

These pages could be a starter base for conversation, a life story book, an autobiography or reminiscence group



Here are some conversation starters which can either be phrased as a question or given to the person to write about or to speak to. Don't ask a question if you sense from what you know about the person that this might not be an easy subject. If they appear very closed or private then make the question more general and less personal. Choose when to ask this but many of these questions could be followed with 'How did you feel about it?'

## CHILDHOOD

What was the house you grew up in like?

What was the area you grew up in like?



What I loved to do best as a child



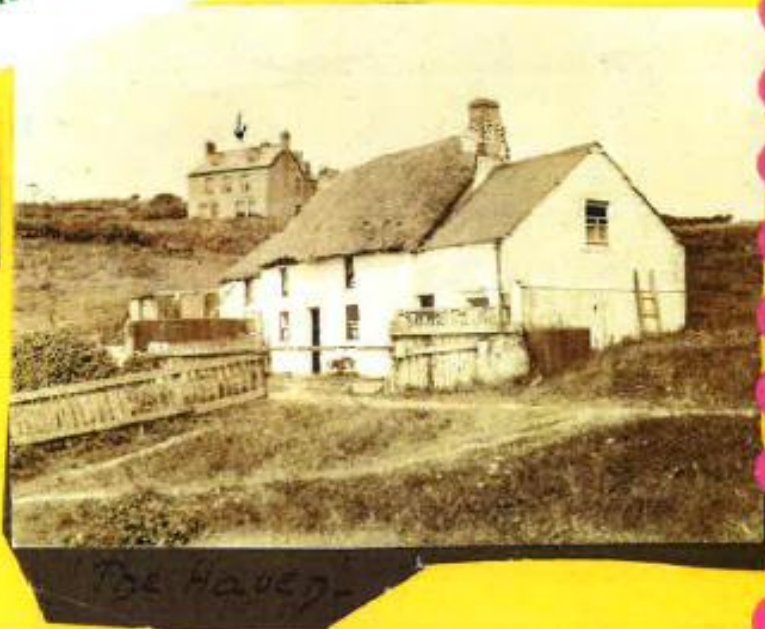
My best friend.... conversation leading to what was liked about him/her and why

Sydney, self, Robin, Peter, Phyllis, Philip

The sort of scenery I like best...

Or play around with how you get the person talking. They may prefer you to start the sentence and they will take over the rest of the sentence/s. Let them know they can say 'No comment' at any point if they do agree to this conversational game. This depends on some trust being built up between you already and some preparation from you with any relevant family photo albums being close at hand. You could select the photos you might have questions about. Comment on how the photo you are looking at strikes you.

My imaginary favourite place...



Adventures I had in the area where I was brought up in with family and friends... **Start as far back as they can remember but this may lead to other places they have lived and feelings about the physicality of an area**



Countries I have enjoyed/ Holidays I have loved/Cultures I am drawn to...

Make comment on what you see in a photo; 'What a lot of children all together! I wonder if they are relatives/on holiday/what time of year it is?

Advance to questions if there is a good reception. Who has made them laugh?/ Does the girl like being the only girl?/ Who is the girl?/ Is it you?/ Who was the naughtiest cousin?/ Have you kept in touch? They are wearing warm clothes?/ Is it summer?/



1916 Rhos-on-Sea  
North Wales

This photo was taken in the middle of winter 1916 and it is a group of cousins whose parents believed holidays by the sea in winter were good for the health. They were allowed to paddle!



Above: Family photo  
1961 Day. Me, Audrey, Mary,  
Neville, Mary, Paul, David, John



What made me fall in love... Was it with a husband/wife or perhaps someone else! My grandmother [age 87] when asked who she had been most in love with, surprised us [since she had been married twice] by saying, with a far-away look in her eyes, 'A girl in the sixth form'

## ROMANCE



Ambitions I had as a teenager...

One of the things I have really enjoyed when I was younger was..

Clothing I hated /loved...

Something I was/am good at



Fashions I remember...

## ROMANCE

What makes me feel most alive...



*The chief bridesmaid is enjoying herself!*



My marriage [s]/ partner [s]... This can lead to both positive and negative discussions but take your lead from the person. They may want to talk about the wonderful qualities of their partner but there may be sadness with all the feelings of loss this brings as well.

My religion/what do I believe in... This can lead to wide ranging conversations about ethics, morality, ghosts, astrology, an after-life, or why they are an atheist or agnostic.

Attitudes to sex and being gay or lesbian when I was a teenager were...



Does this phrase mean anything to you? There's a first love, best love, worst love and last love?

# PETS



Pets/animals that I have loved...



Were your pets easy to care for?



What were their names?

What sort of pets have you had?



Did they give you pleasure or did they get into trouble?

What animals have you always been drawn to?



## EDUCATION

School didn't/did help me in life..

Did you enjoy school?

