

Photo Story Starter

Pick one old photo. Ask these five questions, of a relative or of yourself, and jot down the answers on the sheet over the page. That's the first step to a family storybook.

1 Who's here?

Names, nicknames and how everyone is related. And who was behind the camera?

THEN TRY "What was she (or he) like back then?" · "Who is missing from this picture?"

2 Where and when?

The place, the year, the season. A best guess is fine. Just add a question mark.

THEN TRY "What makes you think it was then?" · "What else was happening in your life that year?"

3 What was going on?

The occasion, the day, and what happened just before the picture was taken.

THEN TRY "Whose idea was this?" · "Why was everyone there?"

4 What's outside the frame?

What the photo doesn't show: the sounds, the smells, the weather, who was standing just out of sight.

THEN TRY "What could you hear?" · "What happened right after?"

5 Why keep it?

What this moment means now, and what someone in the family should know about it a hundred years from now.

THEN TRY "What would you want a great-grandchild to know?" · "Is there a word or saying that goes with this picture?"

Photo Story Sheet

One sheet per photo. Jot down the answers: notes, not sentences.

PHOTO NO.

STORY NO.

Storyteller _____

Asked by _____

Date _____

THE PHOTO

Describe it, sketch it,
or attach a copy
(never the original).

1 Who's here? *and who took it?*

2 Where and when?

☐ about ☐ not sure

3 What was going on? *the occasion, the day, what happened just before*

4 What's outside the frame? *sounds, smells, who was missing, what came next*

5 Why keep it? *what it means; what a great-grandchild should know*

Words to keep exactly

Not sure about, or two versions

SHARING ☐ Family book ☐ Ask first ☐ Private

Next: write it up, label the photo

Turn your notes into a page

1 Write it as a short story

150 to 300 words in the storyteller's voice, keeping their own words.

2 Add a caption

Who, where and when, with a "?" for guesses.

3 Credit the storyteller

"Told by Ruth Anders, March 2026."

4 Read it back

Fix what they correct. Their reaction is the best part.

5 Label the photo

Lightly, in soft pencil, on the back near an edge.



The summer the boat sank

The boat was halfway to the island when June noticed her shoes were wet. Dad had rented it from the man at the bait shop that morning and told us it was "perfectly sound." By the time we turned around, the water was over our ankles and June was bailing with her sun hat.

We made it back to the dock with about an inch to spare. Mother was standing there with the camera, laughing so hard she had to sit down, which is why the picture is a little crooked. That's her shadow at the bottom.

Dad never rented that boat again, but every summer after that he'd point at it and say, "Perfectly sound."

Told by Ruth Anders to her daughter Claire, March 2026
June remembers this as the summer of 1963.

5

A finished page from the kit's example book
(a fictional family; the photo is an illustration)

TIP Not sure? Say so.

Put a question mark after any name, place or date that's a guess: "Pine Lake? 1962?" A rough answer, honestly marked, is more useful than a blank.

The full kit: Shoebox to Storybook

Everything you need to go from one photo to a finished family book: a step-by-step guide with 114 questions, printable sheets and story page templates, 54 question cards for family gatherings, and the **Story Page Maker**, which turns your words and photos into finished pages to print. US\$29, one payment, instant download.

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Free to print, copy and share with family, friends and groups, as long as it isn't sold. The example family is fictional.