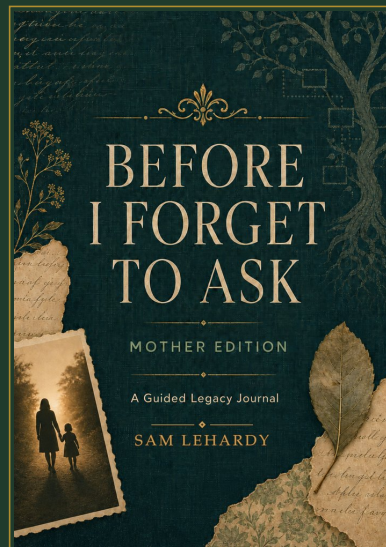
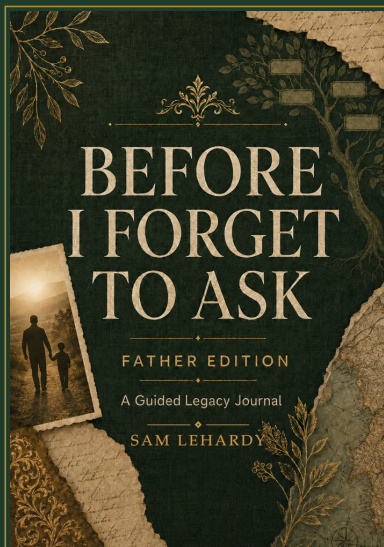
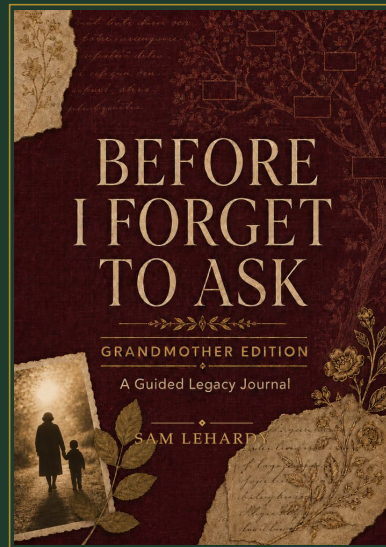
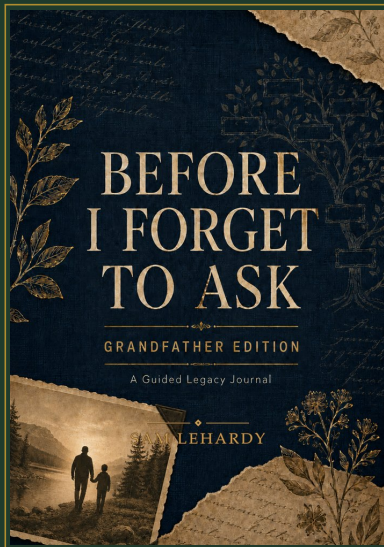


AN UNHURRIED CONVERSATION

BEFORE I FORGET TO ASK

THE COMPLETE FAMILY BUNDLE · SAMPLE PAGES



Four editions. Four voices. One family story.

Grandfather · Grandmother · Father · Mother

Sam LeHardy · samlehardy.com

WHAT THIS BUNDLE IS

Four voices, one table.

The complete Before I Forget to Ask series in one purchase: four guided legacy journals, each genuinely written for its own storyteller — they share a structure, and the questions are their own. Every edition is 248 designed pages: a fillable PDF you can type into with the free Adobe Acrobat Reader or Apple Preview, or print at home and fill by hand. Fill one copy per family storyteller — it is yours forever.

WHO EACH EDITION IS FOR

Grandfather Edition — the world he came from, the work, the hard roads, and what he leaves with you

Grandmother Edition — the girl she was, her own two hands, the keeper's shelf, and her letters to you

Father Edition — the boy before the dad, what work costs, and what he'd like you to carry on

Mother Edition — the woman before "Mom," the choosing of her life, and what she hopes for you