Funny times I had at school...

My favourite/worst teacher...

Did you keep up with any of your school friends?

## FAMILY of origin

When I was naughty in my family.....conversation leading to what discipline was like at that time and in their family

My favourite relatives...

My favourite places as a child...

Celebrations in my family that we enjoyed...



I loved/hated cooking...



The reason I was given my name... There is usually a back story to a name and finding out what a person feels about the names they have been known by tells you more than you might expect

People in my family and what they looked/look like... Leading to a greater exploration about feelings around their family of birth

## WORLD WAR 11

## CHILDHOOD

Were you a child in the second world war?



Do you think it affected the way you were brought up?

Do you remember anything about it? Eg rations, ration books, wounded people, bombs falling.



People behave differently in many ways nowadays to when I was a child...manners/technology/ customs

# HOLIDAYS

Languages I enjoy speaking or listening to...

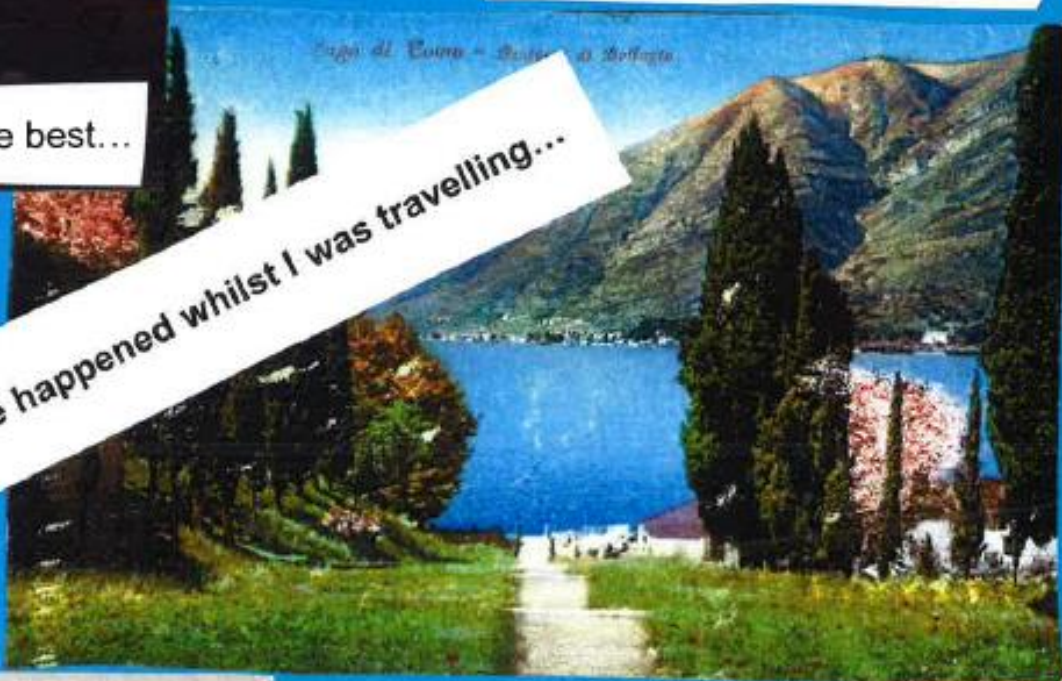


The sort of scenery I like best...



My imaginary favourite place...

Exciting things that have happened whilst I was travelling...



My dream place to live was...



Countries I feel at home in...

Languages I speak/spoke/learned...

## LANGUAGE

Expressions and words that we used as young people...A diary from 1918 by my grandmother who was 18 revealed a lost descriptive vocabulary. She was Newcastle born, and her father was a merchant builder. The family with 7 children lived in a terraced house in Jesmond. The vocabulary of the diary reflected something of her class, culture and the country at the time. I found a lexicon of familiar words used in unknown ways; 'ripping, killing, fooled, talked hard, [all about enjoyment] beastly, mouldy [about men that were not attractive to her], lushable, heavenly fun and glorious fun'. I also discovered the family enjoyed Planchette and attended church weekly with no contradiction experienced and wish I could have asked her had I read it when she was alive if this was because of the slaughter of war involving young men she may have known. Was it a need to negate the finality of death in a way that religion may not have allowed?

Much of our language is class, culture and area based and how we select our words can reveal more openings into the personality and life directly in front of you. When we talk rather than write our language changes too. The person in front of you may want to write parts of the book if fit enough in mind and hand.

Do you speak another language?

Which language do you speak in?

Which language do you think in?

Do you remember your dreams?

Which language do you dream in?

Do you think having another language expands your mind and perceptions?

Do you like to listen to languages you don't understand? Do you have a favourite language that is not your first one to listen to?

## SOCIETY



I was a country/town/city person. Now I am..

Do you feel that your class has been a big part of your sense of identity?

