

25 Questions to Start Your Stories

Focus on the heart of your stories by answering the following questions. At the end of this list, I've included the back-story of how our family developed this list and how you can use it as a catalyst for fun and greater understanding of each other.

How to use these questions to jumpstart your writing: Here are two suggestions.

1. Begin by writing the answers to these questions in order. You might even write the question at the top of a sheet of paper and go through the list sequentially. You may not think you have anything to say on that topic, yet after reflection, stories emerge.
2. Read through the questions and write the answers to the ones that are most interesting to you. Keep them in a document, and place them in chronological order: Stories from your youth, from the middle years and from your current life.

Here are the 25 questions:

3. Name 3-5 people outside your family who have changed your life.
4. What is your #1 favorite movie and why. Name 2-3 other movies you think everyone should see.
5. What's one thing you remember about your grandparents' home? What is an item in your home, belonging at one time to your parents, that is special to you?
6. What is one positive thing you do (or way you live) that is a result of how your parents raised you, or something you witnessed them doing or saying?
7. What lifetime accomplishment are you most proud of?
8. What prank or joke have you participated in that gave you an unforgettable memory and every time you see the "victim" you remember the story.
9. Name one thing on your bucket list and why it is something you'd like to do before you die?
10. Name a quote that gives you inspiration and why.
11. What is your favorite color and why?
12. What is a positive story you remember about your Dad.

13. What is the favorite type of music? Name one or two singers you like and tell why.
14. Name two of you favorite TV shows or series (past or present). Why do you like them?
15. List four people (alive or dead) who are not your relatives who you would invite to a special dinner party? Explain why you chose these four people.
16. Name 3-5 children's books you liked as a child or that you have read to children. Name 3-5 adult books that you love. Name one book everyone should read and tell why.
17. What is your favorite food to make at home? What is one of your favorite restaurants when you go out to eat? When eating out, what do you usually order? Which eating establishment is your least favorite? Why?
18. What do you look for when buying a new vehicle? Which feature could do you most like or need in the vehicle you drive?
19. What does your ideal retirement home look like? Name the location, style, and other amenities.
20. Select three foods you would eat if you could have an unlimited amount of them for the rest of your life. Explain.
21. Name a global event that is forged in your memory. Where were you, what were you doing? How did you feel it impacted your family and society?
22. If your current job/career/position at which you are currently working (or the one you retired from) wasn't an option, what kind of work would you want to do? Why?
23. Someone has given you \$100,000 that you need to spend on yourself in 5 days. You have no debt and you can't use this money to pay bills. You can purchase one item or many. All the money disappears after the 5 days are up. How will you spend your \$100,000?
24. Do you have a will and does your family know where it is? What are your desires for your last days? What are the last things you want to take care of before your death?
25. What is one thing you think you'll be remembered for? (If in a group where you know the others, answer this question for each other).
26. If you couldn't watch TV or go online for a month, how would you spend your time?
27. Talk about a move you made to a different house, city, state or country. Why did you move? Was it a good move or not? If you moved from that place, why did you move again?

The ALICE EXTRA - When our mom sold eggs or donated cookies for a church function, she always tucked in something extra. So in the spirit of Alice Whalen, I'm tucking in 5 extra seasonal questions.

1. **MOTHER'S DAY:** Name one recipe you learned to cook from Mom. One thing your mom used to say that encouraged you. Name a favorite lesson, story, or thing you learned from your Mom.
2. **HALLOWEEN:** What is one of the favorite costumes you have worn for Halloween? What is the most memorable costume you have ever seen? What makes it stand out in your memory?
3. **THANKSGIVING:** Name three foods you look forward to eating at Thanksgiving. Do you have any special memories with these foods?
4. **CHRISTMAS:** What Christmas gift did you *receive* in childhood that was your favorite? At any point in time, what was the favorite gift you have *given*? What is one item on your Christmas list this year.
5. **CHRISTMAS/HOLIDAY CELEBRATION:** What elements make for a good Christmas (Holiday) celebration for you? What traditions of your typical December celebration did you miss in 2020 because of Covid 19? Despite limitations, how will you keep the feeling of *Celebration* in your Christmas season this year?

The Story behind these 25 questions: It all started in March of 2020 when many of us panicked over what was about to happen to our world. I'm sure you remember. That's when the Whalen family, the eight children of L.J. and Alice Whalen (Jan, Len, Ralph, John, Mary, Karen, Ruth and Laura) plus four spouses (Ross, Ellen, Dave and Dan), started our weekly conference phone calls.

It was decided to meet virtually on Sunday evening for about an hour or so, taking turns leading the meeting. The leader was given three simple responsibilities: select a question or set of related questions for each participant to answer (sent out ahead of time makes for more thoughtful answers and more fun), announce the order of speakers, and during the meeting, call on the each person to speak.

Each family member is given approximately five minutes to tell about what's happening in their life, news about kids/grandkids and

anything else they want to say before answering the question of the week. No matter what the question, the answers have been as diverse as the participants. We thought we knew each other, yet the benefit of the weekly call creates greater understanding and appreciation for each other. Priceless.

If this idea appeals to you, I highly recommend adapting it to your family or group of friends. We find it easier to do the conference phone call than a video conference—yet technology provides many options for us to connect. Let me know the results.