

Conversation starters

From many years experience working with Alzheimer’s patients, I know that even very elderly people in later stages will usually respond to some of these questions. Almost everyone has vivid memories through high school and many people have more recent memories.

Topics — Not all will work, but some will bring back joyful memories.

1. Did your family have a vegetable garden when you were a child?
2. What were your family’s favorite every day meals?
3. What were your family holiday customs? Foods? Beverages? Santa Claus? Hiding eggs? Church services? Gift giving?
4. Did your grandparents live in the area? How many siblings did you have? Aunts and uncles? Great aunts and uncles?
5. What were your favorite school subjects and teachers?

Did you ever have to miss school to help the family harvest a crop? Work in a family business?

6. Did you walk to school or ride a bus?
7. If you lived in the country, did your family have a water well? Electricity? A wood stove? Oil lamps?
8. Did you have family members who served in World War I or World War II? Korea or Vietnam? The Gulf War?
9. How did you learn to drive and get a license? Did you drive a stick shift?
10. What kind of chores around the home were you required to do?
11. Did your house have a front porch? Did neighbors visit?
12. Did the family listen to the radio? Subscribe to a newspaper?
13. How old were you when your family got a television? A telephone?

Do you remember “The Cable is Coming?” Sept., 1950 when network TV went nationwide. Edward R. Murrow was the 1st live show.

14. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
15. Did you work during the summer or after school?
16. Was there a pharmacy in the area that had a soda fountain? Did kids meet there after school? What did you like to drink?
17. Did you ever buy Cracker Jacks to get the prize? Order an item from a cereal box coupon? Collect postage stamps?
18. Did you ever perform in a school play? Play in the band? Take ballet or piano lessons? Go to Sunday School?
19. Did you ever have sleepovers with grandparents or friends?
20. Did you have birthday parties? What was your favorite birthday present?

Did your family save Green Stamps? Collect glassware or dishtowels from boxes of laundry detergent, flour, or cereal?



The '57 Chevy became a classic.



Look closely—it’s a radio!



The family station wagon became a status symbol in suburbs.



High tech in the 50’s— vending machines!

Below: “Depression” glass tucked into oatmeal may now be valuable.