How has money featured in your life? Has it been a worry or has it come easily to you?



Issues that I have felt passionately about... **politics, culture , sexism, animal cruelty, green issues and on and on**



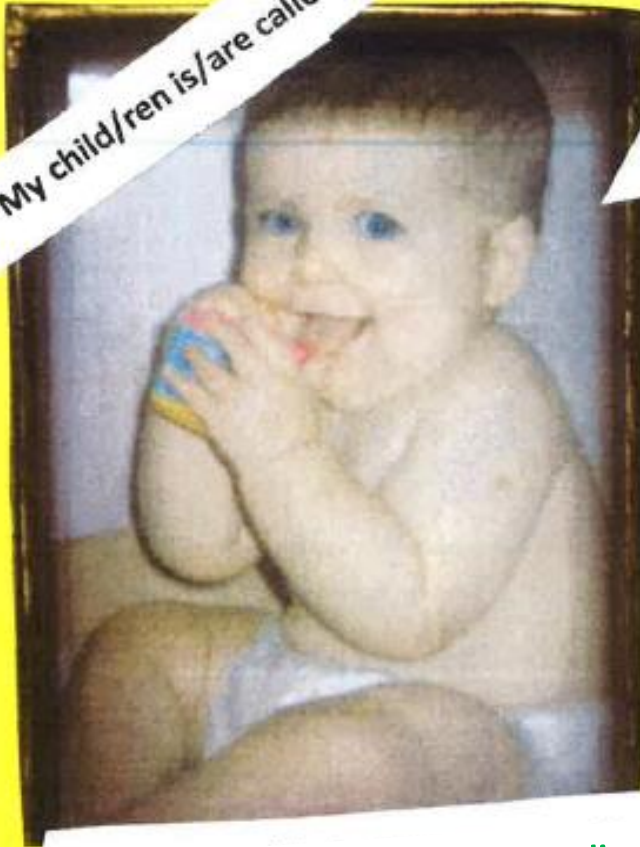
**Reflection:** The main changes I notice in society since I was a child are...

## FAMILY of creation

What was the best part of having a child? What was the hardest?

My child/ren is/are called

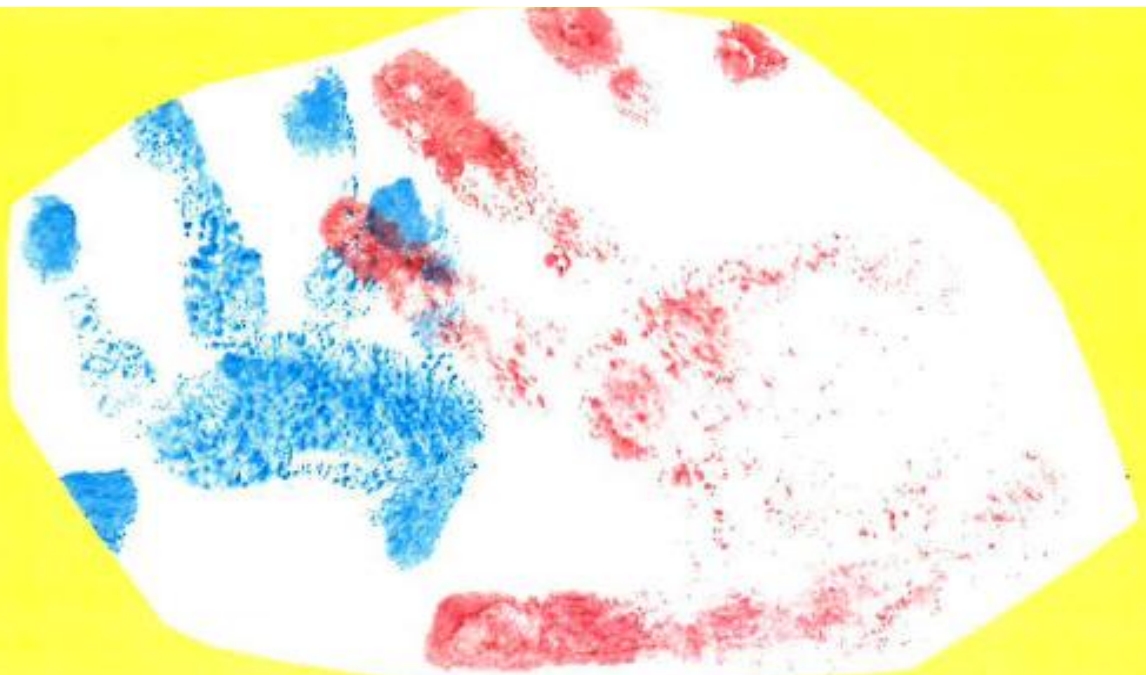
What is their life like?



