

A wooden walkway with railings leads into a misty, hazy landscape. The walkway is made of dark wood and has a railing on both sides. The background is a soft, hazy yellow and orange, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The walkway leads towards a vanishing point in the distance.

REMINISCENCE  
JOURNAL

A COLLECTION OF  
LIFE MEMORIES FOR:

*Virginia*



# VIGNETTES OF *my childhood...*



Virginia was born to Alphonsus (Fritz) and Helen Meng in Toledo, OH in 1937. She was their sixth daughter and she had five older sisters.

When Virginia was just weeks old, her mother passed away from pancreatitis. Since her father could not care for all six girls by himself, Virginia was sent to live with her Uncle Lawrence and Aunt Freda Meng. They had five children as well, and their youngest was 12 years old when they took Virginia in.

Growing up, she viewed her uncle and aunt as her "pop and mom". She remained close with her father and sisters and has many memories where they shared their weekends together. Virginia shared that she felt very fortunate to have two families to call her own.



Her biological father, Alphonsus Anthony Meng, was born in 1897 to Martin Meng and Sophia Shessler in Genoa, OH. He served in World War I and later worked at Libbey Owens Ford in Toledo, OH. While in Kansas, he injured his back while riding a tractor when a tornado came through. After that, he was unable to work in the factory and took to farming, raising apples, strawberries, and English walnuts. Her biological mother, Helen Marie Verkin, was born in 1910 to Mike Verkin and Mary Svetlak in Czechoslovakia. Her family immigrated to the United States in 1914.





Her "pop" owned and operated Lawrence Meng's Music Store in downtown Toledo and played the organ at Gesu Church. Her mother was a tailor, so Virginia learned sewing skills at a young age. She would sew for friends and family, and still does sewing projects today.

# A LOOK BACK

*in time...*



Virginia attended Gesu Catholic School for elementary and went to Notre Dame Academy for high school. While at Notre Dame Academy, Virginia served on the student council as the chairman of the sales tax committee.

Virginia met the love of her life, Donald Giles, in 1954 on a blind date hayride at the CYO festival. They were introduced by a friend that went to grade school with Donald and attended Norte Dame Academy with Virginia.

Donald Dixon Giles was born in 1937 to William and Anna C. (Gensler) Giles in Toledo, OH. He attended St. Anne's for grade school and then Central Catholic High School.

After graduating high school, Virginia attended Mary Manse College in Toledo for Medical Technology. Donald joined the military in 1956 and served as a company clerk.





A LIFETIME OF  
*Treasured memories...*



When Donald got stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii, Virginia moved across the country so they could begin their life together. They were married in 1957 in Honolulu.

Virginia shared how she remembers purchasing their wedding bands in Hawaii, and how they both kept those same wedding bands throughout their entire 64 years of marriage. A true symbol of commitment!

Donald, Virginia, and their first child, Victoria, moved back to Northwest Ohio in 1958. They lived in Donald's childhood home in Toledo until they were able to get settled, as Donald went back to school to earn a bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Toledo.



Their family moved into a house in Toledo where they added five more children to their family, having six children total. First born was Victoria Ann followed by Michael William, Theresa Marie, Kevin Donald, Thomas Paul, and the youngest, Steven Christopher. Virginia stayed home to raise their children while Donald worked in the printing industry and then taught Graphic Communications at Penta Career Center.

They later moved to Genoa, OH, where Virginia became known as quite the community seamstress, helping neighbors and friends with everything from quick patch work to adjusting formal dresses and suits. She even made several of her children's clothes!

She giggled remembering raising six children on a teacher's salary! But, they made it work. She shared that there was always food on the table and a roof over their head, and that was everything they could be thankful for.





Donald retired from teaching after 25 years and returned to the printing industry, working for Priesman Printery in Oak Harbor, Ohio from 1993-2004. Virginia has many fond memories traveling with Donald, visiting several National Parks, and enjoying many yearly trips to Florida. One of her favorite trips was to Bryce Canyon. She shared she prefers this over the Grand Canyon, which she said is "just a big hole in the ground!"

Virginia shared some advice on relationships, saying you always have to make time for you and your partner. Life gets busy. Raising the kids, taking care of them, and keeping the house in tact. But you have to make time for your partner. Go on trips, have date night, do something you enjoy together without the kids.

Donald and Virginia celebrated 64 years of marriage before he passed away in 2021.

# STORIES

*worth sharing...*

Donald and Virginia were blessed to celebrate many milestones during their life together; weddings, baptisms, graduations, and the birth of grandchildren and great grandchildren!

