The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration

Finding a Grannie Annie Topic

Young People Learning and Sharing Family Stories – www.TheGrannieAnnie.org

You or your family storykeeper may know exactly which story from your family's past you want to explore together—but perhaps not! Reading the following list of story ideas, or looking through the stories already published by The Grannie Annie, may help some of your relative's memories rise to the surface. Please understand that these are only examples—you are welcome to write about a story topic that is not on this list.

adventure
animals (cats, dogs, horses, etc.)
babies
careers/jobs
celebration (birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, etc.)
childhood (children with adult responsibilities, play)
community life (neighbors, clubs, volunteer work)
courtship
crime (theft, kidnapping)
death
education (school days memories, mentors, college)
entertainment (books, movies, radio, TV, music, theater, celebrities)
everyday life in times past
family life (challenges, daily routines, family fun, family jokes, relationships, traditions)
food
government or elected officials
Great Depression
hardships (nature, personal challenges or disappointments, societal challenges)
hobbies
Holocaust
illness
immigration
matriarchs and patriarchs
memorabilia, such as jewelry
military
money
mystery
personalities and habits
prejudice
relationships (family, friend, and other: friendship, separation, misunderstanding, rivalry, forgiveness, etc.)
religion or faith
rural or urban life
slavery
sports
surprise
tragedy or triumph
transportation (horse and buggy, bicycle, automobile, ship, train, plane, etc.)
travel (honeymoon, vacation, business)
war (battles, spying, etc.)
wartime (rationing, propaganda, etc.)
weather

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Your Grannie Annie Interview

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The Grannie Annie invites you to interview one of your family storykeepers to learn about your family's history. You will use the information from this interview to write your Grannie Annie story. The tips below will help you make good use of your interview time and will help you write the best possible story.

1. Identify your family storykeepers

- Think about your family members—**ask yourself who enjoys telling stories about the past.**
- With the help of your parent(s) or guardian, **schedule an interview** with one of these people. Family get-togethers, such as Thanksgiving or winter holidays, might provide a good opportunity. If you seldom see this family storykeeper, consider a telephone interview.

2. Plan for your interview

- **Decide which family or historical events, or family members you'd like to learn about** in your interview. Consider asking about hard times as well as good times.
- **Write down some questions** that you'd like to have answered. Try to put your questions in a logical order. Write only two or three questions on a page (with space between them) so that you'll have room to write your storykeeper's responses. Allow space even if you expect a very short answer; your storykeeper might share surprising information with you.
- If you'd like to record your interview, ask your storykeeper if he or she would be willing for you to do so on videotape or audiotape. If you are going to videotape the interview, ask someone else to handle the camera for you so that you can focus on the interview.

3. Conduct the interview

- ***Listen*** to what your storykeeper tells you.
- **Take notes**. You needn't write everything your storykeeper says, but write enough so that you will understand your notes later.
- When you hear something that you'd like to know more about—either because it is interesting or because it is unclear—**ask a follow-up question**. Your interview should be a conversation, not just a long sequence of questions and short answers.
- Try to capture details that will enable you to vividly recreate your storykeeper's experience for your readers. Looking together at old photos, letters, newspaper articles, or objects from the past can inspire more detail.
- Be sure to **thank your storykeeper** for the interview. A thank-you note would further show your appreciation.

(*See next page*)

Your Grannie Annie Interview

(*continued*)

4. Fill the holes (Not always necessary)

- As you write your story, you may find that some of your information is incomplete or you may think of other questions that you wish you'd asked. Some of those questions may be answered through research or by asking another family member. If you can't find the answers to your questions, plan for a follow-up interview (perhaps by phone), and then contact your storykeeper to get the information you need.

5. Share your story

- When you have finished writing, revising, and editing your story, **give a neatly written copy to this family storykeeper** who shared an experience with you and made your story possible. You may want to bind, decorate, and/or illustrate your story.

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Writing Your Grannie Annie Story

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You've interviewed a family storykeeper but aren't sure how to begin writing your Grannie Annie story? That's not surprising, because writing is complex. It involves many specific tasks—getting an idea, putting it into words, and organizing information, *plus* tending to sentence structure, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling! One way to make the writing process easier is to break it into parts so that you can focus on each step individually. Here are some suggestions.

1. Plan your story

- What is the main idea you want to get across? You might not state this idea in your story, but having it in your mind will help you frame your story and decide what information to include.
- What background information do your readers need?
- How will you capture your readers' interest at the beginning of your story?
- How will you end your story? What will you say to leave your readers with the final thought or feeling you want them to have?