## PARENTHOOD

How I found being a parent... discussion about easy and difficult times

These are possible discussions if enjoyment and interest is shown. You will get a sense if the subject is causing pain which does not feel healthy. Long term memory when looking back over the years is so much better than short term memory. Touching on areas experienced long ago can heighten a sense of lived experience whilst present day events can feel blurry and confused.



## UNIQUE STORIES

Sometimes you will come across unusual pictures.  
Ideas for responses are...



I wonder what the story is here...

Can you tell me more about this person?

How important has alcohol been in your life?

Was it an escape or did it really add to your enjoyment?

Adapt to whatever subject or substance is right for the context of the conversation.

## HOMES



How significant or important has your residence been for you?

The houses/flats/cottages/villas/maisonettes I have lived in.

Do you associate them with feelings about your life?

## HEALTH

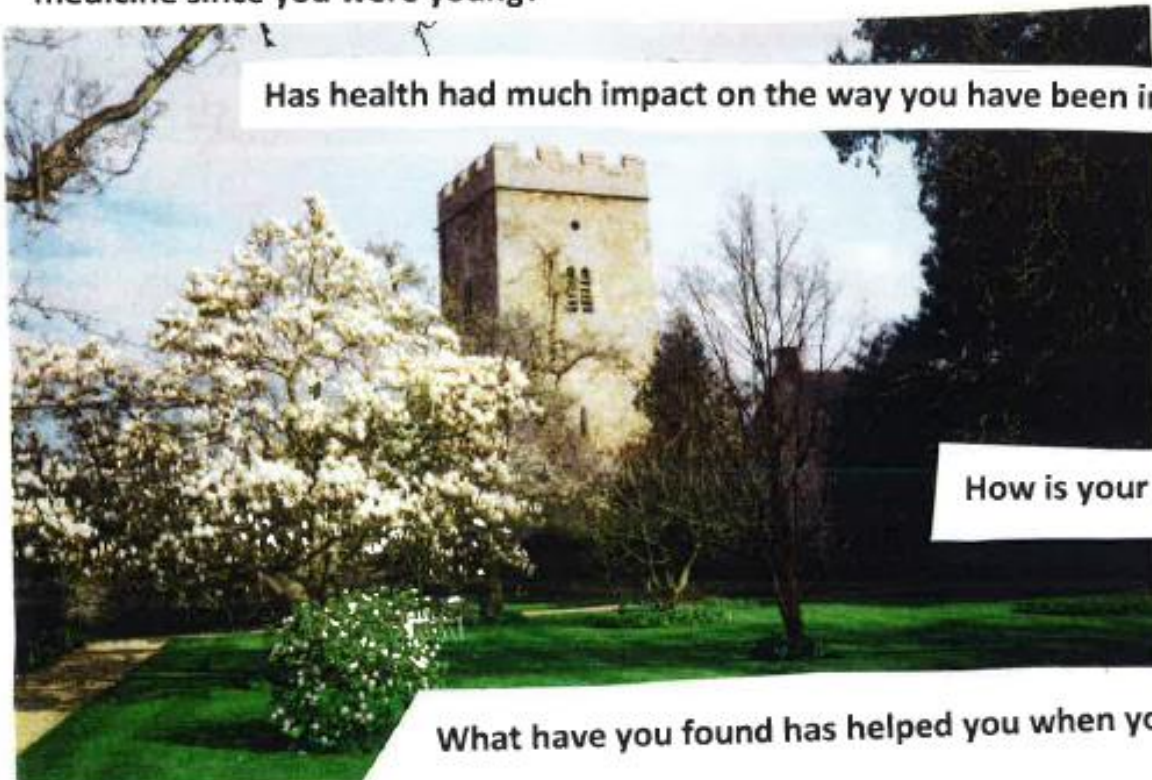
Health events in my life...People tend to enjoy talking about health more as they get older for obvious reasons but sometimes events around health have had an enormous impact on how the person experiences themselves or lessons learned so try to keep curious in how they respond to this one.



Have you ever visited an acupuncturist/healer/herbalist or any other alternative health expert?



Have you had good health in your life? Have you seen many changes in medicine since you were young?



Has health had much impact on the way you have been in your life?

How is your health now?

What have you found has helped you when you are in pain?

