

Belmont Story Project



Recording and preserving the oral history of Belmont across generations

The Belmont Story Project (BSP) is a local, oral history recording project modeled after NPRs' *StoryCorps*. BSP encourages Belmont residents to share stories about the experiences and relationships most important in their lives. Children can interview parents or grandparents, friends and partners can reminisce about meaningful experiences they have shared, long-time Belmont residents can recall what Belmont was like many years ago. Everyone's story matters – *add your voice to our collection*.

Get Involved!

1. Record your story with an interested family member, friend, or neighbor. We'll cover the technology for you, so you can focus on having a good conversation.
Contacts:
 - **Joanna** at jtzouvelis@wickedlocal.com or 781-674-7723, for general questions and for help finding an interviewer
 - **Nancy** at nmccolm@minlib.net or 617-993-2870, for general questions and to schedule an interview at the Belmont Public Library
 - **Jeff** at Jeff@belmontmedia.org, 617-484-2443, to schedule an interview at the Belmont Media Center, or make an appointment to train as a volunteer
2. Listen to recordings of [interviews with Belmont residents](https://soundcloud.com/belmont-story-project) on SoundCloud at: <https://soundcloud.com/belmont-story-project>.

Note: This project is a collaboration of the Belmont Media Center, Belmont Public Library, Belmont Citizen Herald, Belmont Historical Society, and Belmont Council on Aging.

Preparing for Your Interview

Step 1: Choose a Partner

Choose a friend or family member whose story is important to you, or someone whom you'd like to share your own story with. Interviews are usually focused on one person's story, but can also be two people reflecting together.

Step 2: Select Your Questions

See *Great Questions from StoryCorps* and *Suggested Questions for Recording Belmont History* (both below). **Select 3-5 main questions** that you would like to discuss during your interview.

Bring these questions with you. If you are the primary storyteller, guide your interviewer to ask questions that will help you get to the topics you want to cover, or stories you most want to convey. Writing answers ahead is not recommended – stories start best from good conversation!

Step 3: Schedule a Time

Contact Jeff at Jeff@belmontmedia.org or 617-484-2443, to schedule an interview at the Belmont Media Center, or, contact Nancy at nmccolm@minlib.net or 617-993-2870, to schedule an interview at the Belmont Public Library. The process typically takes an hour, with about 30 minutes of actual recording time.

The Belmont Media Center is located at 9 Lexington Street, at Waverley Square. Several 2-hour parking spots are available on the street, and there is a paid municipal parking lot nearby. Belmont Media Center, Studio B offers a professional recording space for 2 people across a table from one another, each with their own microphone.

The Belmont Public Library has limited time slots available to record interviews in the Claflin Room. The Library is located at 336 Concord Avenue and off-street parking is available. Belmont Library uses a laptop with one microphone. Its Claflin Room hosts the Belmont Historical Society's collections.

Tips:

Arrive Early

Please arrive a little early, to see the recording equipment and meet your facilitator, a trained staff person who can answer questions about the project. You will use this time to sign consent forms for your interview to be shared and, (if you wish), to take a photo that will also be shared. This will also allow for time for you to get comfortable with the setup of the recording environment.

Make Yourself Comfortable

Bring a water bottle with you to keep hydrated. Wear comfortable clothing.

Interviewing Tips*:

Ask What Questions. You'll want to ask questions that open the conversation up, as opposed to those that may lead to a simple "yes" or "no." For example, "What did you think of her?" is a better question than, "Did you like her?"

Listen. Pay close attention to what someone says and how they say it. Let this inform your follow-up questions. (See next tip).

Follow up. Ask for clarification when you are intrigued by what someone says or are not sure what they mean. For example, a simple "What do you mean by that?" works well.

Repeat events back. Very briefly, summarize what the person has told you. For example, "So you had made a kind of elaborate plan to ask her to the Prom..." This allows the interviewee to confirm that you've heard them correctly, and may elicit a detail that was missed the first time.

Allow Silence. Don't feel you have to fill in the silence with talk. Sometimes great material comes after a thoughtful pause.

Enjoy the experience.

*Adapted from the video "Interview Tips with Steve Inskeep," host of NPR's Morning Edition.

Suggested Questions for Recording Belmont History

You don't need to ask, or answer, all of these questions. Select the ones that are **most meaningful to you**, or create ones that allow you to share your most significant stories.

- How did you/your family come to live in Belmont?
- What is/was your favorite Belmont event or tradition?
- What do you like most about Belmont?
- What would you like most to change about Belmont?
- Which people in Belmont influenced you the most, and how did they affect your life?
- What are/were your favorite places in Belmont hang out or go on a date?
- What are your earliest memories of Belmont? About what year was that?
- What did Belmont look like then? How does it look different now?
- What neighborhood did you grow up in? How is that neighborhood different now?
- What places in Belmont did you like to visit when you were a child?
- What schools did you attend in Belmont? What are your most powerful memories of school?
- Do you have any funny stories, memories, or anecdotes you would like to share about growing up or living in Belmont?
- What are your hopes for the future of Belmont?
- What do you miss most about Belmont's past, back in your days of youth?
- What did you do for recreation when you were younger in Belmont?
- What was the best park to go to in Belmont?
- What would you say is unique about the town of Belmont?

Great Questions from StoryCorps

Great Questions for Anyone. Select those that are most meaningful.

- Who has been the most important person in your life? Can you tell me about him or her?
- What was the happiest moment of your life? The saddest?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?
- Who has been the kindest to you in your life?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- What is your earliest memory?
- What is your favorite memory of me?
- Are there any funny stories your family tells about you that come to mind?
- Are there any funny stories or memories or characters from your life that you want to tell me about?
- What are you proudest of?
- When in life have you felt most alone?
- If you could hold on to one memory from your life forever, what would that be?
- How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- Do you have any regrets?
- What does your future hold?
- What are your hopes for what the future holds for me? For my children?
- If this was to be our very last conversation, is there anything you'd want to say to me
- For your great great grandchildren listening to this years from now: is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?
- Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?
- Is there something about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?

More sample questions from StoryCorps, focused on specific topics and relationships, can be found at: <https://storycorps.org/great-questions/>