armenian community as you saw it when you first arrived? What did you feel was your role in the community, if any? Did you feel you were a part of the community? Why or why not?
 - Did you feel accepted by the Armenian community? Did you feel that they have biases against you? Did you feel judged?
 - Talk about some of the Armenian organizations you joined, if any.
 - How did you view the religious and political orientation of some of the organization? How did they impact you?
 - Did you give money to any Armenian organizations? Which ones and why those?
 - Did you join any non-Armenian organizations, including religious? Why or why not? If you did, which ones?
 - Did you attend school when you arrived? What did you study? Where did you study? What were your career plans/goals?
 - Did you miss the places you left? What did you miss about them? Why?
 - Did you go back to visit? If so, what was your experience like? Had the place(s) changed? How? Did you regret your decision to leave?

Multiple Identities (if applicable; We're using Lebanese as an example, but replace it with the name of the country/countries the interviewer is from.)

- Do you attend any places where you get to engage with non-Armenians from the country/countries which you have left (Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Russia, etc.)?
- Do you describe yourself as someone from one place? Or two places? Or more? For example: Are you Lebanese? Or Lebanese-Armenian? Or Lebanese-American-Armenian?
- Are there or were there any situations when you felt uncomfortable or excluded because of these various identifications?
- When or in what situations, do you feel Armenian or identify yourself as Armenian? When do you feel or identify as Lebanese?
- Do you ever say “back home”? What country does that refer to?
- Do you get to use the language of your country/countries of origin? How often, in what situations?

- How do you think your spoken Armenian is influenced by the languages of your countries of origin or by the dominant language of the country where you now live? Does your everyday Armenian regularly include expressions, words, or phrases in other languages? If so, can you provide some examples?

Visiting Armenia (if applicable)

- When was the first time you went to Armenia/USSR?
- Why did you decide to go?
- What were your impressions? How were you treated? Did your trip meet your expectations?
- How many times did you go back? When? Why?
- Did you ever work or consider working in Armenia (starting a business, for example)? Why or why not?
- If you have visited more than once, how would you describe the changes in Armenia?
- How do you feel in Armenia?
- What do you think is the diaspora's role in Armenia?

Visiting Western Armenian Lands (if applicable)

- Have you visited historic Armenia? Why or why not? If you have, when?
 - What was your experience like? Was it an emotional experience? What parts did you visit? Describe experiences?
 - Did the trip meet your expectations? Why or why not?

Armenianness

- How do you self-identify? Does it depend on who's asking (Armenian or non-Armenian)?
- What does it mean to be Armenian for you? What are your definitions of Armenianness? How do you identify Armenianness and how do your definitions shape your life and work? (ie. Marrying an Armenian? Financially helping Armenia? Going to Armenia? Living in Armenia? Music? Food?)
- What role does the Armenian language play in your life, if any, and is it tied to your Armenianness?
- *If living in the Diaspora:* Did you ever consider moving to Armenia? What influenced your decision?

Concluding Thoughts/Questions:

- How do you define success? Do you think you've reached your personal and professional goals?
- Do you have any regrets? What and why?
- What are the most pressing issues in your life right now?
- What advice would you share with the younger generations?
- What would you like your parents and grandparents to know about you?
- What would you like your children and grandchildren to know about you?
- What are you concerned or worried about for the future?
- What do you look forward to?
- What do you wish I had asked but didn't?