

Conference on Aging

Tips for Getting your Elder Friends and Family to Tell Their Stories **Shared by Nell Weatherwax with expert help from Cathleen Ingle Weber**

Keep your priority

Hold space in a warm way for the teller

Some members of the family may have heard the story and will try to hurry it along – avoid that happening

Settle in and give them your full attention – no multitasking or looking at your phone

Clear out as much background noise as possible – turn off TV, be in a quieter room

If you are recording the story, set up the recorder and have it running from the start, so you don't have to fumble with it

Make it clear you have plenty of time

Make sure anyone else with you knows to give the teller time and space

Do not rush the teller – help make them comfortable taking their time

Avoid being at all critical – avoid correcting or pointing out that the story is different than what you heard before. Allow for so-called “rambling” and keep your focus on listening and reflecting what you hear.

If comfortable and appropriate – touch their arm, sit close, maintain connecting eye contact

Instead of asking “do you remember” help them return to the moments in their minds and the memories will bubble up.

Prime them with beginnings of things you know and may have heard before (but do not “correct” them) – keep the focus on keeping them talking.

- You know that cowbell that the kids used to bang – didn't your Mom used to hit that?
- You and Dad took a trip to The Everglades when we were kids – what was that place we visited with the parrots?
- You and your best friend loved The Everly Brothers – tell me more about your friendship
- When I smell this pumpkin pie spice it reminds me of Mom's apple crisp – what does it remind you of?

Follow up questions are the best way to learn more – keep them open ended to avoid yes/no responses:

Tell me more about that...

What impression did that make on you?

What thoughts do you have about that?

How did that feel?

What was it like?

What happened because of that?

What did Dad/Mom do when she found out?

Go through the many ways we experience things:

See Describe the room. What kind of things did she wear?
Sounds like you thought she was cute...

Feel What did the grass feel like under your feet?
What was it like to run around barefoot?

Hear Describe how it sounded.
When you first heard Elvis, what did you think?

See Describe what it looked like.
What did you think when you first saw it?

Taste Describe the flavor/texture/heat/temp.
What was it like eating your own strawberries?

Smell Scent / Aroma of specific things
What was the feeling you got smelling that?

Know Facts/Realizations/Revelations
How did you deal with that realization?

Sense Hunch/Intuition/Sensing
When it came to you, how did you feel about it?

What was it like? What did it feel like? What did it remind you of?

Presenting Partner:



Supporting Partners:



Contributing Partners:

