

Family Reunions – the perfect place to capture a story

Family reunions. What thoughts stir in your brain when you hear those words? For me there are many and they are mixed with happiness and a bit of anxiety. But I know the anxiety part shouldn't be there and I am determined to fix that. In order to do that, I need to add some organization to each reunion and provide chances for family stories to unfold. I know, I know, no one wants to be *that* family member who people want to run and hide from when they arrive because they're the "family history person." But folks, we should all be "that family history person" and incorporate some stories and history into the day. How, do you ask? Let's talk about it.



Don't forget to take photos at your reunion!

As a kid, I quite enjoyed family reunions. It meant cousin time which was always my favorite and it usually meant adventures. My large extended family had a yearly reunion in Malad, Idaho, in a large pasture surrounded by a woodsy area we could always go and explore. There was a great mountain with hiking trails nearby and the food was always divine.

As a young adult, my maternal grandparents' family grew big enough that we started having "destination" reunions in the

western United States. A fabulous time, but a little stressful with my tiny and growing family. Now that same family has exploded in size and we settle for a one-day family reunion in the closest local city. The day falls closest to my grandparents' anniversary, even though they passed away 15 years ago. After each reunion, I'm always glad I went, but I kind of dread getting there beforehand. Anyone feel the same way?

My husband's family is a terrific model for family reunions and I have learned a lot from their example. I want to offer a few ideas they have tried and others I have stumbled on over the years. And a note to my family: I will be hoping to incorporate some of these ideas in the coming years!

1. Share some stories (and record them)

In most families there is usually one group put in charge of the reunion each year and it rotates between families. This is true in my family's and my husband's. When we were newly married, we attended a reunion where the family in charge brought old journal entries from their ancestors who had passed on. One of the family members read from the journals, but when she did she also put on an article of clothing from that great grandma. I'm not totally sure it was hers, but it was from the era that she was alive. It was a sweet little hat. As she read the journal entry, I was touched because she had written a promise to pray continually for her family members to have religion in their lives. She committed to also pray for them after she died. As the entry was read, many of us felt the spirit of her words. We were then given copies of the journal entry to keep. It was a sweet and wonderful moment and I love that we have that entry and that promise. It was a simple act by this reunion organizer, but it was powerful.

2. Do some interviewing yourself

Bring some of your best [interviewing gear](#) and get to work! Let people know ahead of time that you want to do a few family interviews and ask some questions. This may take a little time, but it will be worth it. We have a great downloadable printout that you can assemble into a book to take, which includes a great list of questions. Start with the oldest at the reunion and work your way down. This year you may only get a couple of interviews, but it will be worth your time. Don't forget to record it or video it. It's okay to start small, but start! [Click here](#) to read more about the kinds of questions to ask and even download a free printable book of questions to take to the reunion to use!



Free printable book
of memory-evoking
questions

3. Introduce your family to their

ancestors

The year after my husband's grandfather died, his wife was in charge of the reunion. She decorated the tables with some of his favorite things – gardening gloves, patriotic decorations and the like. She then talked all about him and the things he loved the most. It was a great way to remember and honor him and everyone there got to know him better. It was such a simple thing, yet it meant so much. At my family's reunion, we always bring some of the favorite meals that my grandma cooked. She was a master chef and we have a tasting table in her honor. The morning of the reunion, we have a golf tournament in honor of Grandpa, who loved to golf. We have a trophy we pass around each year to the big winner. All simple things, but a way for the little ones who may not have known the grandparents to get to know them a bit. A suggestion to sweeten the idea? Write down the recipes and write down the "golf stories" shared at the tourney. There are some doozies told for sure.



4. Have a picture sharing/artifact extravaganza

Before the reunion, encourage family members to bring old photos. Designate someone in the family to take them to Family Search Library to scan or see if someone in your family has a portable scanner to scan them at the reunion. Or better yet, bring a shotbox, take photos of the photos and upload them when you get home. Also if you have any cool artifacts that

can be shared and photographed – an old hat, a kitchen tool, anything easy to transport – encourage people to bring them and take a photo. Photos open the door for great conversations and great memories to be told. Don't hesitate to turn on a recorder and sit back and enjoy. And take some pictures of everyone at the reunion too, why don't you?

5. DNA, anyone?

If you want to make the financial investment, family reunions are a perfect time to for many to take a DNA test. There are several options out there. If not, give the suggestion for family members to go home and take the test and share results at the next gathering. DNA results can be powerful and open the doors for many discoveries related to family history. And the more who take the test, the richer your database will be. One thing we have found is that when it comes to ethnicity, "23 and Me" is a great option, but the database for "Ancestry" is huge so results can be telling there too. Do a little research to see which test would fit your family best.



IMPORTANT INFO:

**Before purchasing
visit [23andme.com/fda-info](https://www.23andme.com/fda-info)**

Use of kit is subject to 23andMe's Terms of Service, found at [23andme.com/tos](https://www.23andme.com/tos)

23 and Me is great to determine ethnicity. Click here to learn more or to

purchase.



Ancestry's DNA kit has a huge database and the more family members who participate the better.

6. Create a game

Several years ago, my mom spent some serious time putting together a family jeopardy game. She researched names and dates and threw in some funny stories, as well. My family loved it – even the “win or die” folks. We learned a lot about our family and enjoyed some funny “how did you meet” stories, too. This is a good way to get the older family members involved ahead of time and give them some meaning for being there.

7. Keep the reunion going

Create a page on whatever social media platform you love best for your family. You can make it a closed group so family members feel free to share stories/videos without the whole world seeing it. This way it keeps the family reunion going year-round. Of course, most of us keep up with our extended family through social media anyway, but having a separate page is more private and intimate. If that seems like a lot of

work, create a “family hashtag” so when people are doing things or even for that reunion, they look up the hashtag and see all the family fun being had around the world or just that day/weekend at the reunion.



Rachel’s all-time favorite digital voice recorder – the Olympus WS-852 with built-in USB connection. [Click to get it on Amazon.](#)

With all of these tips, I can’t stress enough the importance of taking some time to record and/or video the goings on at the reunion. You don’t have to record every second, but once a family story related activity comes out, don’t hesitate to record. You will enjoy it for a long time. I know sometimes I think of these tips and tend to feel a little bit overwhelmed, but don’t let this be you! Pick something and just start now. Even the fact that you care enough to go to a family reunion means something. Just going means you’re halfway there. Add a little more and it feels truly special, worthwhile and will mean something for years and generations to come.



Rachel J. Trotter is a writer at Evalogue.Life, where we tell personal and family stories that inspire, and help you tell yours. She has worked as a writer since her college days over 20 years ago. She loves telling people's stories. She lives in Ogden, Utah and is busy raising six children and loves working on family history alongside her husband, Mat.