

## ABSTRACT

LOHR, KATHY DIANE. Lasting Expressions: A Case Study of Lifelong Learners in a Life-Story Process. (Under the direction of Dr. Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner.)

Starting in 2012, 10,000 Americans will turn 65 years of age every day and by 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population will be 65 and older. Considering that adult education has historically responded to individual and societal needs, it is understandable that there is a need to focus on this growing group of older learners. How will these adults find meaning and how can education enhance their later years? At the root of this research is the premise that creating legacy is a developmental need of older adults. Capturing one's life experiences in story form is one type of legacy.

The purpose of this research was to explore a life-story process as it relates to personal legacy and the insights emerging for the writers involved. Ten lifelong learners who completed a life-story writing course and joined a life-story writers' group affiliated with a learning-in-retirement program participated in this qualitative case study. Two research questions guided interviews, stories, observations, and field notes: How does the composing and sharing of life events foster and shape stories written for the purpose of personal legacy? And, what insights emerge for writers who engage in this memory-capturing process?

The specific life-story writing process under study in this research impacted each writer's understanding of his or her specific life experiences. Memories and compositions were revisited and revised. Insights emerging reflected four characteristics of Tornstram's gerotranscendence model (1997): a connection to earlier generations, an acceptance of the mystery of life, a decrease in self-centeredness, and a move from

duality to plurality. Issues of truthfulness and entertainment emerged as major themes. Implications for practice included a negotiation of truth, both externally and internally on the part of the authors; the emergence of context in detail related to a focus on life events versus autobiography; and, the benefit of extending the sharing aspect of the life-story process, in this case through a monthly writers group.

Lasting Expressions: A Case Study of Lifelong Learners in a Life-Story Process

by  
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## DEDICATION

To Dr. Valerie-Lee Chapman, who along with Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger, championed my acceptance into this doctoral program at North Carolina State University. Four months prior to losing her battle with cancer, Dr. Chapman voiced this request in a personal email, “Carry the torch for me and remember, love your students and let light into their lives; don’t crush them in the name of standards.” Her torch and her words live on through me and the many other educators she graced with her working philosophy of teaching from the heart as well as the mind.

## BIOGRAPHY

Kathy Diane Lohr was born February 28, 1957 in Wichita, Kansas. Her mother, Barbara Lohr, is a Kansas native from whom Kathy gained an appreciation for the beauty of nature. Her father, David Lohr, is an engineer who taught her a respect for the laws of physics and nature. Kathy began her higher education experience at Colorado State University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in horticulture. An internship at a county Extension office in Colorado inspired her to return for a master's degree in horticulture which qualified her for a professional position in the Cooperative Extension Service. It was in Extension that she found a calling to education for all ages, from the youth in 4-H to the retirees she trained as Master Gardeners.

Kathy returned to higher education in 2001 when she was admitted to the adult and community college education master's program at North Carolina State University. She completed her second master's degree – one of the last offered at NC State with a focus in educational gerontology – in December of 2002. Her doctorate research has continued her interest and commitment to learning as a developmental need throughout the lifespan.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals made the completion of this doctorate possible. I thank my committee who pushed me to make this the best work I had in me. My advisor, Dr. Colleen Weissner, believed in this research from the beginning and throughout its many manifestations. Dr. Susan Bracken and Dr. Tuere Bowles guided me in the creation of a work that will hopefully make a lasting contribution to the field of adult education. Dr. Audrey Jaeger was both friend and mentor on this dissertation and the graduate experience, celebrating my successes and providing perspective to my defeats. Dr. Steve Katz, who left NC State for an endowed chair in English at Clemson, believed in my work and followed this project to the end even with more pressing projects to finish.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	1
Problem Statement .....	4
Purpose and Research Questions .....	6
Definition of Terms .....	6
Significance .....	8
Limitations .....	9
Overview of the Study .....	10
Summary .....	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Conceptual Framework .....	14
Truth .....	18
Literature .....	19
Adult Development .....	19
Learning from Experience .....	35
Reminiscence .....	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	49
Research Approach Rationale .....	49

