



Journal in a Jar



Journal in a Jar® is an Activity Resource developed by Linda Panarella, Certified Dementia Practitioner, PAC Certified Independent Trainer, and Director of Business Development for Senior Helpers of Ocean County and Town Square at the Jersey Shore. Linda is available for community training and education on many topics, including Senior Gems® and the Positive Approach to Care® for professional, family, and volunteer care partners.

Senior Helpers is a leading international home care company providing companion care, personal care, and 24/7 live-in care for seniors to help them live independently, wherever they call home. Senior Helpers specializes in Alzheimer's and Dementia Care and Parkinson's Care.

Town Square is a pioneering Adult Day Care and Enrichment Center. Town Square resonates the look and feel of a town in the 50's where members can interact in 13 different store fronts to experience reminiscing and enriching activities. It is scheduled to open Spring 2021 in Brick NJ.

*Journal in a Jar is provided with our compliments and our desire to help you continue to write the story of someone's life by:
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Preserve Memories and Create a Legacy for Your Client/Loved One

Before memories fade or are lost altogether you can preserve them for your clients/loved ones. Doing so will create many moments of joy as stories are shared and memories are re-lived. It will also create a legacy to be treasured by the family.

There are several ways to do this activity. It is intended to be done over a period of time, and not necessarily in the order of the questions below. Additionally, not all or even half of the questions need to be answered to create a significant memoir. You can also add your own questions or fill in more information where your client/loved one is able to provide it. Depending upon your client/loved one and the length of your relationship with them, you may want to start with less personal questions first.

Interviewers can be one person or several and can include professional, family, or volunteer care partners. If there are multiple interviewers, it is recommended you put in place a method for tracking the questions that have been answered. Family care partners can include any family member which creates the potential for a wonderful inter-generational project when including grand-children.

Ways to chronicle your journal:

1. Write the questions and answers in a spiral or 3 ring notebook, in a bound journal, or a simple Marble Composition notebook. It is then retained in Journal form.

2. Or, record questions and answers on a tablet. Use only one side of the page for this method as you will cut each page into strips with a question and answer on each strip. Then fold the strips and place them in a jar to present to the family. The family can then choose one slip each day to read. After all slips have been read it can be passed between households. This version of the project is called “Journal in a Jar”.
3. You can also use a recorder for oral documentation and enjoy the benefit of capturing your client’s/loved one’s voice as they share reminisces.
4. If client/loved one is able to record their own responses to the reminiscing questions, the gift of having the answers written in their own hand is an added treasure. Care partners can assist by keeping client on track to work on journaling and to support the task with encouraging conversation.
5. Take your time in interviewing and enjoy the moments of reminiscing and relationship building that can occur during your conversations.
6. There is potential to self-publish the journal. This can be done by having the completed journal transcribed from the written or oral format. Senior Helpers and Town Square is currently forming a partnership with a publishing company with several publishing options. Contact Linda Panarella for more details.

Tips on interviewing a person living with dementia.

- Memories that are the oldest are preserved the longest. If a client/loved one is not able to tell you what they had for lunch, don’t be discouraged by thinking they cannot participate in telling stories from the past—they will excel at that.
- Depending upon cognitive abilities of the person being interviewed, some questions may pose a challenge to answer. If that happens, re-assure the interviewee by saying, “We can come back to that one” and then focus on simpler questions. The activity is not intended to create stress. It should be emotionally healing and restorative as favorite stories and memories are shared.
- Another way to draw out a person living with dementia is to simplify the questions and elicit more information by saying, “Tell me about it”. When you allow the person living with dementia to take the lead in the conversation, they are better able to communicate within their abilities.
- Allow time for a person living with dementia to hear the question and potentially formulate a response. As dementia progresses, our typical communication practices can be impaired because what may have once been an automatic response may now take more time to process and reply to. Impairment in communication is not equivalent to inability to communicate. It just means we may have to adapt, which includes simplifying and being patient for a response.

Potential questions to pose to encourage or help do some journaling...

Remember—you don’t have to ask them all and you don’t have to do them in the order listed.

All About You

Tell me something funny or embarrassing that happened to you as a child or teenager.

Do you know why you were given your name? Does it have a special meaning?

Did you have a nickname? How did you get it?

What was the first thing you usually did when you got home from school?

Did you ever skip school? To do what?

What is the one thing you were afraid of when you were a small child?

What are you most afraid of now?

What was your favorite radio show? Tell about it.

What was your favorite TV show? Tell about it.

What games did you enjoy as a child?
Did you have any pets? Tell about them. What were their names?
Tell about the first motion picture you ever saw.
Were you ever seriously ill as a child?
Did you ever have any accidents as a child?
Tell about some traditional foods from your holiday celebrations?
What is your saddest memory of your childhood?
What was your least favorite chore as a child? Explain.
What was your most favorite chore as a child? Explain.
What were the most mischievous pranks you pulled?
What were some of the fads when you were a teenager? Did your parents disapprove of any of them?
What did you like best about your looks when you were a teenager? What did you like the least?
What kind of dances were popular when you were young?
What was your favorite snack food when you were young?
What was your favorite dessert when you were young?
What food did you refuse to eat?
Who did you admire most when you were a teenager?
What was your favorite place to go when you were a child?
What was your favorite place to go on vacation?
Did you have favorite sport as a child?
If you played a sport as a child, what position did you play?
Did you ever win an award or a prize?
How did you typically get in trouble with your parents? How were you punished?
Who was your favorite teacher and why?
Who is your favorite actor or actress?
What is your favorite movie?
What kinds of games did you play outdoors at home and on the school playground?
What types of card games or board games did you play with family or friends?
What did you do for relaxation 30 years ago?
Were you in the service? Where was your basic training and what was it like?
Where were you stationed and for how long? Describe your living arrangements.
NOTE: To focus only on military life, consider participation in the Veteran's History Project. Details and a Field Kit are available at <https://www.loc.gov/vets/kitmenu.html>

