

Transcript for *Oral History: A Short Introduction*

Hello, everyone! I'm Stacy Torian, and I'll be teaching Part One of the "Oral History for Beginner's Workshop" taking place from 3 to 5:30 on August 5th at the Ila North Public Library. I made this video to provide a brief overview of what oral history is and to make you aware of a few tasks I'd like you to complete prior to the workshop on August 5th.

So, I'll begin by just talking about what oral history is. I personally like the definition from the Oral History Association, some of which I have excerpted here on this slide.

"...[Oral history] begins with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee, both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past."

Essentially, you're coming together with another person to create a piece of the historical record that will outlive both of you. It's exciting. It's emotional. It's rewarding, and it's humbling because it's someone entrusting you, the oral history interviewer, with the story of their life.

The purpose of oral history is not objectivity. This is not about the omniscient observer. It is a highly subjective enterprise. The focus of oral history is not just what happened but what were the person's feelings about it and how did it affect them. You get to explore the details of people's everyday lives: what they ate, what they wore, what kind of bed they slept on, all those little details that make history come alive. When you do oral history, you can capture those details. You can also capture the voices of people who may have been marginalized, people whose voices are not reflected in the traditional historical record. They can be heard through oral history.

Oral history provides us with a more complete record of the past. So rather than just reading about what people did you actually get to hear what they were like as people, in their own words. I remember doing an oral history interview once with someone who had a background in musical theatre. He was so excited about something that he was talking about that he just burst into song, right in the middle of the interview. And that is such a beautiful memory to me because the sound of him singing is something that might not have been captured for future generations were it not for that interview and it's certainly not something you would read in a history book.

So, I'll leave you with that thought and I'll tell you about the tasks I want you to complete prior to August 5th.

First go to the oral history resource center of Durham website. Click on the training link. Under "Workshops and Classes" you'll see links to some readings and pre-workshop questions. I'd like you to set aside about 20 minutes to complete the readings and the questions prior to the workshop. This is a short exercise. The readings are a total of two pages long, and there are only two short questions. This is an exercise that will get you in the mindset of being an oral historian, which is what the August 5th workshop is all about.

I'll be sending you an email soon that includes a link to the website I just showed you, as well as directions to and the address of the workshop taking place on August 5. Take care, and I look forward to seeing you soon.

References

Discovering oral history: What is it? (2012). Retrieved from Baylor University Institute for Oral History website at <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/66419.pdf>

Principles and best practices. (2009, October). Retrieved from the Oral History Association website at <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices-revised-2009/>

Understanding oral history: Why do it? (2012). Retrieved from Baylor University Institute for Oral History website at <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/66420.pdf>