Research Design: Setting .....	51
Research Design: Participants.....	51
Data Collection .....	52
Data Analysis .....	58
Data Reduction.....	60
Data Display.....	61
Limitations and Strengths .....	63
Researcher Positionality and Ethics.....	64
Verification .....	66
Summary .....	68
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	69
Writer Intentions .....	71
Story as Legacy.....	71
Story as Therapeutic .....	76
The Writing-to-Remember Process .....	79
Remembering.....	82
Composing .....	88
Sharing .....	103
Writer Expressions.....	113
Self-care .....	114
Change in Perspective.....	124



The Essence of People, Places, and Things .....	131
Summary .....	152
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	155
Adult Development.....	155
Aging Models.....	156
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs .....	159
Gerotranscendence .....	161
Learning from Experience .....	167
Experience and Reflection .....	168
Constructivist Learning.....	169
Reminiscence .....	171
Autobiographical Memory .....	172
Life as Literature.....	173
Summary .....	175
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS....	177
Overview of Findings .....	177
Implications for Practice.....	180
Implications for Adult Educators.....	181
Implications for Program Planners .....	183
Recommendations for Future Research .....	186
Conclusion .....	189

REFERENCES .....	192
APPENDICES .....	214
APPENDIX A: Sample Interview Questions .....	215
APPENDIX B: Participant Demographics .....	216
APPENDIX C: IRB Forms .....	217

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Wisdom Literature .....	33
Table 2: Participant Context .....	62
Table 3: Data Themes and Subcategories.....	70
Table 4: Themes by Research Question.....	154
Table 5: Wisdom, Tornstam and Maslow, and Themes .....	167

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: W2R Process .....70

Figure 2: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....159

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research is an intrinsic case study of lifelong learners involved in a life-story writing process as a means of creating legacy. At the root of this research is the premise that creating legacy is a developmental need of older adults. This research explores a specific life-story writing process as a tool for creating legacy and the implications for its use in adult education. The Writing-to-Remember process under study is unique in three ways. First, it combines completion of coursework in life-story composition followed by a monthly writer's group. Second, the emphasis is on single life stories versus prompted life review or guided autobiography. Third, the individuals participating are healthy active adults, atypical of populations found in most reminiscence research (Webster & Haight, 2002).

### Background

Reminiscence is defined as stimulation of an older person's memory of positive and negative events of their past. As Webster and Haight (2002) reported, the research on reminiscence has become prolific. The number of articles on reminiscence, life review, life story, and remembering the past has gone from 68 between the years of 1960 and 1990 to over 150 between 1994 and 2000. Although life review could be traced to Socrates' claim that the unexamined life is not worth living, it was Robert Butler in his 1963 seminal article *The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged* who brought reminiscence work to the attention of gerontologists and others working with older adults. Butler contended that life review is, "a naturally occurring, universal mental

process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of experiences and conflicts” (p. 66).

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1963) published his psychosocial model around the same time that Butler was writing on life review. Erikson’s popular model is based on adaptive processes that move individuals through a linear hierarchy of age-based stages including a final stage that places individuals on a continuum between ego integrity and despair – ego integrity reflected in those who seek a sense of meaning to their lives by reviewing accomplishments, dealing with losses, and preparing for death.

Although reviewing one’s life has been identified in numerous studies over the past two decades as an important aspect of adult development (Coleman, 1999; Silver, 1996; Webster, 1999; Weiss, 1995), a number of researchers have refuted Butler’s life-review premise. The process of sorting and restructuring the past, according to Lieberman and Tobin (1983) requires high levels of skills built by a lifelong habit of introspection, which many people don’t have. Parker (1995) submits that based on Atchley’s Continuity Theory, life review in old age is a practice of individuals who feel adrift, are confronting a crisis, or exhibit lower level functioning.

Atchley’s (1989) Continuity Theory, looked at in-depth, offers a broader perspective on individual trajectories of development than Parker’s comments indicate. “Neither society (in the form of social expectations of engagement) nor personal action (in the form of higher levels of activity) are determinative of successful aging, instead, the relative degree of success in aging is a function of personal style of adaptation and

adjustment that had been developed over the course of one's life" (McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996, p. 23). Lieberman and Tobin's assumption that a lifelong habit of introspection as relatively rare runs counter to researchers who have confirmed evidence of Erikson's ego integrity and similar advanced stage constructs such as wisdom, consciousness, transcendence, and enlightenment (Fowler, 1981; Jung, 1933; Kegan, 1982; Maslow, 1970; Tornstam, 1997, and Wilbur (2001). According to Erikson, wisdom is the primary virtue emerging from the ego integrity stage.

