

Oral History Interview Record



EARTHQUAKE

Topic: Memories of the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake

Interview Date

Interview Place

Name of Interviewer

Interviewee Name

Age and Location at Time of Earthquake

Interview Questions

Notes (*continued on reverse*)



Starting the Interview

Introduce yourself and briefly explain your project. Since the word 'interview' can sound formal and intimidating, it may be best to approach someone by asking *"Do you have five minutes to chat about your experience in the 1989 earthquake?"* or *"Do you have a few minutes to tell me your story?"*

When you visit the California Academy of Sciences, be on the lookout for docents wearing buttons that advertise our *Earthquake* exhibit. They may be potential interview subjects.

During the Interview

- » Don't interrupt a good story. Your aim is to get them to talk, not to talk about yourself.
- » If you think of a question while your subject is talking, write it down so you don't forget.
- » Always wait for a pause before you ask the next question.
- » Ask one question at a time.
- » Keep questions short and clear.
- » Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or a "no". Start with "why," "how," or "what kind of..."
- » Listen carefully and maintain good eye contact.
- » Nodding and smiling gives more positive feedback than verbal responses such as "Really?"
- » Be relaxed, unhurried, and caring.
- » Take accurate notes! You can ask for clarification or for help with spelling words.
- » Ask follow-up questions, but don't jump from one subject to the next too abruptly.
- » Remember that oral history interviews are not scripted. Come prepared with questions, but let your interview subject tell his/her story and work from there.
- » In addition to capturing descriptions of events, try to explore motives and feelings with questions like:
 - "Why?"*
 - "How did you feel?"*
 - "How did that affect you?"*

Sample Interview Questions

- » *Where were you when the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake hit the Bay Area?*
- » *Can you describe the experience? How did you feel? What did you think?*
- » *Can you describe the place where you lived at the time? Did any damage occur?*
- » *Did any of your friends, family, or coworkers also experience the earthquake?*
- » *What do you remember most about that day? About that week? About the months and years following the quake?*