# THE ARTS

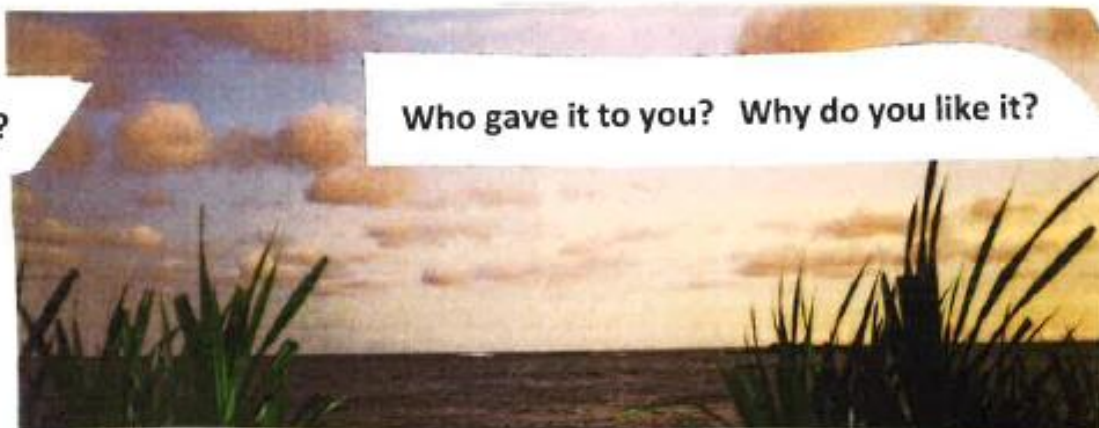
Talk about anything visual you see on the walls



Why did you chose this picture/painting/screenprint/ornament/object/embroidery/clock etc?

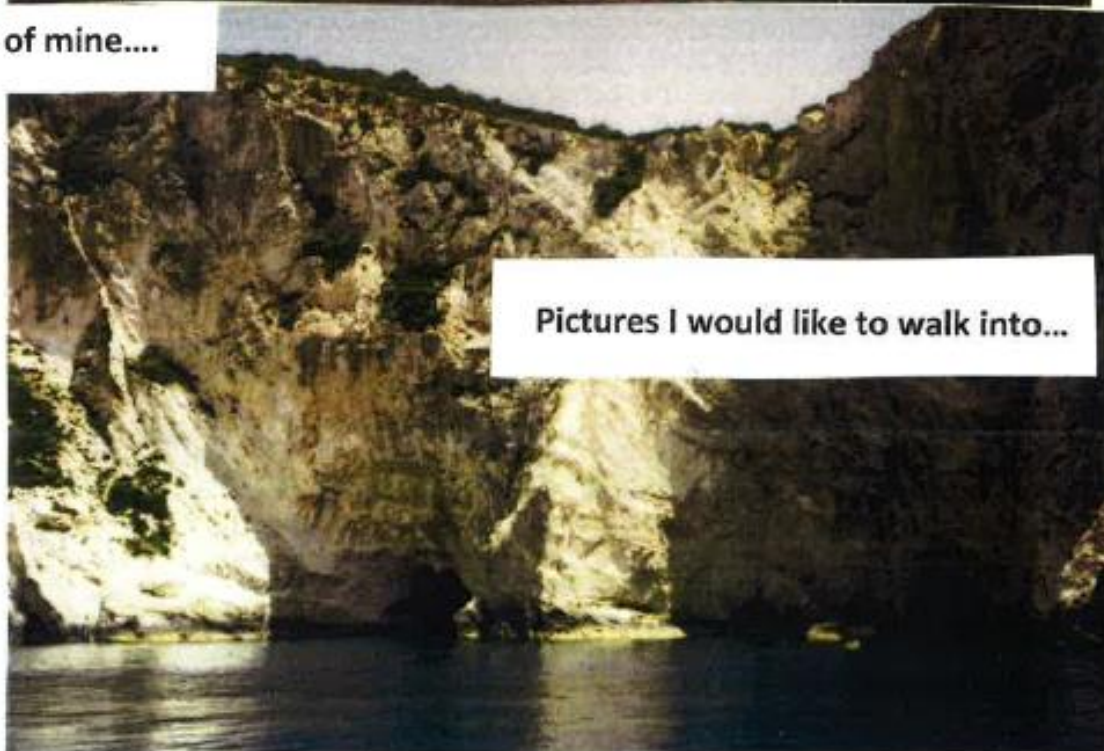
Is there a story about it?

Who gave it to you? Why do you like it?



A favourite picture of mine....

Pictures I would like to walk into...



# THE ARTS



The first movie/theatrical production I remember...