When introspection takes the form of story, the aspect of narrative emerges. Although the composing of personal narratives supports the ego demands illustrated in Butler's life review theory and Erikson's ego integrity stage (Eaken, 1999; Kenyon & Randall, 1997), it is within Erikson's seventh stage – generativity versus stagnation – that contributions beyond the self are expounded upon.

Generativity marks a developmental crisis thought to occur in early and middle adulthood involving a concern for others - the immediate family, future generations, and the nature of the world in which these descendents will live. In *Outliving the self: How we live on in future generations*, Kotre (1984) proposed four domains of generativity: biological, parental, technical, and cultural. Biological is the bearing of children, parental is the rearing of children, technical is the teaching of skills, and cultural "refers to the conservation, renovation, or creation of collective meaning systems, be those systems religious, artistic, ideological, scientific, or commonsensical" (Kotre & Kotre, 1998, p. 368). In addition to these four types of generativity, there are two categories that each of

these four can be further divided into: agency and communion with agency involving the self and communion involving others.

Cultural generativity overlaid with ego integrity provides a springboard for a study of legacy and life review (or narrative). Tornstram (1997) combined Erikson's two stages – generativity and ego integrity – into a model termed Gerotranscendence. This model suggests a “shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction” (p. 143). Five dimensions define gerotranscendence. These include an increased sense of connection to earlier generations, an acceptance of the mystery of life, a decrease in self-centeredness, a move from duality to plurality, and ego integrity that he describes as “realizing that the pieces of life's jigsaw puzzle form a wholeness” (p. 11).

#### Problem Statement

Starting in 2012, 10,000 Americans will turn 65 years of age every day and by 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population will be 65 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Considering that adult education has historically responded to individual and societal needs (Manheimer, 2002; Rachal, 1989) it is understandable that there is an increasing need to focus on this growing group of learners. Although society has continued to support and extend education's reach beyond primary and secondary schooling to adult and higher education, older adult education has not been a primary focus (Eisen, 2005; Fisher, 1998; Peterson & Masunaga, 1998). “If we are to connect with older adults, we



need to understand how they find meaning and develop educational approaches to enhance this spirit of individual purpose and perspective” (Beatty & Wolf, 1996, p. 26).

Western psychologists from the 1950s onward have identified meaning and purpose as important to a satisfying, fulfilling life (Erikson, 1980; Kotre, 1984; Maslow, 1970). Hunter (2007) points out that when one possesses a sense of meaning, he or she then experiences life as purposeful. “Few of us are comfortable with the idea that we live, we die and that is it. We want to believe there is a purpose in life and that we will make a mark of some kind, perhaps only in the memories of our descendents, but a mark nonetheless” (Hunter & Rowles, 2005, p. 327). Polkinghorne (2007) suggests that incidents placed in narrative context gives meaning to the human experience of temporality, spatiality, and personal action. McAdams (1996) further underscores this human yearning stating that, “constructing a meaningful and coherent self through narrative may be a psychosocial challenge that is especially characteristic of modern Western societies” (p. 296). A number of researchers studying Western culture have found that contemporary adults make sense of their scattered lives by restructuring the past, perceiving the present, and anticipating the future in story form (Bruner, 1991; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricoeur, 1984; Singer & Salovey, 1993).

There is currently a paucity of research on adult education strategies that facilitate legacy creation as defined by the developmental construct of cultural generativity. The purpose of this study is to explore the Writing-to-Remember process as a tool for the facilitation of this developmental demand.

In following Creswell's (1998) assertion that "the strongest and most scholarly rationale for a study follows a documented need in the literature for increased understanding and dialogue about an issue" (p. 94), I have proposed this intrinsic case study for its potential in increasing our understanding of a unique life-story writing process and its application in meeting older adult needs from an educational perspective.

#### Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the Writing-to-Remember process as a tool for facilitating legacy creation in the form of life stories. At the root of this research is the premise that cultural generativity is a developmental demand of older adulthood and when supported by adult education practice, personal and social benefits result. The research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy?
- 2) What insights emerge from those engaged in this process?

#### Definition of Terms

Several terms deserve clarification before proceeding. These terms are defined below.