2. Write your first draft quickly, not worrying about correct sentence structure, usage, capitalization, punctuation, or spelling.

3. Revise your story, getting feedback on the *content* from your classmates, family, teachers, and others. Find out which parts of your story work well and which parts are confusing or need more detail. Make the changes *you* want to make. Consider the suggestions in The Grannie Annie resource titled "Revising Your Grannie Annie Story."

4. Edit your story for correct usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. You may want to read through your story several times, checking for just one kind of error at a time. Keep reading through your story until you have read it at least twice without making any changes. You also may want to ask for guidance from a teacher or other adult.

5. Share your finished story with your family, your classmates, and others in your school and community. Celebrate the fact that you have saved this important piece of your family's history!

The Grannie Annie Family Story Celebration

Revising Your Grannie Annie Story

Young People Learning and Sharing Family Stories www.TheGrannieAnnie.org

Once you've written a draft of your Grannie Annie story, share it with your classmates, family, teachers, and others to find out which parts work well and which parts are confusing or need more detail. Make the changes in your story that *you* want to make.

Now you're ready for an even closer look at your story. Published authors consider the specific revision topics identified below to make their writing interesting and satisfying for their readers — to make their work shine. Don't feel you need to use all these suggestions; just use those that feel right to you and work in your story.

The story excerpts that follow each revision topic provide just a few examples of the excellent writing in the stories published by The Grannie Annie. Numbers following each author's name indicate the paperback volume and first page of the story. For example, 1:15 indicates Volume 1 of *Grannie Annie*, page 15.

Beginning

The beginning of your story should provide necessary background information and should grab your readers' attention.

Imagine being a teenager and leaving your family to travel thousands of miles to a new country to live. How would you feel? In 1981 my dad had to do just that. He was sixteen years old, and my grandparents sent him to Chicago alone from Taiwan to stay with family friends. They did this because they thought he would get a better education in the United States.

"A Different Land" by Joanne Hsueh, 2:67

My grandpa was seven years old when he was shot at by the Japanese on December 7, 1941.

"Pearl Harbor Day 1941" by Avalon Derlacki, 1:69

Ending

The ending of your story should leave your readers with the final thought or feeling you want them to have.

When the weather is very cold and you listen very carefully, you can hear furniture moving in the attic where the soldiers had huddled together for warmth. To this day, the attic still creaks and moans as if two soldiers are dragging chairs together to stay warm.

"Aunt Gail's Haunted House" by Gabe Salmon, 1:62

So the next time you get the hiccups, remember my great-great-great-uncle Charles Osborne and hope that one of the home remedies for these irritating hiccups works for you! No one wants to break Charles's world record for sixty-eight years of hiccups!

"Longest Attack of Hiccups" by Madison Paige McIntyre, 1:64

Revising Your Grannie Annie Story

Framing Your Story

Tying the beginning and ending of your story together provides a frame for your story. A frame might repeat a key idea from the story, might create a story within a story, or might depend upon a single repeated word. The following excerpts show beginnings and endings that frame their stories.

"Grandma, will you tell me a story?" I ask. . . . This is my favorite story. It makes me feel like I'm a time traveler. My grandma passed along her history, and now I'm passing it along.

"Ferdyl" by Samuel Kramer, 2:15

A hot, humid day in June of 1972 started out to be normal, as normal is on a farm with five kids. . . . It took several days to clean up, but life was back to normal again on the farm.

"The Tornado" by Jeffrey Paul Duda,1:21

Concrete Description

Providing concrete details, especially details that appeal to the senses, will help bring the experience to life for your readers.

With her better-paying job, Oma bought a green bicycle with lights on the front and the back so she could ride fourteen miles round trip between home and work each day.

"Growing Up German" by Sean Millard, 2:40

The owner (they called him Mr. Candy) blew hot candy into action figures, animals, fruits, and all kinds of interesting shapes. It was just like balloon animals at the fair except it was smaller and you could eat it if you wanted. Most of the kids eventually did.

"Holding Hands" by Benji Gu, 2:17

Dialogue

You know your characters are alive when they have a voice of their own. Dialogue gives readers a firsthand view of your characters. Including regional words, or dialect, can make the recreated experience even more vivid for your readers.

Hungrily Grandpa told them, "Looks larrupin'. I'm as hungry as a bear."