WHAT EVERY EDITION HOLDS

- **100 questions across the ten chapters of a life**
with optional follow-ups for going deeper on every question
 - **The Essential Twenty-Five**
twenty-five questions to begin with when time is short — starred and listed up front
 - **A Story Details box on every question**
year, age, who was there, and the photo, object, or recipe that goes with the story
 - **An optional "Wisdom to Carry Forward" line**
for any advice the storyteller wants to pass on — blank is fine
 - **Keepsake mount pages**
room for the photograph, card, or recipe that a story is really about
 - **Letters for later**
a closing chapter of letters and messages for days the storyteller might not be there for
 - **Pages that travel both ways**
a welcome for the storyteller, a portrait of current tastes, a pause for the pleasures of a life, and room for what each of you would like to ask the other
 - **The Ten Stories, the Story Log, and Who May Share This**
for the family: what to record, how to keep it, and who gets to hear it
-

No. 1 ★

What is the full story of your name — who chose it, who you were named after, and what your family actually called you?

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

Who else in the family has carried your name, or a piece of it, since? · Was there a time you wished you had a different name? · What did your mother call you when you were in trouble — and when you weren't?

YEAR	1951	MY AGE THEN	newborn	WHERE	Lowell, Massachusetts
WHO WAS THERE	my mother, my father, and my aunt Rose, who had opinions				
A PHOTO, OBJECT, OR RECIPE THAT GOES WITH THIS	the hospital bracelet, still in the cedar box				

Illustrative typed answer — fictional family

I was supposed to be Walter, after my mother's father. My dad wanted James, after a ballplayer he never admitted to liking that much. They argued about it in the car on the way to the hospital, and my aunt Rose settled it from the back seat: "Name him after nobody. Let him be the first one." That is how my mother always told it, anyway. So they named me Raymond — a name no one in the family had — which I resented at nine and have been grateful for since. Nobody called me by it anyway. My mother called me "Bud" until the day she died, and my father called me "chief" when he was pleased with me and my full name when he wasn't. You can tell which one I heard more. Years later, when we were naming our own first child, my wife and I had the same argument, in the same kind of car, and I thought of Rose.

GRANDFATHER EDITION

Every life holds a story worth saving.

For the world he came from, the work, the hard roads, and what he leaves with you.

THE TEN CHAPTERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. The World I Came From | 6. Your Kids, and You |
| 2. Boyhood | 7. Hard Roads |
| 3. Firsts and Crossroads | 8. What I Believe |
| 4. Work, Sweat, and Paychecks | 9. What I Know How to Do |
| 5. The People I Loved | 10. What I Leave With You |
-

THREE OF THE HUNDRED QUESTIONS

No. 1 · The World I Came From

What is the full story of your name — who chose it, who you were named after, and what your family actually called you?

No. 51 · Your Kids, and You

Tell me about the day your first child was born or arrived. Where were you, what happened, and what did you do afterward?

No. 99 · What I Leave With You

How would you like to be remembered — and what's the one story about you that should be retold at every family table?

Turn the page for one of this edition's question pages, with its fields live — try typing into it.

No. 81 ★

Teach me something on this page, step by step — the thing your hands know best. Changing a tire, sharpening a knife, reading the weather, tying the one knot that never slips. Write it like I'll need it, because I will.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

What's the wrong-looking part of your method that's actually the secret? · Who taught you, and how did they teach — patiently or the other way? · What's the mistake every beginner makes at this?

YEAR		MY AGE THEN		WHERE	
WHO WAS THERE					
A PHOTO, OBJECT, OR RECIPE THAT GOES WITH THIS					

GRANDMOTHER EDITION

Her stories are part of your story.

For the girl she was, her own two hands, the keeper's shelf, and her letters to you.

THE TEN CHAPTERS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. The Family Before Me | 6. Mothering, and You |
| 2. The Girl I Was | 7. Hard Times |
| 3. Firsts and Turning Points | 8. What I Hold Sacred |
| 4. My Work, My Own Two Hands | 9. The Keeper's Shelf |
| 5. Love and the Life We Built | 10. My Letters to You |
-

THREE OF THE HUNDRED QUESTIONS

No. 1 · The Family Before Me

Tell me the story of your name — who chose it, who you were named for, and every nickname you've answered to since.

No. 51 · Mothering, and You

Tell me about becoming a mother — the day, the fear, the first time you held your child. And if motherhood came to you a different way — adoption, marriage, or mothering children you didn't bear — tell that story with every detail it deserves.

