

Story Goal Guide

1. What is a Story Goal?

- **Definition:** A *Story Goal* is the central desire, ambition, or challenge that shapes a person's life journey. In family history, it helps frame events around what mattered most to that individual.
- **Purpose:** It answers the question: “*What was this person striving for, consciously or unconsciously?*”
- **Key Idea:** Even if they weren’t aware of it, every ancestor had personal goals—survival, success, love, belonging, freedom, etc.

2. Why is the Story Goal Important?

- **Creates Emotional Depth:** Readers connect more deeply with a story that reveals the *why* behind someone’s actions.
- **Brings Focus:** Family histories often cover many events; the Story Goal helps determine what details to emphasize.
- **Shows Growth:** Whether the goal was achieved or not, the journey itself reveals personal growth, values, and lessons.

3. How to Identify the Story Goal

Reflective Questions:

- *What did this person want most in life?* (e.g., security, adventure, family, recognition)
- *What stood in their way?* (e.g., war, poverty, illness, discrimination)
- *Was there a moment that changed the course of their life?* (e.g., immigration, marriage, loss)
- *Why did they make the choices they did?* (e.g., to protect family, to prove themselves, to escape hardship)
- *What did they leave behind, intentionally or unintentionally?* (e.g., traditions, values, lessons)

4. Quick, In-the-Moment Exercises

Exercise 1: The “Because” Test

- **Prompt:** Write one major fact about your ancestor.
- **Add:** “because...” to uncover the deeper motivation.

Example:

- “Grandma moved to the city...” → ...because she wanted to find independence after growing up in a small town.
- “Uncle Joe joined the army...” → ...because he felt a duty to protect his family and country after Pearl Harbor.

Exercise 2: The Life Timeline with a Twist

- **Step 1:** Draw a simple timeline of the ancestor’s life with major events.
- **Step 2:** Next to each event, write “What was the goal here?” or “What did they hope for at this time?”
- **Bonus:** Add obstacles or setbacks alongside the goals to highlight tension.

Exercise 3: 5-Minute Character Interview

Pretend you’re interviewing your ancestor. Set a timer for 5 minutes and ask:

- “What was the hardest decision you ever made?”
- “What kept you going when things got tough?”
- “If you could be remembered for one thing, what would it be?”

(Answer based on what you know or imagine possibilities to inspire reflection.)

Exercise 4: The Goal-Obstacle-Outcome Triangle

For any story or event, fill in:

1. **Goal:** What did they want?
2. **Obstacle:** What got in the way?
3. **Outcome:** What happened, and how did it change them?

Example:

- **Goal:** Great-Grandfather wanted to start a farm in a new country.
- **Obstacle:** Faced harsh winters and financial struggles.
- **Outcome:** The farm eventually succeeded, teaching resilience that shaped family values.

5. Types of Story Goals in Family Histories

- **Survival Goals:** Escaping war, famine, or hardship.
- **Achievement Goals:** Building a business, earning an education, becoming a community leader.
- **Emotional Goals:** Finding love, creating a family, seeking acceptance.
- **Legacy Goals:** Leaving behind traditions, values, or a sense of identity.

6. Final Reflection: Telling the Story

When writing, consider these prompts:

- *“What was the heart of their journey?”*
- *“How did pursuing this goal shape their life—and our family?”*
- *“What lesson does their story offer future generations?”*