Activity theory of aging: A normative aging theory suggesting that individuals, in order to age well, must maintain social roles and interaction, rather than disengage from social life (Morgan & Kunkel, 2001).

Autobiography: The biography of a person written by that person (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Baby boom: A sudden large increase in the birthrate, especially the one in the United States from the later 1940s through the early 1960s (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Cohort: A group of people born at the same time; sometimes used interchangeably with “generation” or “birth cohort” (Morgan & Kunkel, 2001).

Constructivism: an epistemology which argues humans construct meaning from current knowledge structures.

Continuity theory of aging: Individual-level theory suggesting that adults, to adapt successfully as they age, attempt to preserve and maintain existing self-concepts, relationships and ways of doing things (Morgan & Kunkel, 2001).

Cultural generativity: The conservation, renovation, or creation of collective meaning systems, be those systems religious, artistic, ideological, scientific, or commonsensical (Kotre & Kotre, 1998).

Ego integrity: Erikson’s eighth stage of psychosocial development in which an individual reintegrates all aspects of his or her life (Moody, 2006).

Functional age: The use of attributes such as appearance, mobility, strength, and mental capacity to assign people to broad age categories such as middle age and old age (Atchley & Barusch, 2004).

Generativity: Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development (1980) involving a middle-to-older-age person's concern for and mentoring of younger generations.

Kotre (1984) identified four levels: biological, parental, technical, and cultural.

Humanism: A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Legacy: Something handed down from an ancestor or a predecessor or from the past (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Life history: The history of changes undergone by an organism from inception or conception to death (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Oral history: The spoken relation and preservation, from one generation to the next, of a people's cultural history and ancestry, often by a storyteller in narrative form (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Reminiscence: The act or process of recollecting past experiences or events (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000).

Writing-to-Remember: A process that facilitates the remembering, composing, and sharing of life stories.

### Significance

The significance of this study is what it will add to the conversation in adult education on older learners, particularly our understanding of life-story writing as a means of meeting the developmental goal of legacy creation. In addition, practitioners who work with adults will have a tested process for the cultivation of personal narratives

and some associated insights and impacts of the process. The oncoming wave of older adults makes this study particularly relevant at this time. While the results of this study are not generalizable to other populations, this model of life review and its associated insights is a start in moving the capture of life experience into mainstream humanistic adult education.

In contrast to numerous studies traced to Birren and Deutchman's 1991 text, *Guiding Autobiography Groups for Older Adults*, which advocates specific prompts of life transitions and major events in developing a life history, the life-story process as practiced here taps memories of life events resulting in spontaneous, value-laden stories. In accordance with the Birren and Deutchman's methodology, it does incorporate group dynamics in the prompting of memories and the sharing of mutual experience and emotion.

This study involves a group of highly educated, middle-class Caucasians, age 50 to 90, active in a university learning-in-retirement program who have not been the focus of reminiscence research. In addition, there are many other senior groups for which a similar study would add andragogical insight. The demographics of my study population present both significance and limitations to the study.

#### Limitations

This study required a degree of literacy on the part of the participants. This is not to imply that creating legacy is not present or possible among those who lack literacy skills. Traditions of cultural generativity, such as those associated with oral storytelling

by tribal medicine men, community elders, or heads of households are pervasive throughout history. However, this research involved highly literate, lifelong learners with basic computer skills and computer and internet access.

Another limitation is that the study's sample is not diverse in age, race, or culture. All members were fully-functioning, white, middle-class, educated seniors from relatively similar backgrounds. Although this lack of diversity may be considered a limitation, it bounds the study in such a way as to categorize it as an intrinsic case study.

Approximately one third of the students in the Writing-to-Remember class were male. Two of these males continued with the writers group. One volunteered for this research study. There was no indication of difference when analyzing the data from the male participant and the females but further research is needed to see if a gender difference emerges.

### Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 presents both the conceptual framework for this research study as well as the literature areas reviewed. A conceptual framework of constructivism underlies this qualitative case study. Constructivism claims that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed and that the function of cognition is adaptive, serving to organize experience rather than discover reality. Following a discussion of constructivism, I provide a literature review that includes adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology followed in this qualitative study of lifelong learners involved in a life-story process. The methodology includes research rationale, research design, data collection and data analysis, and ethics and verification. Because I approached this study from a constructivist viewpoint, it was appropriate to use an interpretive paradigm, which is integral to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Merriam (2002) states that “questions of meaning, understanding, and process are appropriate for qualitative research” (p. 19). The purpose of this study is to explore the Writing-to-Remember process as a tool for facilitating legacy creation in the form of life stories and the research questions (how does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy and what insights emerge from those engaged in this process) further support the use of a qualitative methodology as argued in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 presents the data acquired through interviews, field notes, and stories. The Writing-to-Remember course was designed to help students capture their memories, improve their life-writing skills, and experience sharing of their composed memories, orally. The Writing-to-Remember writers’ group continued to provide the sharing component of the process. In organizing the data, a sorting system surfaced around three themes – themes that paralleled the course’s organization. The writers’ purpose for enrolling in the class and continuing with the writers’ group was the focus of Writer Intentions. The second major theme, termed The Writing-to-Remember Process, contained three primary elements: Remembering, Composing, and Sharing. The process,

though seemingly linear is more accurately described as interactive. The third theme was termed Writer Expressions. While the Writer Intentions theme explains why a process or system of life-story writing is worthy of practice and research, the Process theme held answers to the research question, “How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy?” The final theme, Writer Expressions, combined the writers’ words and stories to answer the second research question, “What insights emerge from those engaged in this process?”

In Chapter 5, I took the findings from Chapter 4 and analyzed them through the literature presented in Chapter 2 as a means of understanding the two guiding research questions. The first research question was explained most directly through the literature on learning from experience and reminiscence when cross referenced with the themes within the Writing-to-Remember Process. Research question two was illuminated in the adult development literature overlaid on the Writer Expressions theme and subcategories.

Chapter 6 provides implications for practice for both adult educators and program planners. The interactivity of the three primary Writing-to-Remember elements (remembering, composing, and sharing) is reviewed as are the subjectivity and confidentiality of the resulting compositions. The logistics of the Writing-to-Remember process, including the commitment required for the writers’ group element, are explored under implications for program planners. Recommendations for future research include a short discussion of course configurations, the application of narrative analysis to the



resulting stories, and the potential for a study of temporal aspects of real and story timelines. A conclusion summarizes my experience with this research project.

### Summary

This research charts my journey with ten lifelong learners committed to writing their stories as legacy for future generations. Included in this chapter, was the problem this research addresses, the purpose of this research, and the research questions driving this qualitative case study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Framework

Guba and Lincoln (1989) define three inquiry paradigms that assist in bracketing a researcher's beliefs, which inevitably impact any study. The first is an ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality? The second is epistemological and asks, what is knowledge? The third is methodological - how does one go about finding what can be known?

Several approaches to the nature of reality have evolved over the centuries. For the realist, reality is waiting to be discovered and is independent of beliefs and perceptions. The belief that reality lies outside one's consciousness has led to the popularity of positivism. Positivists focus on claims about reality and the justification of those claims through observation, resulting in an objective truth. In contrast, idealists believe that reality lies in one's consciousness or reason, that only the perceptible is real (Magee, 2001; Stevenson, 2002). One's ontological approach impacts one's epistemology.

Following the Renaissance, empiricism, which defines knowledge as a product of sensory perception, stood in contrast to rationalism, which portrays knowledge as a product of rational reflection. Pragmatic epistemology arrived on the philosophical horizon, combining empiricism with rationalism by incorporating proven models and thereby simplifying problem solving. In response to the pragmatists, constructivists

entered the epistemological debate, claiming that knowledge is built by the subject who is constructing the knowledge (Briton, 1996; Kohl, 1992; Pratt, 1998).

Historically, many aspects of constructivism can be traced to the eighteenth-century philosophers Kant, Vico (Delanty, 1997; Neimeyer, 1995; Spivey, 1997), Hume, and Berkeley (Delanty, 1997) as well as the nineteenth-century philosopher G.W. Hegel (Neimeyer, 1995). Within philosophy, constructivism is loosely equated with idealism in that materialism, naturalism, and pragmatism are refuted (Kohl, 1992). Although constructivism appears first in the sphere of philosophy, it has been in the domain of psychology that constructivism has grown rapidly.

My worldview is classified as constructivist. For me, the nature of reality is relative, local, and constructed within specific contexts; knowledge is subjective, constructed, and transactional; and my research methodology preference is hermeneutical and dialectical. Several factions of constructivists have shaped the constructivism movement including radical constructivists and social constructivists.

