Talking Family Album Company

Instruction sheet No.1

Introduction.

As mentioned on the Talking Family Album Company website I've made 100's of hours of TV for everyone from ITV to Eurosport to MTV, but the video I made of my Mum back in 2010 is by far the most important video I've ever made. I captured a fluent , chatty Mum, with great recall ability and stories about her life growing up in prewar Brixton London, school days, wartime, meeting Dad, getting married, and importantly identifying all of the people in the tin of BW photos under the bed.

This started out as something for my (then teenage) daughters to look back on when they reach an age where they may have an interest in our family history, and what real life was like in the early part of the century. But when we eventually lost Mum I soon realised that for me, and my brother and sisters, to have a record of the Mum we remember, strong, fighting fit and full of attitude, was equally, if not more important.

Whether you're doing this as a history lesson for your kids or to fill gaps in your own family knowledge, the truth is this video will, at some stage, be a lasting reminder of someone dear to you, and everyone has the right to have a keepsake of their loved ones, which is why I'm giving this guide away for free. If you'd like something a little shinier, or feel that technology, lighting and audio are too much to deal with, then please contact us for a quote and we'll look after the whole thing for you for a very reasonable price. We're happy to spread the cost over a few months, or work out a deal with several siblings chipping in to make costs much more managable.
I do hope that using this guide gives you the confidence and ability to produce something that will mean as much to your family, as the video of my mum, does to ours.

How to make your own family history video for free:

There are 3 distinct phases to making something like this and all are important for a good result. 1) Preparation or Preproduction, making sure you've got all the photos you'd like to talk about, you've worked out good questions that'll give good answers, you know a good place to film, and your phone is set up properly. 2) Production, filming the interview, gettting the best results possible. This can easliy be done with a standard smartphone. 3) Editiing or Post Production. There are many options to find free editing software online. Editing can be a complicated business, and depending on the computer you have the workflow will vary so it's beyond the scope of this tutorial to go into this, however contact us via the website and we can look after this for you.

Talking Family Album Company

Instruction sheet No.2

Step 1: Preparation

Filming something like this is 10% equipment and 90% making people feel comfortable. If your aim is to get Granny to feel comfortable and relaxed in front of the camera, then adding lights and lots of equipment will quickly backfire and if they're anything like most English people, they'll clam up at the sight of a camera and say something like "Oh no-one's interested in MY old stories" ...
but we really are, so preparing the subject of your interview is an extremely important part of the process. Explain to them that you're making something for the family history books that will be able to be seen in 100's of years, and this is a way that they can talk to their great great great great grandchildren and fill them with the wonder of life back in the 1900s. (Imagine being able to see an interview of YOUR ancestors from 300 years ago talking about their early life!).

The Photos:

If possible, I'd go through the old photos with a sibling or family friend beforehand, and decide which ones you'll want to feature. Then get them to show the pics to your Mum / Gran, just to get the memory cells going, but don't discuss them yourself, you'll want the first time your interviewee talks to you about them to be on camera and fresh.
However, if you do know a little about the pictures in advance, that may help you prompt some memories.

You may want to put the pictures in rough date order, or subject order, holidays, houses, cars, weddings etc, don't get too hung up on the dates being right, it won't really matter too much.

I'd suggest not scanning these photos in just yet, as you may not use them all and there may be others on the day that come up. There is software that you can use to fix any scratches or bends in the photos but that's entirely up to you if you want to fix those.

Set a date, and get them thinking:

Give Mum / Dad / Granny, plenty of time to think about what they'd like to say in the video, have them try to remember areas you want to cover. Maybe give them the actual questions. I asked my Mum what life was like at school in her day, and she told me she remembered part of the caretakers job was to come round and light the fires in the classrooms, she remembered a time in the war when she and her brothers were dive bombed and shot at by a German fighter plane on the south coast. I asked her to give me every detail she remembered about meeting my Dad, what Nan and Granddad thought of him, how sure was she it was the right thing to do? what was the wedding like? what was the reception like? What were holidays like? any good stories? Remember, you'll be illustrating these with your photos, so if Mum talks a lot about Auntie Barbara and you don't have photos, you may not be able to illustrate this very well ....

Talking Family Album Company

Instruction sheet No.3

Setting up your phone

All smartphones are different, so it may be best to google the correct way to access these controls, but generally they're in settings / camera. I would recommend going for HD rather than 4K, which uses up 4 x more memory, and you'll want to record about 30 minutes of video, so that will add up to a lot. HD may be shown as 1080P which is the same thing, and you should be on 25fps (or 30 if 25 is not showing). The iPhone has a grid setting that may be useful, it splits the screen into thirds, and the idea is that you place your subjects' head at the intersection of one of the vertical lines and the top horizontal line.

Finding the right spot to film:

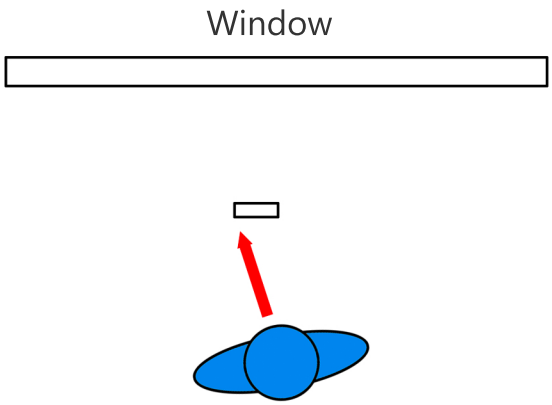
A day or so before you start filming look around the house for a good spot.