No. 98 · My Letters to You

How would you like to be remembered — and which story about you should be retold at every family table?

Turn the page for one of this edition's question pages, with its fields live — try typing into it.

No. 81 ★

Write down the recipe you're known for — exactly as you actually make it, including everything that has never been on any card. The pinches. The “until it looks right.” All of it.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

Which step do people always try to skip, and why can't they? · Who taught it to you, and how did their version differ? · How can I tell when it's ready? What should I watch out for?

YEAR		MY AGE THEN		WHERE	
WHO WAS THERE					
A PHOTO, OBJECT, OR RECIPE THAT GOES WITH THIS					

FATHER EDITION

Get to know your dad's life before you knew him.

For the boy before the dad, what work costs, and what he'd like you to carry on.

THE TEN CHAPTERS

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. Where Your Dad Comes From | 6. The Day You Arrived |
| 2. The Boy I Was | 7. The Harder Parts |
| 3. Becoming Myself | 8. What I Believe |
| 4. Work and What It Costs | 9. Things I Want You to Know How to Do |
| 5. The People I Love | 10. For the Road Ahead |
-

THREE OF THE HUNDRED QUESTIONS

No. 1 · Where Your Dad Comes From

What's the story of your name — and then the story of mine? Who chose them, what were the runners-up, and who vetoed what?

No. 54 · The Day You Arrived

What's a moment with me you hope you never forget — one that's already in your permanent highlight reel?

No. 97 · For the Road Ahead

What story, tradition, or recipe would you like me to carry on?

Turn the page for one of this edition's question pages, with its fields live — try typing into it.

No. 91 ★

Write me a letter for a day you might not be there for — or just a day when I'm too far away to call.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

How will I know it's the day to open it? · What did you need to hear on your own worst day — and who said it, or didn't? · What do you know about getting through that I can't believe yet?

YEAR		MY AGE THEN		WHERE	
WHO WAS THERE					
A PHOTO, OBJECT, OR RECIPE THAT GOES WITH THIS					

MOTHER EDITION

Get to know your mom's life before you knew her.

For the woman before “Mom,” the choosing of her life, and what she hopes for you.

THE TEN CHAPTERS

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. The Women (and Men) I Come From | 6. Becoming Your Mom |
| 2. The Girl I Was | 7. The Hard Seasons |
| 3. Choosing My Life | 8. What I Believe (So Far) |
| 4. Work, Money, and Making It Work | 9. From My Hands to Yours |
| 5. Love, Friendship, and Who Holds Me Up | 10. What I Hope for You |
-

THREE OF THE HUNDRED QUESTIONS

No. 1 · The Women (and Men) I Come From

What's the story of your name — and then of mine? Who chose them, what other names were considered, and what did you call me before I was born?

No. 52 · Becoming Your Mom

Tell me the story of the day I was born or arrived. What do you remember most clearly?

No. 97 · What I Hope for You

What story, tradition, recipe, or way of caring for people would you like me to carry on?

Turn the page for one of this edition's question pages, with its fields live — try typing into it.

No. 30 ★

Who were you the year before you became my mom? Paint me that woman — her plans, her fears, her Friday nights. I never got to meet her, and I want to.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

What was she most afraid of — and did it come true? · What did she do on a Friday night that would surprise me? · What would she think of us — this table, this life?

YEAR		MY AGE THEN		WHERE	
WHO WAS THERE					
A PHOTO, OBJECT, OR RECIPE THAT GOES WITH THIS					

How to Use This Book

For adult children and grandchildren who want to preserve a parent's or grandparent's stories — through conversation, writing, or both.

*And to the storyteller: this is **your** story. You choose what to answer, what to skip, and who may hear it — on every page, always.*

This book has no rules. Skip anything. Answer in any order. One-word answers are welcome; half a page is plenty. Nothing here requires a happy answer. You can include difficult memories, but you never have to, and every one of them can end wherever you want it to end. If you'd rather talk than write, hand this book to a grandchild and let them write while you tell it. That counts. And if your family is far away, this book travels: answer a few pages and mail it; they'll mail it back with questions.

Not sure of a name, a date, a detail? Write “as I remember it” and keep going. Memory is allowed to be human. And where a story belongs to someone else too, share what's yours to tell.