Family Life

Tell me about your grandparents.
What did your parents do for a living?
Describe the kind of people they were.
Describe the house you grew up in.
Tell about your brothers and sisters—where did you fall in the birth order of your family?
Did you have to share a bedroom?
What was it like to share a bathroom?
How did you spend your summers as a child?
If you ever moved when you were young, how did you feel about leaving your friends and going to a new school?
Did you have any favorite relatives? How were they important to you?
Tell a story about each of your children's early years.
Did your children have any medical emergencies or serious illnesses?
How did you discipline your children?
What is the proudest moment you had as a parent?
What is the best part of being a parent?

Education and Work Life

When did you move away from home and where did you go?
Did you go to a trade school or college?
Did you pledge a fraternity or sorority? Describe that experience.
What was your favorite activity at college?
What is your favorite memory from college?
Tell me about your first job. What was your pay?
Tell about your first job that allowed you to be self-supporting.
What job did you stay at for the longest time?
Did your career match your education, or did you choose another field?
What led you to your line of work or career?
Did you ever change your line of work or career? How many times and why?

Romance

What kinds of things did you and your friends do on dates?
Did you attend any school dances or your prom? With whom? Describe them and the event.
How and where did you first meet your spouse or significant other?
What was your first date?
Describe your marriage proposal.
How old were you when you were married?
What was different about your pre-wedding events and your wedding than those of today?
Where did you have your honeymoon?
Tell about your first home together.
Do you have a favorite story about being a newlywed?
What did you argue about the most?
What were the hardest times in your marriage?
What do you admire most about your spouse or significant other?
What was the first pregnancy like? How, when, and where did the birth occur?
How did your first child change your lifestyle?
How did you choose your children's names?
What was your biggest parenting challenge?

Faith Life

What does God mean to you?
What are some of your favorite religious verses?
If you could ask one question of God, what would it be?
How often do you pray? Do you say a prayer you learned or do you pray what's on your heart?
What religious holidays were celebrated in your home?
What is your favorite religious holiday and why?
Do you believe in an afterlife? What do you think it's like?
What brings happiness to you?
If you only had one week to live, what would you do?
Have you made peace with everyone important in your life? Explain.

Significant Memories

What was your favorite event of your childhood?
Are there any smells, flavors, sounds, or songs that bring back memories of your childhood?
What do you remember about your mother when you were a child?
Who do you look most like—your mother or your father and why?
Which of your mother's characteristics did you inherit?
What is the happiest memory you have of your mother?

Which of your father's characteristics did you inherit?
What were your father's best qualities?
What is the happiest memory you have of your father?

Reflections

What would you like to do that you've never done before?
Where would you like to go that you've never gone before?
What is the biggest mistake you ever made?
What is the smartest decision you ever made?
What is the nicest thing you have ever done for someone else?
What is the nicest thing someone has ever done for you?
What do you think is the most amazing invention of your lifetime?
What modern conveniences have affected your lifestyle the most?
What dreams have you had in your lifetime? Did any become a reality?
If you have had or still have a serious illness, how has it changed your life?
If you could change the way you raised your children, what would you do differently?
What accomplishment in your life are you most proud of?
What advice do you have for getting along with others?
What makes a good friendship?
What advice do you have on parenting?
What do you feel has been your purpose in life?
How do you most want to be remembered?
Is today's younger generation very different from the young people of your generation? Have their values changed for better or worse?
What is more difficult about growing up today than when you were growing up?
What advantages do the youth of today have that you didn't have?
What dis-advantages do the youth of today have that you didn't have?
How do you deal with things you can't change?
What is the most important thing you want your family and friends to know about you?
From whom do you feel you have learned the most about life? Explain.
For what are you complimented the most?

Looking at Me Now

As an adult, is there any food you still refuse to eat?
What was your least favorite chore as an adult? Explain
What was your most favorite chore as an adult? Explain
If you could live your life over again, would you do anything differently? If so, what?
If you could change any part of yourself, what would it be?
What were the most important things you learned about life by the time you reached middle age?
Between the ages of 40 and 65, what was the best year for you and why? The worst year and why?
What is your favorite snack food today?
What is your favorite dessert today?
Name 3 things you cannot do without.
How did you feel about becoming a senior citizen?
Have your senior years been like you always thought they would be? If not, how have they been different?
Have you lost many loved ones? If so, who have their losses affected you?
Have you become emotionally stronger with age? Explain.
What changes should be made to benefit senior citizens?
Are any of your looks, personality traits, or talents evident in your grandchildren?
Name some disadvantages or things you don't like, related to aging.
What is one of the best advantages to aging?