It needs to be somewhere quiet, away from barking dogs, away from interuptions if possible and away from fridges and freezers, which you normally don't hear but they make quite loud buzzing noises.

You also want somewhere that's bright but doesn't have direct sunlight streaming through. A North facing large window is ideal, but MOST IMPORTANTLY that window will need to be IN FRONT OF, NOT BEHIND the person you're filming. If the light is coming from behind your interviewee, the camera will think things are way brighter than they really are and expose for the window making your interviewee very dark.

Make sure the camera is between your subject and the light source, for a flattering, correctly exposed image.

If the light source is behind you, you'll be under exposed at best, possibley even silhouette.



Talking Family Album Company

Instruction sheet No.4

Tidy up your background

Plonking someone in front of a bare wall and filming them rarely makes the best backdrop, however, a messy background is probably worse. Remember you're making something for future generations so try to include a little of the decor of the house. Maybe place a plant or something in the background, if there's a small table lamp put it in shot. Try to show the character of the person you're filming by the things around them, nik naks, books, etc, but keep it tidy!

Too messy

Try to match this shot

This is a still from a video filmed on an iphone. You'll notice that the interviewee is looking off camera, there's a little bit of information about the style of the house, and her head is approx 2/3rds to the right and 2/3 rds up the frame. There is some room above her head and there's plenty of "looking room", ie much more space in front of her than behind her.

Just right

Use a tripod

Balancing your phone on books or anything else isn't going to enable you to get the best shot, plus it'll almost certainly topple over at some stage.

We recommend getting a simple small "smartphone" type of tripod, They're very inexpensive and can be delivered next day for around £10, and will make a big difference to the end result.

Talking Family Album Company
Instruction sheet No.5

Audio

Whilst the audio on an iPhone is generally fine for "normal" videos, if you'd like to get a better result it's worth investing £20 in an iPhone mic. I went with the Bietrun Lavalier Professional Omnidiretional mic from Amazon for £20.84. The reason for this was it has a 3 metre cable which means it's possible to frame a wider shot, whilst still having a decent mic attached to the phone.

These mics make a huge difference and if you can afford it I'd highly recommend going down this road. Again next day delivery on Amazon, and again I have nothing to do with the company!

Before filming though, always, preferably at least the night before filming, if not sooner, plug it in and ensure it's all working fine, you should hear a big difference.

A "lavellier" or "lapel" mic would be best for this style of video, if you do get one, however, make sure it has a long enough cable to set up the shot we need.

The Interview itself

Prior to filming the interview make sure that you've tested the mic if you've chosen to buy one, that you have plenty of room on your card in your phone, and that you have your charger with you, there's not much more frustrating than running out of battery halfway through an interview.

Don't forget to put the mic on the interviewee (it's easily done), make sure you put your phone on airplane mode, and everyone else turns their phone off.

Camera too low

Set the camera up so that it's just below the level of the interviewee's eyes, too high and it'll look like you're looking down on them, too low and it's unflattering and looks a little arrogant. Try to match the image on sheet No.4 where the interviewee's head is 2/3rds up from the bottom and 2/3rds to one side, making sure there's more space in front of them than behind, and they should be looking at you, ignoring the camera as much as possible.

Camera too high

Talking Family Album Company
Instruction sheet No.6

During filming:
The person in front of the camera is likely to feel pretty self conscious , so it's your job to put them at ease. Maintain eye contact the whole time and nod enthusiastically, but don't talk over them! Explain that for the edit suite your voice won't be in it, so you can't have a normal conversation (or course you CAN but it won't look like an interview which is obviously fine if you're happy with that).

Never worry about asking to do something again, an extra 30 seconds during the interview will be forgotten immediately, but in 20 years time when watching it back if something's not clear you'll kick yourself (or your grandkids will).

To make life easier at the editing stage, start recording and before each question ask the intterviewee to show the photo to the camera and CLEARLY describe who is who in the photo, so later when you're editing and Mum talks about Uncle Fred, you'll know who to zoom in on. You'll cut these bits out in the edit suite, but don't let her start talking about the photo until she's put it down out of sight, and is looking at you. Then simply ask about who was in the photo? what where they like? any good stories?
When you edit this, your questions won't be in it so try to get them to paraphrase your question.

Show the photo to camera before talking about it

If the question is "What was Uncle Frank like?" and Mum says "Hilarious, always up for a laugh", because your voice isn't in it you really need her to say "Uncle Frank on the right of this photo was hilarious, always up for a laugh". Then just work your way through the photos!

At the end it's always nice to sum things up with a question like, "Whats the biggest changes you've seen in life since you were little?" "What do you think? Life is better today or then?" something to round things off nicely.

Transfer your interview to your computer:
Different systems have different ways to do this so the best option is to google it, but try to make sure you don't send compressed versions to yourself. The best option, if possible, is to use a USB cable and transfer your inteview footage to a folder on your dektop. Then scan all of the photos that were spoken about, and drop those in the same folder.

Editing your footage :
There are many video editing options available online. If you've shot the footage and you'd like us to edit it please just drop us a line via the website. It's impossible to give a complete rundown of all of the edit hoices available but for each software there is usually several tution videos available on Youtube etc. Best of luck ! If you have any questions pleasew drop me a line
Alan