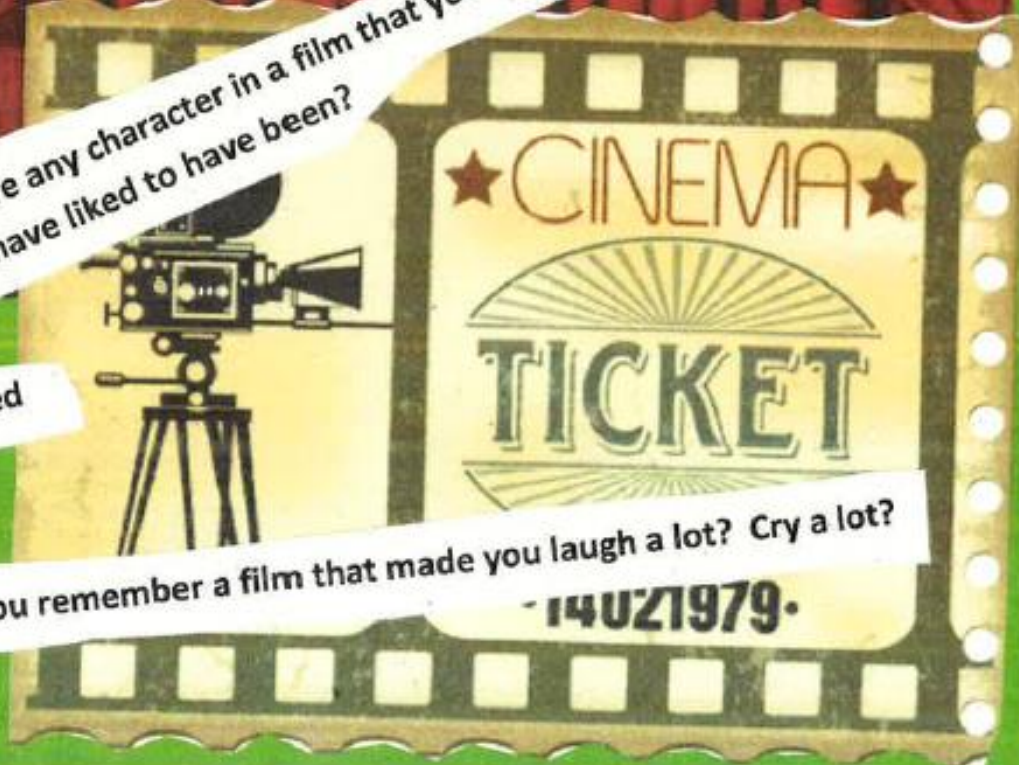


How often did you go to the cinema? What did a night out at the cinema usually involve? Have there been many changes?

Was there any character in a film that you particularly identified with or would have liked to have been?

A film I loved

Can you remember a film that made you laugh a lot? Cry a lot?



# THE ARTS



The first music I remember hearing...

Do you like to sing?

tunes

My

My favourite musicians and why I like/d them

The first album I bought...

How their music made me feel

Sounds I love/d

My best piece of music...

What I danced to...

Music I would set the story of my life to..

Conversations about music could lead to accessing U Tube and playing them the music they are able to recall. Just a few lines of lyrics even if the musician is not recalled can lead to immediate retrieval via google and on U Tube.

An instrument I played

# THE ARTS

## POETRY

Do you like poetry?



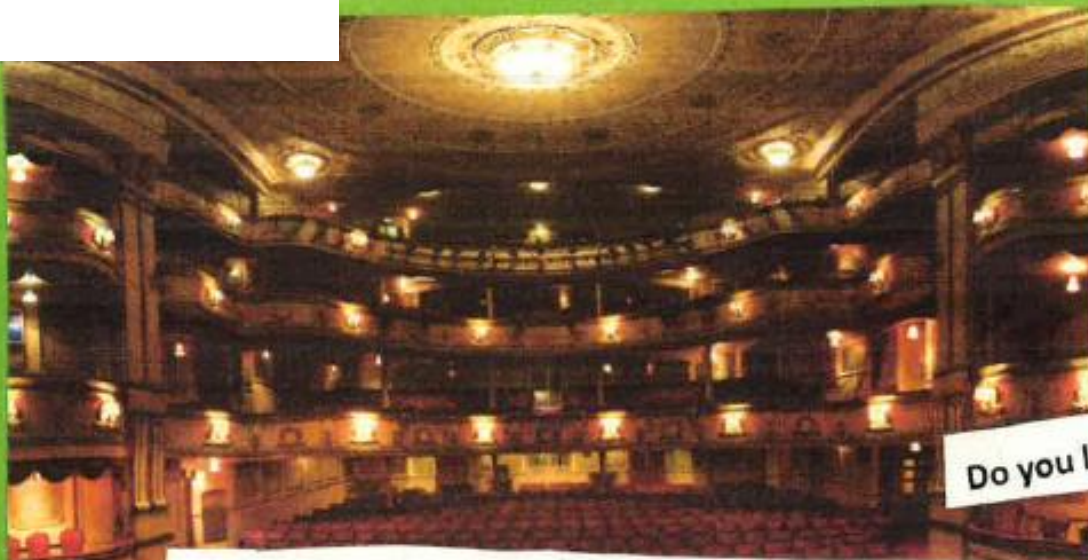
What is your favourite poem?

Do you ever write poetry?

Would you like to write a poem about something we have talked about?

**Why not select poetry or old letters with your person if they are engaged and have kept any? You could read them aloud or they could read them to you. This might engage them more deeply. Find poetry they like on YouTube. If they don't remember any poetry ask them the sort of subjects they liked to listen to. Podcasts can be good to listen to together and discuss afterwards.**

# THE ARTS



Do you like live theatre?