Radical constructivists argue that the nervous system of an organism cannot distinguish between an external phenomenon and a purely internal event. Knowledge is seen as independent of a hypothetical 'external reality.' The term 'radical constructivism' was popularized by von Glasersfeld. The danger with radical constructivism is that it leads to relativism - the idea that there is no way to distinguish 'true' knowledge from 'false' knowledge (Derry, 1996; Marshall, 1996). According to von Glasersfeld (1989), "To claim one's theory of knowing is true, in the traditional sense of an experiencer-

independent world, would be perjury for a radical constructivist” (p. 1). Within most psychologically based interpretations, “constructivism does not hold to the thesis of epistemological idealism that reality is a creation of the mind but that reality can only be known by our cognitive structures” (Delanty, 1997). Reality is therefore not denied but it cannot be known rationally (Davis & Sumara, 2002).

Social constructivism, in contrast to radical constructivism, emphasizes culture and context in constructing knowledge. Reality reflects human activity and knowledge is a human product. Symbol systems like language are acquired by the individual as a member of a particular culture (Kim, 2001). Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky studied dyads between teacher and student and student peers. He believed knowledge was determined by social interaction, language, and culture. The term Vygotsky used to represent this construction of shared definitions and negotiation of meanings was intersubjectivity (Silverman, 1997).

Social constructivism is sometimes confused with social constructionism. Social constructivism is affiliated with theorists coming out of psychology whereas social constructionism is a sociological construct attributed to sociologists Berger and Luchmann (1966). Social constructionists maintain that all knowledge is derived from and maintained by social interactions. The focus is social and cultural. Social constructivism, even with its focus on relationships in the context of culture and associated symbols, is foundationally cognitive with organizing processes ongoing (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004).

Phillips (1995) attempted to clarify differences in constructivist concepts by identifying areas of disagreement. He suggests that “the source of initial confusion [comes when] some constructivist sects focus their attention on the cognitive contents of the minds of individual learners, others focus on the growth of the ‘public’ subject-matter domains, while a few brave groups tackle both – thus doubling the amount of quicksand that has to be negotiated” (p. 5). Phillips places popular constructivists on a continuum of ‘individual versus public discipline’ with Piaget sitting at the individual end and Vygotsky at the public end. In the middle, he situates von Glasersfeld, Kant, and Popper.

Several authors have labeled locations on this continuum. Null (2004) uses the term instructional constructivism for individual or cognitive constructivism and epistemological constructivism for knowledge constructed within society. One of the “brave” groups Phillips refers to who attempt to tackle both include, Gergen and Rorty who push aside the mind-world duality by theorizing that language determines knowledge. Linguistics takes center stage, holding to linguistic determinism wherein only that which can be articulated in language can be known.

Additional theorists adding to this conversation include Bartlett (1932), who worked in England during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and leaned toward cognitive constructivism, attributing an individual’s knowledge to his or her ability to build meaning and memory around current mental structures or schemas. At this same time, Jean Piaget (1971), a Swiss psychologist and botanist, was studying the developmental aspects of children and theorized that a child’s cognition evolved over time through

assimilation and accommodation. Piaget's work has greatly influenced education curriculum and teaching, particularly in K-12. Piaget held to a cognitive version of constructivism. As mentioned earlier, Vygotsky believed knowledge was determined by social interaction, language, and culture.

The primary debate in constructivism seems one of the origin of knowledge. Many education theorists avoid this debate, taking the view of Woods and Murray (2002), that

In the rawest sense, constructivism adheres to an epistemology that seats the source of all knowledge creation within the individual...a belief that individual constructions of knowledge and the environmental variables that mold these constructions should be the true objects of epistemology (p. 49).

### *Truth*

One's conceptual framework impacts how one interprets truth and when studying memory and story, the issue of truth versus fiction emerges. This makes truth a contested concept. Knowledge considered from an objectivist perspective holds that truths are independent of beliefs. The classic Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Plato are associated with objective truth, proposing that true statements accurately copy objective reality. Scientific truths, which are directly observable and reproducible and logical truths which hold true in all possible worlds have objectivist leanings. Pragmatists accept some subjectivity of truth, believing that facts are relative to specific problems and therefore mutable but still is verifiable. These would be considered relative truths or statements

relative to some convention or standard. If the convention applied is manmade, the framework shifts to the subjective (Lavine, 1984; Magee, 2001; Stevenson, 2002).

