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Culture Change in Practice

Elder Storytelling on the Web



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posted by Steph Kilen

It is easy for us to get to hear the stories of the famous people and events in history, but I think the combined stories of ordinary folks are the ones that can best paint a story of our past and our humanity. I'm not alone in this. Anyone ever heard of **Ken Burns** ([http:// www.pbs.org/kenburns](http://www.pbs.org/kenburns))?

Can you imagine what a nursing home would look like if we could see the stories of our elders projected on the walls and floating around in the air? Such a wealth! Tapping into elders' wealth of stories can make the day more enjoyable and rewarding for everyone. Elders have an opportunity to give of themselves and staff get to know them better, giving all involved a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

Friends and family know each other's stories. It's one of the reasons we find story telling essential for creating home in long-term care. We get to know each other this way. We can also help facilitate relationships when we recognize a common bond between residents and staff members.

Person-centered care focuses on the individual, but a lot can also be gained from understanding the shared history of elders and the years that shaped their lives. Since history often repeats itself, you may be struck by similarities to current events to those events that have shaped our elders' lives and world earlier in time. This is a great way to start a conversation with an elder about something you both have experienced. It is a way to recognize shared humanity.

There are some great websites dedicated to elder story telling. You could get lost for days in them, reading snapshots of people's lives. I hope they will give you understanding and inspiration. These sites also have ways for readers to contribute stories. Pull yourself and an elder up to a computer and share a story with the rest of us! You could also use a story from one of these sites as an ice breaker or learning circle to get folks to share their own stories.

I, Witness to History at:
(<http://iwitnesstohistory.org/Tier2and3Pages/GoalsPage.htm>) was founded in 1996 by the residents

"Culture Change in Practice" is our own weblog where people can become involved in a conversation about Culture Change as it is practiced by professionals in real nursing homes. Feel free to join the conversation, or post a comment about something you have learned on your journey.

www.culturechangenow.com/weblog

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“Elder Storytelling” *cont’d*



and staff of **Larksfield Place retirement community** (<http://larksfieldplace.org/>).

They had their eye on the means as well as the end: “The *process* of writing one’s story, promotes personal insight, provides an added sense of self-worth, restores a measure of self-control in one’s life, and provides much-needed social interaction.”

The site is a huge library of stories that you can search by author or topic or just browse. There are some great tips and info about collecting stories and creating a program like I, Witness to History. You’ll also find info on their inter-generational program.



I also love **Time Goes By** (<http://www.timegoesby.net/>): What It’s Really Like Getting Older blog/site by Ronni Bennett. Time Goes By features great elder issue pages like **Elder Video** (<http://www.timegoesby.net/weblog/elder-video.html>) (links for

clips featuring elders on YouTube). Ronni’s blog is fantastic and there are links to about a gazillion blogs by folks 50 and older and even a **page of photos**

<http://www.timegoesby.net/weblog/where-we-blog.html> of the actual rooms where related bloggers do their blogging.

There’s also info on setting up your own blog. It’s not for everyone, but I bet you could find a resident or two or four who would like to do their own blog. Not ready to commit to a blog?

The Elder Storytelling Place (<http://www.ronnibennett.typepad.com/elderstorytelling/>) –an offshoot of Time Goes By – is a great place to read and submit one-off stories by elders.

Know of other great places on the Web for elders to share their stories? Let us know in a comment.

