



Banner Alzheimer's Institute

BAI BEACON

The Newsletter from Family and Community Services
Banner Alzheimer's Institute

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The Gift of Your Story

We all have a life story, but sadly most of us never take time to write it down or share it. There may be no better time to tell these life stories than during the holidays, a time of tradition. As families gather for holiday meals and celebrations, sharing stories can be fun to share and create a legacy for years to come with children, grandchildren and other family and friends.

While people with Alzheimer's disease/dementia may lose more recent memories, it is these long held, deeply rooted memories that are the most robust. Encouraging conversations with the person with dementia may prompt crystal clear memories that range from childhood to adulthood. Families and friends are often amazed by the details that emerge and get a sense of what made this person so unique. Many families might even get a history lesson or two! The benefits of promoting these conversations give the person with memory loss a sense of self and accomplishment in a world that has become more confusing and sometimes defeating. Family and friends get a chance to learn more about this person as often there are undiscovered lessons.

Capturing the life story is a precious gift. However, some preparation will be needed if you or other family members or friends want to archive these stories. Early on in the disease, the person with dementia may be able to write or journal part or all of their favorite memories. Some may want to record their stories on audio or video tape. As the disease progresses, a family member, friend or hired historian, will be needed to facilitate this process. Once again, the stories can be written or recorded. There are prompters that can be used to capture short stories and sometimes this is the best way to begin. The stories don't have to follow a chronological timeline and may be more meaningful if they surround themes that are more important to that person. For example, some individuals may like to talk about their family heritage while others may prefer to tell stories about work, friends or even lessons learned.

BAI has met some very interesting professionals trying to help families capture these memories that can last a lifetime for them... and give the person with dementia a sense of purpose. Barbara Tabach is an author and personal historian who has created an easy to use guide, "545 Life Story Prompts: Keep Personal and Family Memories Alive." You can learn more by going to the website: www.lifecatching.com. If you want to capture and archive photos, slides, movies, videos, etc. iMemories offers an easy way to assist families. Photos and the like can be shipped directly to iMemories, who will then digitalize and organize. You can then go online, share and select your favorite memories and get a DVD back (along with your photos, etc.). For more information go to www.imemories.com.

Make this holiday season a time to share and gather stories!

Capturing Your Story

Getting started is often the most difficult part of any project. Here are some ideas on how to begin capturing important stories and conversations.

Family History

Record name, date/place of birth; parents/siblings/grandparents names. Where the person lived. Spouse/partner/children's names. Country of origin, traditions from those origins. Facts about heritage. Family life growing up. Influence of the family on the person.

Childhood Memories

Overview of growing up; nick-names, best friend/child hood friends, any pets, family home/neighborhood. Games that were played; favorite toys/activities. School memories: best subject, favorite teacher. Childhood dreams, favorite family vacations/holidays. First job/chores.

Young Adult Memories

Overview of college/technical training; first job/occupation. How much money earned on first job; favorite music/activities; what made you happiest; major historical events during young adult years. Military service.

Random Topics

Best/worst: vacation, car, advice. Favorite sights, smells, tastes, seasons, music, books, movies.

Advice on life

Best lessons learned; if I had to do it over again; dealing with loss.

Have fun with reminiscing!



“Ask the Expert”
Jan Dougherty, RN, MS

Dear Jan:

I am afraid of losing my husband, not so much to dementia or to death but to the hard reality that the world will forget him. I've read that AD tends to affect people with less education but that was certainly not the case here. My husband is a very important man: a college professor and CEO who invented medical equipment that saved thousands of lives! Now when we meet someone new I am afraid they will see only the dementia. We have always been very private people but now I find myself telling everyone who my husband is, what he did, and remind them to treat him with respect. I feel like a braggart. How can I learn to keep my mouth shut?
 CEO's Wife

Dear Wife:

You should not keep your mouth shut for several reasons. First, what you are experiencing is not bragging but a normal part of the process of caregiving in dementia. As the person's abilities fade, the family assumes a larger and larger part of "telling the person's story." This includes describing the person's attributes, accomplishments, values,

and preferences. You have become the person who preserves your husband's history. Research shows that in order for a caregiver to trust another person, whether physician, professional caregiver, or acquaintances, they have to listen to your husband's story. If they fail to do this how will you know they value him?

Second, it is important to tell the story to decrease the stigma of Alzheimer's disease. If YOUR husband (wife, mom, dad, etc) who is highly educated and accomplished can get AD, it reinforces that anyone has some risk for the disease. Many people think that AD is the result of poor education, lower life achievement, or being intellectually lazy. Clearly this is not the case. Alzheimer's disease is just that, a disease. You are, through the normal process of becoming a caregiver, becoming a spokesperson for the unfairness of the disease. Maintaining your husband's story will provide him with the dignified and personalized care that he will need and reflect the love you have for him. Keep telling his story!

Jan

What's New

GPS for Memory (Giving People Strategies for Memory) is a new program offered monthly by Banner Alzheimer's Institute. Throughout 2010 participants are invited to attend a free 60-minute lecture on various aspects of Alzheimer's disease/dementia, caregiving and brain health. Following the lecture, participants are welcome to enjoy the lovely surroundings of the Desert Botanical Gardens free of charge. To help you better connect with nature, please wear comfortable shoes and light clothing, and bring a hat, sunscreen, and sunglasses. You are welcome to bring a water bottle, and the Garden has water fountains to refill them on the trails. Be sure to bring a camera to capture the memories and fun!

On Friday, January 8, 2010 from 11a.m. – Noon, the topic will be "Maintaining Caregiver Sanity" to provide caregivers fresh new approaches to start the New Year balancing the demands and joys of caregiving. Susy Favaro, MSW, Social Worker at Banner Alzheimer's Institute will be the presenter. Ms. Favaro specializes in working with individuals with chronic illness and their care partners.

Beacon Bits

COMPASS is a free 90-minute class to discuss the progression of dementia and effective strategies to manage daily living. January 7th or 21st

Finding Help is a free 90-minute class to help caregivers identify and plan for legal, financial and hands on assistance. January 11th or 25th

Arts Engagement Program is registering for programs at Phoenix Art Museum, Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art and Phoenix Symphony.

For more information or to register, call Veronica Ellis at (602) 839-6850

Banner Alzheimer's Institute is now on Twitter, please follow us at Banner Alzheimer to hear the latest updates and event information.



Consider supporting the nonprofit mission of Banner Alzheimer's Institute by making a tax-deductable year-end gift or through a bequest in your will. A bequest can be in the form of cash or securities. For details, visit www.banneralz.org or call (602) 839-3851.

Our Mission

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.

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