With each blessing received, their love and appreciation for one another only grew.





When Donald began to have some health issues, Virginia did not hesitate to step in as his caregiver. Rooted in faith, she stood by his side every single day, selflessly caring for him and his health.

Virginia reflects fondly on the life they were able to create and enjoy together, sharing their stories and memories with her children and grandchildren.



Virginia spends much of her time now volunteering and doing various sewing and knitting projects that are helpful to her community. She's currently making little quilted blankets to donate to a local hospital NICU!

She shared that she just wants to continue to do good and help others. Virginia has such a servant's heart and it is an admirable quality that she has helped instill into her growing family.

There is no doubt that she loves to spend time with loved ones! her door is always open for visitors and they will always leave with a smile and a snack. When they pull out of her driveway, they know that she can be seen standing in the kitchen window to give them a final goodbye wave with a big smile on her face.

Her positivity and light touches everyone around her, and will certainly continue to impact her loved ones for generations to come.

# REMINISCENCE GUIDE

## Reflection

Dear Virginia,

It was such a joy to connect with you throughout our time together in the Caching Memories program! From our very first call, I felt welcomed and accepted by you.

Your story is so beautiful and as a young woman, it was inspiring to me to hear how much you value your family, faith, and love. You are without a doubt the matriarch of your family, always caring for others, leading by example, and performing selfless acts of kindness every day. I hope to live that way as well!

I particularly enjoyed our conversations centered around your travels, primarily the National Parks. I think it's so cool that you and your husband carved out time to make those trips and they obviously became such cherished memories for you both. Because of those stories you shared, I have added a new item to my bucket list that I wanted to share with you. I'd like to visit all of America's National Parks before I die! I'm especially excited to see the ones we spoke about, including your favorite one, Bryce Canyon. When I visit there, it will be special and I will be thinking of you and the time we shared together.

I hope you have had as much fun as I have connecting! I've learned a lot from you and gained so much wisdom...and we had a lot of laughs, too! I hope this book is something that can be cherished by you and your family and friends. I feel so lucky to have been able to hear these stories from you first hand!

Be safe and well and continue to make many more memories. And as we always ended our phone calls, I'm sending you love and prayers.

-Kelly



CAPTURE THE

*stories untold...*

Continue to reflect and share life stories by  
journaling memories here.

