

Newsletter - September 2015



Greetings!

**Ask, Listen, Document:
The Importance of Getting to Those Memoirs**

If I have learned one thing in the last six months, it's that everyone has a story to tell and most are eager for someone to listen to it.

Consider Rosadelle. She left Germany by boat during WW2 for a safer life in America. She had her infant son with her who slept in an orange crate for the duration of the journey. Aside from her baby and \$20 sewn into the collar of her coat, she had nothing as she docked in a foreign country with people speaking a language different from her own.

Rosadelle tells me this as if she's recounting something that happened just yesterday. Her mental acuity is starting to slip due to Alzheimer's. I have to remind her of my name each time we meet and keep the questions short and focused to keep her on track, but she could tell me that it was about 45 degrees, windy and raining when she arrived to America that day.

I've been working with her and other seniors in informal writing workshops for the past six months at several area senior homes. Many of them start with doubts. I've heard "I can't write well" or "I don't have anything important to say" from several participants. But I urge them on. I tell them that I want to hear it. That simple reassurance is usually all they need to get going.

I ask the group to write for 10-15 minutes on different prompts, and then we come together as a group to share. Some want to share, some don't, but all listen attentively as all of these colorful, entertaining stories come out of these supposed novice writers.

It has been inspiring to lead these workshops. There is also a sense of relief knowing that these men and women are capturing anecdotes that may have otherwise been forgotten. I implore them to keep writing, to get it down on paper, and then share these stories with their kids or other loved ones.

What is important to note is a workshop is not required here. We can all serve, as William Zinsser put it, as the "custodians of memory." So take stock of those special people around you. Someday our grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles will be gone, and with them goes their stories. Sit down with a loved one. Ask questions, and more importantly listen. Jot down notes or even use a phone to record their responses if they don't write it down themselves.

If you need help, let me know.

-Nora



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