You don't have to finish. Twenty filled pages beat a hundred blank ones. If you only do a few, do the ones marked ★ — twenty-five that make a good place to start.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO GO DEEPER

What do you remember seeing, hearing, smelling, or holding? · Who else was there? · What happened next? · How old were you? · What did you feel at the time? · What do you understand differently now? · Is there a photograph, recipe, letter, song, or object that goes with this story? · What would you want someone younger to take from this?

Photos, albums, and objects on the table can surface names and details that questions alone never reach. Three of these appear at the bottom of every prompt page — a different three on each page. Use any of them, or none.

The Listener's Page

For the family — because this book works even better as a conversation.

If your storyteller would rather talk than write, sit down together — you ask, they talk, you write or record. A few things professional oral historians know that families should too:

- **Bring a photograph or a familiar object.** Old photographs, names, dates, the shoebox of letters — bring them to the table. “Tell me about the house on Maple Street” unlocks more than “tell me about your childhood.” When you know a detail, put it in the question.
- **One question at a time.** Then let the silence do its work — don’t fill the pause. Use open questions — how, what, why — to invite stories. Short yes-or-no questions still have a job: confirming a detail, or checking whether someone wants to continue. Not “Wasn’t that hard?” but “Tell me about what that was like.”
- **Keep three follow-ups in your pocket** — the same ones the Smithsonian’s interviewers use: “Could you explain?” ... “Can you give me an example?” ... “How did that happen?”
- **Never rush a story you’ve heard before.** Told one more time, it can surface a detail nobody has heard.
- **Don’t argue with a memory.** This is their telling. Avoid interrupting to dispute a memory; if the details matter, note the different accounts and check them later.
- **An hour at a sitting is plenty.** Stop while it’s still fun. A good closing question: “What didn’t we get to today?”
- **If you record — with their permission, confirmed at each visit** — a phone voice memo is enough. Set the phone on the table between you, close enough to capture both voices clearly, and make a short test recording first. Start every recording with the identifying details archivists recommend: “This is [your name], talking with my grandfather, [their name], at [place], on [date].” You can leave it running between stories, as long as everyone is still comfortable being recorded; pause or stop whenever someone asks. (More on keeping recordings safe: the back of this book.)

The Ten Stories

The ones you always tell. Yes — those.

Which stories do you return to most often? In one small study, adult children described about ten stories they had heard again and again from an aging parent; many of those stories expressed the parent's values or sense of identity. Use this page to list some of yours. There is no right number. You can tell the full versions elsewhere in the book, or aloud.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

The Essential Twenty-Five

Not sure where to begin? Start with these starred pages. Check them off as you go.

- | | |
|--|--------|
| ☐ 1. What is the full story of your name | p. 20 |
| ☐ 3. What do you know about how your parents met | p. 24 |
| ☐ 8. Where did our people come from before your hometown | p. 34 |
| ☐ 11. What did a Saturday look like when you were ten years old, start to finish | p. 42 |
| ☐ 18. Who was the adult | p. 56 |
| ☐ 21. Tell me about the first time you left home for good | p. 64 |
| ☐ 25. Tell me about a fork in the road | p. 72 |
| ☐ 29. Tell me about the moment you first saw | p. 80 |
| ☐ 31. How did you end up in your life's work | p. 86 |
| ☐ 35. What piece of work are you proudest of | p. 94 |
| ☐ 42. What did love look like in your longest relationship | p. 110 |
| ☐ 47. Tell me about someone you loved that I never got to meet | p. 120 |
| ☐ 51. Tell me about the day your first child was born or arrived | p. 130 |
| ☐ 56. What's different about being a grandfather than being a father | p. 140 |
| ☐ 61. Tell me about the hardest year of your life | p. 152 |
| ☐ 62. Tell me about a difficult time in our family. What changed, and how do you see it now | p. 154 |
| ☐ 69. Is there a regret you'd be willing to tell me about | p. 168 |
| ☐ 71. What do you believe about God, faith, or whatever is beyond us | p. 176 |
| ☐ 78. What did your generation learn through hardship that you hope ours remembers | p. 190 |
| ☐ 81. Teach me something on this page, step by step | p. 198 |
| ☐ 86. What's the dish you're famous for, even if it's only fried eggs at midnight | p. 208 |
| ☐ 91. Which of your belongings would you like us to have someday | p. 220 |
| ☐ 94. What's the single most important thing you've learned about being alive | p. 226 |
| ☐ 95. Write me a short letter for a hard day you won't be there for | p. 228 |
| ☐ 99. How would you like to be remembered | p. 236 |

Who I Am These Days

For the storyteller.