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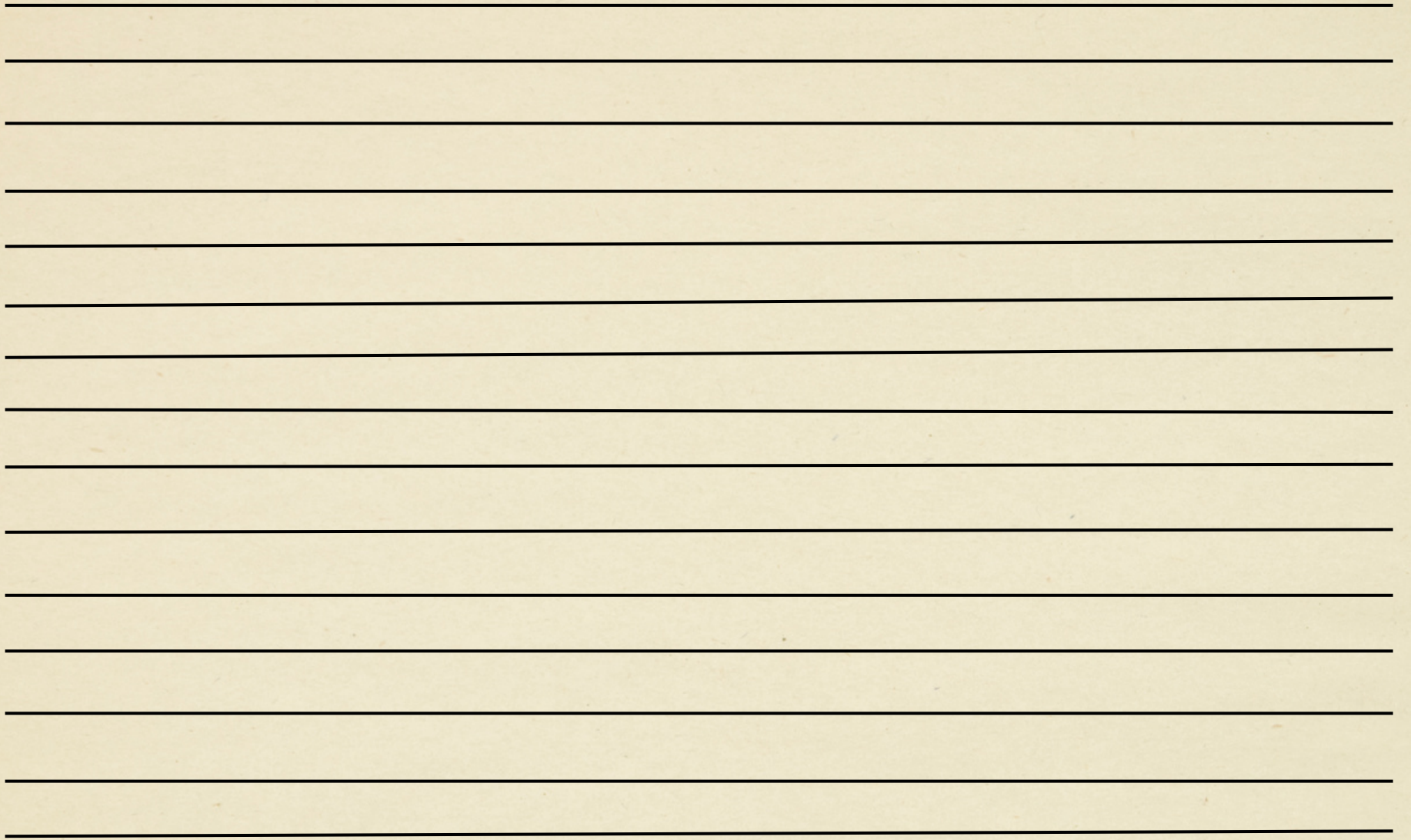
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