Epistemologies with a subjectivist proposition hold that truth depends on what we believe. For the radical constructivist there is no truth, only belief. Social constructivists hold that truth is historically and culturally constructed and shared through social processes. This construct incorporates consensus theory (Lavine, 1984; Magee, 2001; Stevenson, 2002). This study rests on a social constructivist framework. As the researcher, I consider the nature of reality as relative, local, and constructed within specific contexts; knowledge as subjective, constructed, and transactional; and having incorporated a research methodology that is hermeneutical and dialectical.

### Literature

The literature that shapes my understanding and interpretations of this study is provided below. It includes three divisions: Adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence. Within adult development, I examine aging models, psychological models, and wisdom.

#### *Adult Development*

In this section of literature, I will examine development as described by aging models and by psychological and cognitive models. Developmental perspectives have significantly impacted adult education theory and practice (Granott, 1998) with three primary frameworks informing research: biological, psychological, and sociocultural (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Courtenay, 1994; Imel, 2001). The more popular aging models

combine physical, mental, and social aspects. These include activity theory, disengagement theory, and continuity theory.

### *Aging Models*

Newer models in the gerontology literature regarding development in older adulthood are Rowe & Kahn's Successful Aging model (1998) developed from the MacArthur Foundation Study and Vaillant's Aging Well model (2002) generated from the Harvard Study of Adult Development. These models are preventative and prescriptive in approach, Eurocentric in worldview, and incorporate the particulars of two aging theories that have dominated Western culture for the past half century: Activity and Disengagement.

Activity Theory (Havighurst, 1957) suggests that individuals are happier and healthier if they stay active and engaged; not becoming a burden to family and society. It is a theory consistent with a Protestant work ethic promoting individualism, wealth, and productivity (Malcolmson, 1999). Additionally, as older adults lose roles due to disability, retirement, or other intervening event, they need to replace these with other productive roles to remain active and involved. Life satisfaction – in accordance with Activity Theory – implies mental, physical, and social engagement.

Disengagement Theory, introduced by Cumming & Henry (1961), recommends that older adults move aside to make room for younger generations. Neither of these popular models attend to the uniqueness of older individuals, a heterogeneity that gerontologist Bernice Neugarten (1976) suggests is the only consistent finding in



gerontology over the last decade. Under this premise, a model that attends to subjective attributes of aging might be more helpful in understanding developmental needs and thereby be useful in directing educational planning.

Atchley's (1989) Continuity Theory comes closer to acknowledging individual trajectories of development. Within Continuity Theory "neither society (in the form of social expectations of engagement) nor personal action (in the form of higher levels of activity) are determinative of successful aging, instead, the relative degree of success in aging is a function of personal style of adaptation and adjustment that had been developed over the course of one's life" (McGuire, Boyd, & Tedrick, 1996, p. 23).

Integrative models of development have begun emerging in the literature (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). These approaches explore human behavior through such lenses such as spiritual (Tisdell, 1999), temporal (Merriam, 1999), and narrative (Rossiter, 1999, 2002). Rossiter's work, which draws on narrative knowing and meaning by Bruner and Polkinghorne, emphasizes contextual, interpretative, retrospective, and temporal dimensions of development. Integrative theories, including Rossiter's, continue to draw on psychological perspectives defined by behaviorism and humanism. The following section traces the history of the more enduring psychological models influencing adult education.

### *Psychological Models*

Modern psychological models that concentrate on the individual (as opposed to the outer environment) are categorized by Tennant (1988) as: 1) models focusing on an

endpoint or full-functioning human being draw on either the psychoanalytical framework described by Freud and Erikson or the humanist perspectives conceived by Rogers, Maslow, Allport, and Goldstein; and 2) models concerned with knowledge and cognitive development as commonly traced to Piaget and Kohlberg.