"The Family Reunion and the Missing Plate" by Sara Michelle Zachary, 1:15

"It's not my fault your stupid hog was in the road," interrupted Uncle Paul.
"That was our best hog, and you're going to pay for it," yelled the bigger Lowe.

"Hank and the Hog" by Michael Joseph Rother, 1:57

Revising Your Grannie Annie Story

Strong, Active Verbs

Verbs, the words that indicate action, bear the greatest responsibility for keeping your writing lively. Finding the appropriate specific verb will enable you to express your idea concisely and will make your writing powerful.

The fluffy yellow ducklings peep at our feet as we toss them stale breadcrumbs. The little birds sing their sweet songs; twitters pierce the air. We stop and listen, then continue our way down to the beach. . . . We had stood together smelling the salt air and gazing at the waves foaming and crashing against the rock.

"A Walk into the Past" by Megan M. Howson, 2:31

When [Great-Grandpa] arrived, the snow had accumulated so high that the door to the shelter was blocked. Grandma had to hoist herself up and out of a window to get outside. She climbed onto the sleigh and into the barrel, and again covered herself with the blanket. Great-Grandpa covered himself as best he could from the cold and wind, and off they went.

"Horses Know the Way to Carry the Barrel" by Karen Figenshau, 2:50 [end of story]

Sentence Variety

Imagine how dull it would be to read a story about someone's aunt that primarily consisted of short sentences, all beginning with the words "Aunt Mary." Varying the length and pattern of your sentences will make your writing more interesting and effective.

When my savta returned to her hometown in Romania, her home was destroyed and the factory was gone. Only 2,000 of the 8,000 Jews who had entered Mogilev had survived. From 1944 to 1947 Aunt Pearl worked hard making arrangements for my savta and her sister to travel to relatives in Canada.

"From Tragedy to Triumph" by Matan Halzel, 1:51

Growing up as a child was very hard for Harriett; she was the oldest of three kids. After her parents' divorce, times were even harder.

"Miracles Do Happen" by Bri'Anna Brown, 2:58

Show, Don't Tell

Describing a person's words and/or actions — instead of naming their feeling — provides your readers with a vivid picture. Then your readers can draw their own conclusions about the person's feelings.

Tears rolled down her cheeks because her father had recently passed away.

"And They Lived Happily Ever After" by Manny Rodriguez, 2:43

Kitty purred at Aunt Sue and my dad. He gave Grandpa that old familiar glare.

"Kitty" by Joey Rosga, 2:55

Revising Your Grannie Annie Story

Figurative Language and Other Poetic Devices

Using poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, repetition, alliteration, simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech can make your writing more descriptive. Try to avoid figures of speech that have been used so much that they are no longer fresh and appealing, such as "sweet as honey."

Whoosh! Root beer was flying all over the kitchen. This was not good. There was root beer on the ceiling, root beer on the floor, root beer on the windows, root beer on the door. And the root beer was still spraying out of the bottle like Old Faithful. This was not good at all.

"Root Beer Rascals" by Timothy Andrew Metcalf, 1:37 [onomatopoeia, repetition, simile]

"You see, children, this flower is just like us. It is working hard to survive. There are many sorts of flowers here, and there are many sorts of people in New Amsterdam. But we will all work together. This pretty pink flower will grow up here, and so will we."

"My Ancestor Philippe DuTrieux" by Emily M. Esther, 1:40 [extended simile]

Voice

Voice is the way you, the author, project yourself into your writing. Various factors, such as how serious or how formal the piece is, may affect the voice of a piece of writing. Notice how the authors' attitudes toward their subjects differ in the following excerpts:

I will just put it right out there and say it: I am related to a klutz. No, I am not talking about my dad (though he is on my dad's side). I am talking about my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, John Howland. That is ten *great*s, which is a lot. But then I guess you would need that many *great*s to go back to the *Mayflower*. Yes, you read this right. My ancestor came over on the *Mayflow*er, and then fell off the *Mayflower*.

"John Howland" by Kaylie Hodge, 2:71 [beginning of story]

My family is Jewish, and when I listen to my grandparents' stories, it helps me to learn more about my history and my heritage. My savta (Hebrew for *grandmother*) and her sister were born in the late 1930s in Romania. Sadly, they were subjected to one of the most tragic events in our world's history, the Holocaust.

"The Golden Chocolate Bar" by Ariela Halzel, 2:19 [beginning of story]