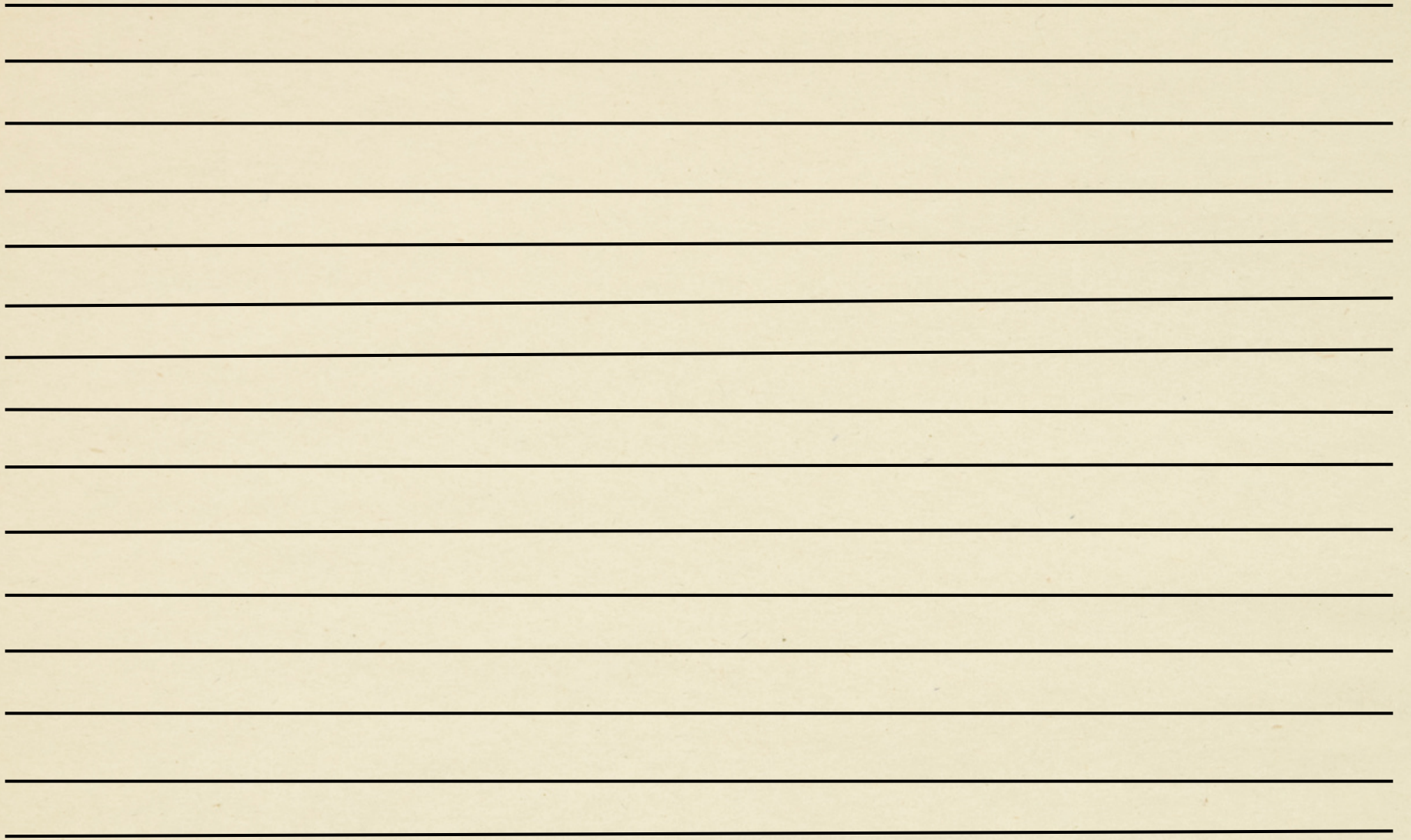
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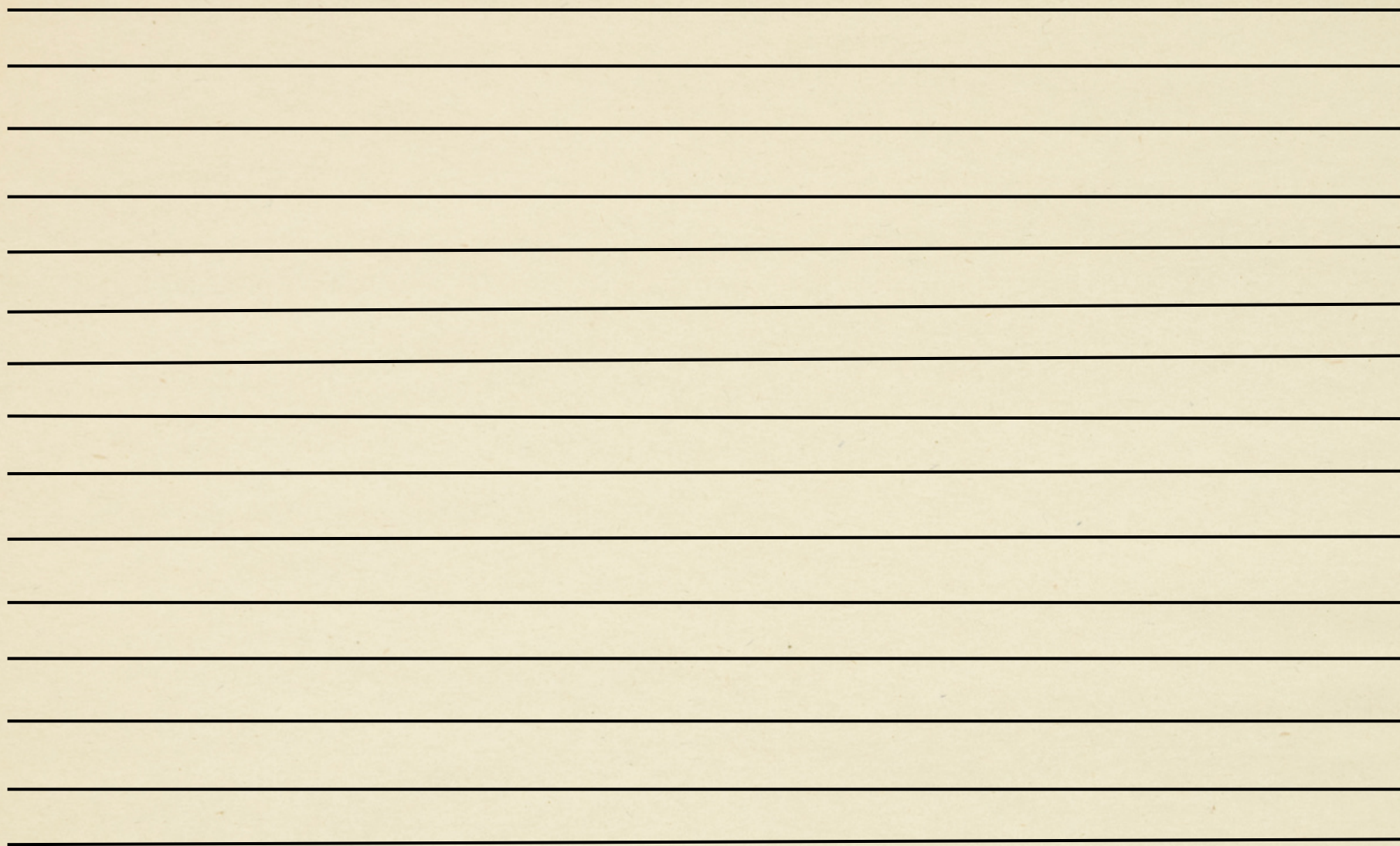
