

Caregiver's Corner Column (December 2011)

Do You Remember When...Creating a Legacy through Story-telling

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Care Resources

Everybody has a story. The holidays often create an atmosphere of nostalgia when seniors want to share their stories. This time of year tends to bring on a myriad of emotions-- nostalgia, sadness, joy, loneliness, and peace -- all as a result of reminiscing the days of long ago.

The holidays close out the year and offer a final chance to reflect on the events of life over the past twelve months and over the previous years combined.

The sights, sounds and scents of the holidays can trigger a person's memories. And so the holidays become the perfect time to document stories while seniors' memories surface.

The opportunity to create a life story is valuable in capturing life's tender moments-- the highs and lows, loves and losses, successes and failures. It can also offer a healing process for forgiveness and reconciliation of life's disappointments and hurts. The stories become a tapestry that weaves together a person's life.

For the family who maintains the treasured memories, a life story can create a lasting legacy to be treasured for years and can offer the chance to pass down valuable life lessons to loved ones.

A person's life story can be documented in a variety of ways, from journaling to scrapbooking. Caregivers can capture their loved one's memories by writing them down on paper if the senior can't do it. Or the seniors themselves can help piece the stories together by recording them either by audio or video. Creating a scrapbook of photos and mementoes (newspaper clippings, letters, etc) can connect a beautiful visual timeline. There is no right or wrong way to capture a life story.

The content you might want to write about may include *who* the people are, *where* they've been, *what* they've done, *whose* lives they've touched, *why* they're special, *when* they lived, *what* they've experienced, *what* they've learned and *how* they reacted to life's ups and downs.

Writing a life story is a wonderful Christmas gift for a senior and for their children, grandchildren and friends. There are a variety of books and internet resources available to help you walk through the process. Though each person's story is unique so is the way of capturing it.

The process doesn't have to be stressful. Don't think of it as writing a biography or autobiography. Simply write in small chunks as the stories come to light. Writing

doesn't have to be in chronological order either. It can be done as a memory is revealed. And don't judge whether a story is interesting or valuable. To the person who reads them, the stories offer a glimpse into the senior's life and that alone is worth reading.

So enjoy the process as it unfolds, delight in the memories that are revealed and reap the rewards of what a life story offers.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664