THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

I. Choose an interviewee who is interesting, "a good talker".

II. Arrange an appointment, a time and place that is comfortable and convenient to them. Remember, they are doing you a favor.

III. Write questions before the interview
   A. Fact Questions:  5W & H
   B. Story Questions: Tell me about ________________ .

IV. Double check equipment
   A. Pen and Paper
   B. Tapes, batteries, and recorder
   C. Camera

V. Be prompt and courteous. Relax; the more relaxed and at ease you are the more relaxed they will be.

VI. Start with Fact Questions to get a little basic information and to warm them up, then ask story questions to get the His-story or Her-story of their life. Follow-up with a few fact questions to clarify the details.

VII. Take good notes, occasionally ask for spelling and further clarification, but do not ask them to repeat themselves too often. This can be seen as rude.

VIII. Make up questions as you go: Tell me more about ____________ .

IX. Thank them graciously.

X. Review your notes and take more notes immediately after the interview.

XI. Piece together a story: (See Other Side.)
   A. Characters-allow readers to get to know 3 dimensional people.
   B. Setting - Create a clear picture in a distinct time period.
   C. Plot - Build the sequence of events around one key happening.

XII. You may need to do a follow-up interview to clarify a few details.

XIII. Send them a copy of your story with your thank you note.

TURNING NOTES INTO A STORY

I. What is the key event?
   Choose one key event, climactic happening and build the story around it.

II. Who is telling the story?
   Choose a point of view:  1st, 2nd, or 3rd person?
   Find a voice, a distinct persona.

III. Who is in the story?
   Write at least two sentences defining each character:
   A. Description - You can tell a lot about a person by what they wear, what they look like, their make-up, hair cut, eye color. Focus on details.
   B. Action - You can tell a lot about a person by what they do. How do they treat others? Don't tell me they are nice or mean, show me. Action speaks louder than words.
   C. Dialogue - You can tell a lot about a person by what they say and how they say it. What is their vocabulary? Tone of Voice? Use quotation marks: He said, "Oh, Please don't...."

IV. Where does the story take place?
   Write three sentences about the setting.
   A. Place - in the world, in the country, in the house. Be specific. Not just any apartment, but the third floor of an old brownstone building with a spiral staircase that squeaked about every fourth step so you always knew when someone was coming.
   B. Time - of day, of year, in history. Midnight when the wind howled and the sky was glowing with strange lights behind the clouds is very different from a sunny spring morning with bird songs and the fragrance of wildflowers mingling in the air.
   C. Use all of your senses - sounds, smells tastes, textures and sights are what bring the setting to life!

V. What happens in this story? Outline your plot:
   1. Beginning  Introduction
   2.   Problem  Clues, but don't give it away
   3. Middle  Climax
   4.  Solution  Twists and turns
   5. End   Resolution
   (Introduce concepts of Foreshadowing, Suspense and Irony.)

VI. What did / could you / we learn from this story?
   Make the personal universal. Put the story into historical perspective. Look at the big picture. Don't teach us something, write the story in a way that allows us to discover something. Create hooks that we as readers/listeners can relate to ... an "Ah, yes, I know" experience.

VII. Use the sentences you have written in response to these questions as the outline of your story. Rewrite your notes into a historically accurate, adventurous tale! Send me a copy and I may use it on my web page!