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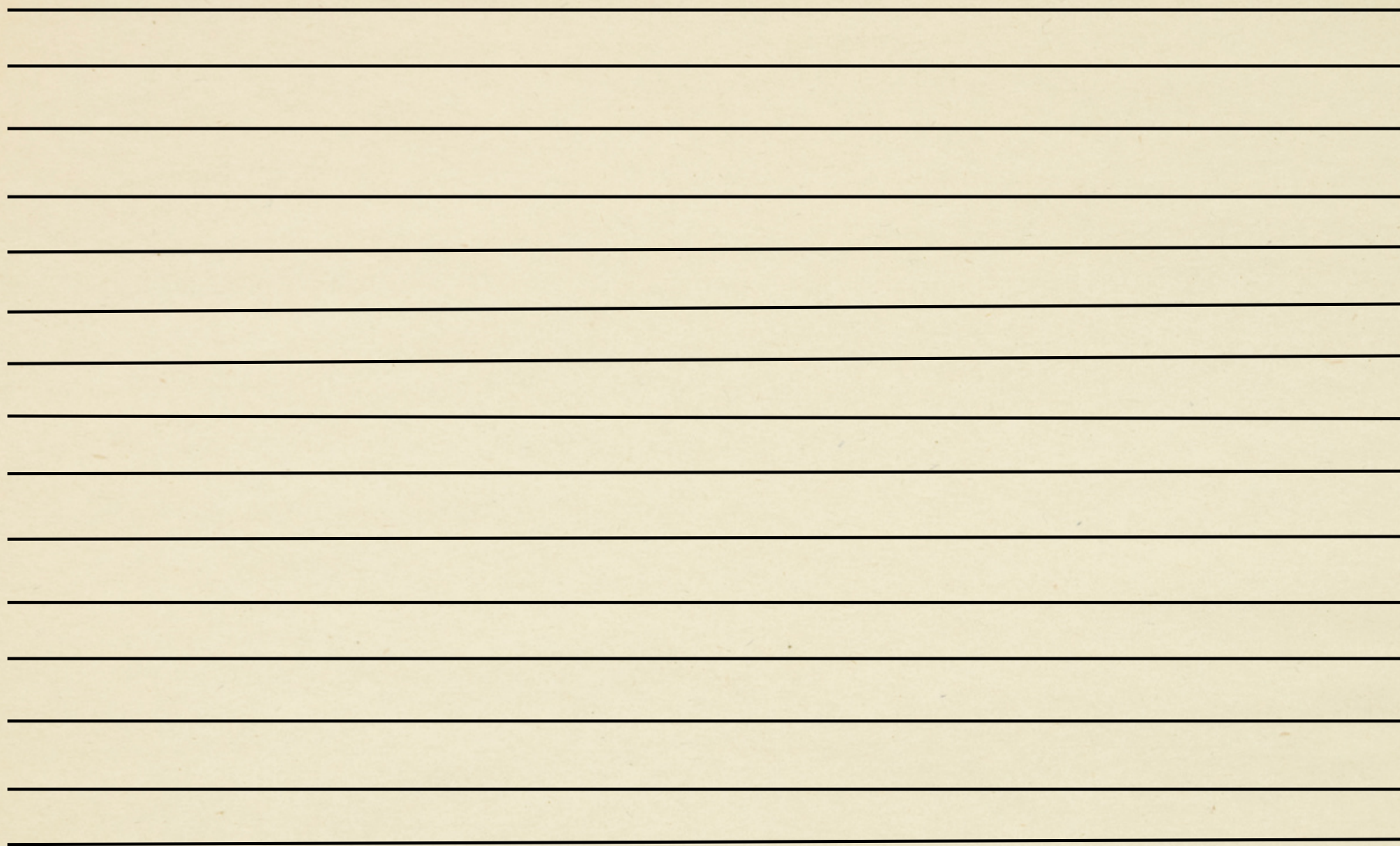
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