A family can remember a favorite of yours for years. Someone still buys the same cake, mentions the same hobby, or assumes you will want the usual seat. Sometimes they have it exactly right. Sometimes your tastes have moved on.

Here is a chance to bring them up to date.

Think about what has been holding your attention lately. It could be a book you keep bringing into conversation, a project spread across a table, a show you have opinions about, or a small routine you enjoy. You might be learning something. You might have decided you have spent quite enough time doing something else.

Choose a few of these beginnings and see where they take you:

Lately, I've been interested in...



Something that made me laugh recently was...



One of my favorite parts of an ordinary day is...



No. 16, continued

PLACE THE PHOTO, CARD, OR KEEPSAKE THAT GOES WITH THIS STORY
and on the lines below, write what it can't say

WISDOM TO CARRY FORWARD · OPTIONAL — LEAVE IT BLANK IF THE STORY SAYS ENOUGH

“Is there anything you want us to remember or learn from this?”

The Story Log

One line per story, per recording – so no voice gets lost in a folder.

For each recording, note the file name and date, then one line per story with the minute it starts. A short log like this helps you find a story without transcribing the whole recording. Add a transcript if it would be useful.

Who May Share This

The storyteller should decide how these stories and recordings are shared. This page records those wishes; it is not a legal release or estate document.

Professional oral historians put this in writing, and families should too. For this family project, these pages and any recordings should be treated as controlled by the person who told them. I answered freely, skipped freely, and these are my wishes:

- ☐ My family may read this book and play the recordings.
- ☐ Copies may be made for family members.
- ☐ Parts of it may be shared outside the family (memorials, social media, a printed family history):
 - ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ ASK FIRST
- ☐ Pages or recordings I have marked private are not to be shared unless I have named a date or event for sharing them below.

DATE OR EVENT, IF ANY
- ☐ I can change my mind about any of this, and I know that once something is shared widely it cannot be fully unshared.

SIGNED

DATE

Keeping the Voices

How to make sure the recordings outlive the phone they were made on.

- **Follow the 3-2-1 rule:** three copies, two kinds of storage, one off-site. Move recordings off the phone soon after; a computer, external drive, and reputable cloud storage are one possible mix.
- **Use consistent file names:** date, storyteller, visit number — YYYY-MM-DD_grandfather_visit01. Date first, so the files sort themselves.
- **Record in the best quality your app allows** (lossless/WAV if offered) and never trim or edit the original — make copies to cut from.
- **Far away?** Use a video call from quiet rooms. Answer aloud rather than only nodding. Record only with everyone's permission and follow platform rules and applicable law.
- **If you point a camera:** prop it steady, lamp light on the face (never a bright window behind them), no swiveling chairs — and remember audio still matters most.
- **Where this can live after us:** some historical societies and libraries accept oral histories. For veterans, check loc.gov/vets; eligibility, forms, and length requirements apply. StoryCorps recordings can also be archived at the Library of Congress, if the participants choose.
- **Close the loop:** send the storyteller a copy of every recording, and thank them.

This is a sample.

The Complete Family Bundle holds:

- All four editions — Grandfather, Grandmother, Father, and Mother — in one purchase
- 400 questions in all — four editions, one for each storyteller
- Each edition: a 248-page fillable PDF, printable at home, with tailored follow-ups for every essential question
- The Essential Twenty-Five, the Ten Stories, and the Story Log in every book
- A welcome for each storyteller, a portrait of current tastes, a pause for pleasure, and pages that travel both ways
- Keepsake mount pages, a letters chapter, and the family sharing agreement
- Fill one copy per family storyteller — yours forever
- Four books for less than the cost of three

Before I Forget to Ask — An Unhurried Conversation

Get the bundle, or any single edition, at samlehardy.com

Paperback and hardcover editions on Amazon · conversation editions for Kindle