Remember that you can view extracts from many productions, films and musicals via Youtube. Showing these on an I pad or laptop can bring back further memories and feelings. Podcasts can be helpful too for accessing whole radio series and are often free from the BBC website. All the desert island discs that have ever been made can be accessed so a favourite actor might be available to listen to

The type of novel/book/film/theatre/musical I have most enjoyed/been gripped by...



An actor I admired most

What play have you been most affected by?

My favourite TV programmes/Radio shows/magazines/foods/smells/drinks/snacks/alcoholic beverage ... This could lead to you accessing talking books, CD's of poetry, a Kindle of a favourite book with big typeface for the person concerned if they can still read or even you reading aloud to them.

A programme that I found funny



# FRIENDS

Has friendship been important to you in life?



Who are your friends? Why do you think you have stayed in touch?

Did you feel passionate about your friends?

What sort of things did you do with them?



Would you say that there is any particular type of person you find yourself being friends with?

# GAMES AND SPORT

M<sub>3</sub> A<sub>1</sub> P<sub>3</sub> S<sub>1</sub>

I<sub>1</sub>

N<sub>1</sub>

D<sub>2</sub>



The most exciting sporting event I have ever attended

## Games I have enjoyed playing or watching...

This can include any type- cards, board games, tennis, netball, football, chess etc. Think about if any of these are possible to actively bring into their life now. If someone has been good at table tennis for example it is still possible for the muscle memories to gradually come back if they are given the opportunity and encouragement. Some sense of involvement and enjoyment may be gained again. Find out what is accessible and when the sport might be on via TV or radio. The person may not be able to make this happen but you can do this for them by reminder notes or being there to facilitate access.



Research what is out there in terms of community groups and local activities for those who are vulnerable whether through minor memory loss or further stages of dementia. There are groups out there that the person may feel comfortable in if pitched right with not too many who are locked into a speechless world.

## CULTURE

## JOB/CAREER

Risks that I have taken in job/career/house

What I loved about my job/career was...

If you have two or more cultures is there one you express yourself in a way that you feel more comfortable?

Parts of England, Scotland and Wales that I have lived in....

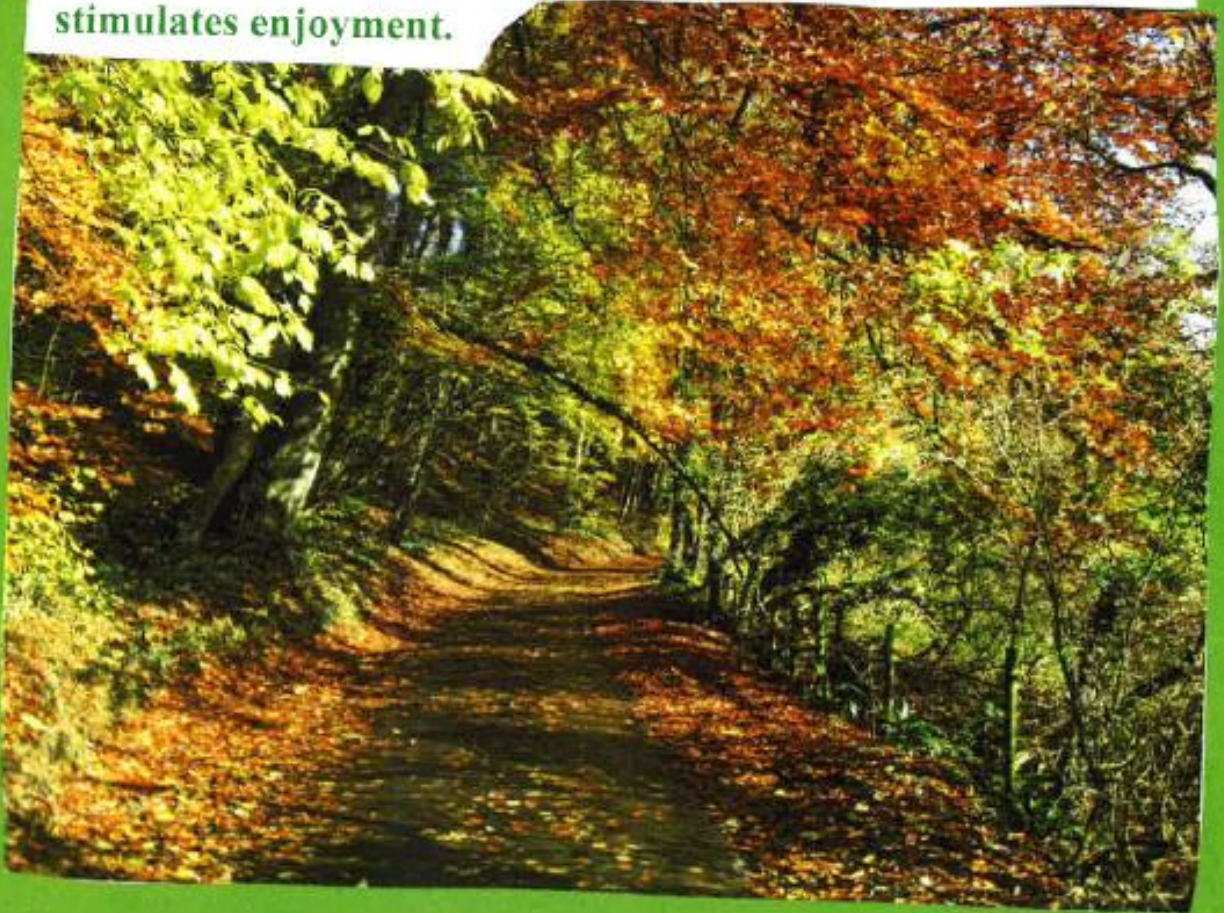
If you don't speak another language how would you describe your accent?

