

## Making contact & setting up

### *Arranging the interview*

- ◆ In contacting persons whom you wish to interview, make clear to them how their names were obtained and explain your interest in them. Establish at the very outset that you feel that their lives and experiences are important. Explain the specific project for which you are conducting the interviews and be prepared to answer questions.
- ◆ Many oral historians introduce the project and extend the invitation first by mail and follow up with a telephone call. Then, when contact is made, the interviewee will be more clear about who is calling and what is wanted, and an appointment can be made.
- ◆ Accommodate the interviewee's convenience when setting a time and place for the interview. The interviewee's home or place of business may or may not furnish the privacy and quiet required for recording the interview. Have in mind a suitable alternative location.
- ◆ Make clear to interviewees from the start that the interview will be recorded and that they will be asked to sign a legal-release agreement form.

Waco History Coalition  
PO Box 9222  
Waco TX 77777

January 1, 2011

Mr. Arthur Santos  
2222 West Drive  
Waco TX 77776

Dear Mr. Santos:

The Waco History Coalition is currently working on a project to record stories and gather photographs of the old Sandtown neighborhood, which was home to generations of Wacoans before urban renewal and highway development forever changed the landscape. A mutual acquaintance, Mr. Edgar Smith, told me that you had been his neighbor in Sandtown. Little information exists to tell us today what it was like to live there. I am writing to invite you to share your memories of growing up in Sandtown by participating in a recorded oral history interview.

I have enclosed brochures explaining the goals of the Waco History Coalition and a copy of the legal-release form participants in the oral history of Sandtown sign, giving us permission to record the interview, deposit the recordings in the public library, and include your stories and recordings in an educational Web site for local students.

I will call you next week to tell you more about the project and answer any questions you have. I hope that we can also set up a time for an interview about Sandtown.

I look forward to visiting with you soon.

Sincerely,

John Sutcliffe

### *Setting up on location*

- ◆ Demonstrate respect for the interviewee. Show up on time, be polite. Allow time to answer questions and engage in friendly conversation before and after the interview.
- ◆ Interview only one person at a time, if at all possible.
- ◆ Be very familiar with your recording equipment. The less attention you need to focus on your equipment, the more you will have to concentrate on your interviewee.
- ◆ Be flexible with your equipment so that the interviewee can sit wherever is most comfortable. Ask permission to rearrange light furniture, if necessary, so that the microphone and recorder are well placed between you and the interviewee.
- ◆ Bring extension cords if you plan to use A/C current. If you must rely on battery power, have extra batteries. A small, portable battery tester can save an interview.
- ◆ Arrange as quiet a spot as possible. Be aware of extraneous noises that will be picked up by the microphone—chiming clocks, humming refrigerators, clattering dishes, et cetera—and request permission to make changes to minimize background noise.
- ◆ Set up your recorder so that you can easily view recording levels and, when using analog tape, so that you reach the machine to turn over or change tapes.
- ◆ Place the microphone, whether internal or external, between you and the interviewee. Test the microphone before beginning the interview. Record both your voices, play back the test recording, and adjust the microphone placement and recorder settings as needed.