What does it say about your background?

Expand to anywhere in the world. A map is a useful focus point to trigger memories.

## PLACES

**My favourite holiday destinations only a drive away. Use Pinterest and maps to bring back memories of locations if this stimulates enjoyment.**



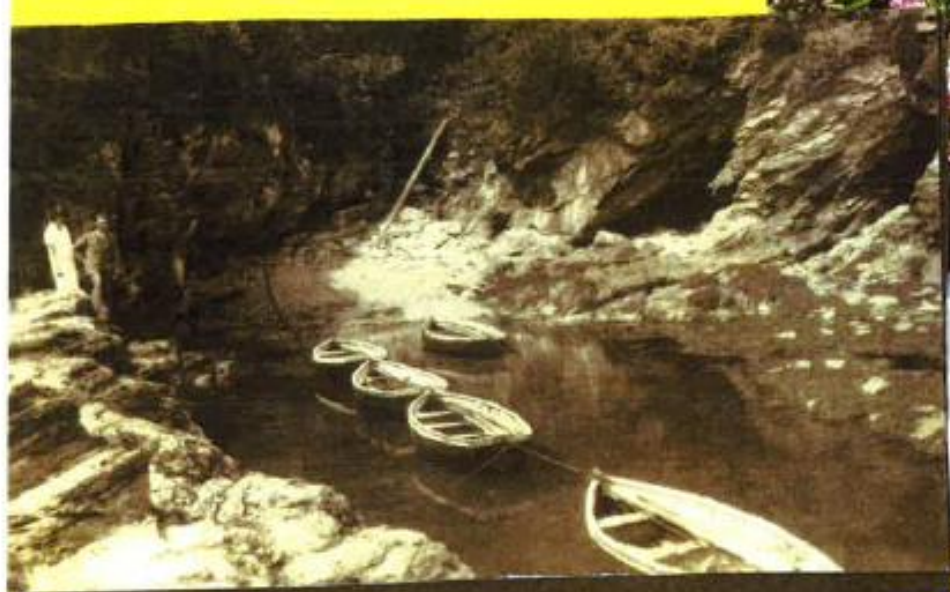
**Do/Did you drive?**



**Was driving something you used to enjoy? Have you had good feelings about different cars you have owned?**

## PLACES

My favourite special places...



Bessie's Cove



Paintings/pictures I would like to step into...

Is this a scene that makes you feel cosy?



The most extraordinary thing that has happened to me

## DISCUSSIONS AND REFLECTIONS



If the person you are thinking about might enjoy some of these topics outside of their relationship with you, do think about what local resources might be available for them to access these types of conversation. Bring the topics further alive through music, art and objects to ground your questions and conversation as these speak to different parts than the verbal. Your person may have talent for drawing, poetry or painting so there is no harm in asking them if they would like to express feelings or ideas this way or simply do a sketch to describe something better. If memories just don't seem to come to the person that you might expect you could say; 'Maybe that was not important to you.' or 'It must be hard when things don't come back clearly to you.' Or 'The reason you can't remember might be the Alzheimer's/ Dementia' [if they can make sense of this and accept this] or otherwise 'It was a very long time ago. It's not surprising you can't remember.'



## WHAT NEXT?



Many care homes run reminiscence groups or there may be local ones in the community. You could start one yourself. See this website for reminiscence and reflection group guidance. The Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE] and Age Exchange also have useful material on this. Do not write off anyone's capacity to want to reflect and talk just because they have Alzheimer's and appear incapacitated. As long as they are able to do some thinking and communicating, this sort of group might be invaluable for them to feel part of. A balance of capacity works best in a group. Please see website links and power point on tips for caring for the elderly for further resources.