*Cognitive development.* Several developmental models focusing primarily on cognitive growth and changes in an individual's view of knowledge have been applied to education including Kohlberg (1984), Kitchener and King (1981), and Perry (1970). Personal epistemology research has resulted in multiple theories including reflective judgment (Kitchener & King, 1981), contextual knowing (Dirkx & Prenger, 1997), constructed knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, & Goldberger, 1986), moral development (Kohlberg, 1984), ego development (Loevinger, 1976), faith development (Fowler, 1981), Perry's Scheme (1970), metacognition (Kuhn, 2000), epistemological awareness (Hofer, 2001), and stages of consciousness (Kegan, 1982). In comparing these models, Hofer found similarities.

These models share interactionist, constructivist assumptions and sketch similar trajectories of development. The path of epistemological development begins with an objective, dualistic view of knowledge, followed by a multiplistic stance, as individuals begin to allow for uncertainty. Typically, a period of extreme subjectivity is followed by the ability to acknowledge the relative merits of different points of view and to begin to distinguish the role that evidence plays in supporting one's position. In the final stage, knowledge is actively constructed by

the knower, knowledge and truth are evolving, and knowing is coordinated with justification (2001, p. 359).

Cognitive theorists, particularly Piaget from whom many of the later theorists drew, are criticized for their failure to incorporate feelings, beliefs, values, and desires into their models (Tennant, 1988). Psychoanalytic and humanist models vary on their inclusion of such characteristics. Theorists associated with a psychoanalytic and humanist perspective include Erickson (1980), Gould (1978), Levinson (1978), Lowenthal (1977), Maslow (1970), and Neugarten (1976).

*Psychoanalytic and humanist.* Many of the psychoanalytic and humanist models incorporate either non-sequential steps, or steps sequential by age or stage. Some staged models stipulate a chronological age range while others are not linked to age or age periods but are hierarchical, with each stage qualitatively different and more complex. Erikson's popular model (1980) is psychoanalytic and staged by age. Other sequential, stage models include Fowler (1981) and Loevinger (1976). Personality development reflected in the models created by Levinson (1978), Gould (1978), and Vaillant (2002) rely on a reformulating, maturing, and modifying of previous patterns of thinking and acting as one develops.

Development by stage still punctuates much of the adult education literature with psychoanalytic and humanist models common. Humanist models share the common goals of self-identity and growth; autonomy and independence; with stages that range from simple to complex, and occurring throughout the lifespan (Courtenay, 1994). "The

concern with the ‘self’ is a hallmark of humanistic psychology, which emerged as a protest against the scientific explanation of the person” (Tennant, 1988, p. 13). Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1951) applied humanist principles to their work. Maslow, considered the founder of humanistic psychology, proposed a theory of motivation based on a hierarchy of needs. In order, these needs are 1) hunger and thirst, 2) security and protection, 3) belonging and love, 4) self-esteem, and 5) self-actualization.

From a learning theory perspective, humanism emphasizes perceptions centered in experience together with the freedom and responsibility to become what one is capable of becoming. These tenets underlie much of adult learning theory that stresses the self-directedness of adults and the value of experience in the learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Humanist developmental models, particularly those with stage and phase attributes, have been criticized for their lack of breadth in acknowledging gender and cultural differences, their linear and hierarchical underpinnings, as well as the assumption of an inherent drive for personal growth (Courtenay, 1994). As Daloz (1988) demonstrated, there is not necessarily an inherent motivation to proceed to the next stage. These humanist models have also been denounced for their Western predilection for independence and individuality at the expense of social justice and reform. Several educational theorists counter this last criticism, arguing that individual and social transformation is interconnected and inseparable (Dewey, 1916; Lindeman, 1989; Mezirow, 2000).

Erikson's (1980) psychoanalytic model suggests that there are adaptive processes that move individuals through a linear hierarchy of age-based, psychosocial stages. His final two stages of development have influenced gerontology research (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004) and pertain to the age group of this study. It should be noted that one of the strongest criticisms of Erikson's model is that it is conformist and supports the status quo (Tennant, 1988).

In Erikson's model, a major developmental crisis is said to occur in early and middle adulthood involving the attainment of generativity – a concern for others beyond the immediate family, for future generations and for the nature of the world in which these descendants will live. “People who are successful in resolving this crisis are said to be able to establish clear guidelines for their lives and generally to age in a happy and productive way. Failure to achieve generativity results in stagnation in which people become preoccupied with personal needs, comforts and concerns” (Withnall, 2000).

Although Kotre (1984) has supported the concept of generativity, he has been critical of Erikson's lack of differentiation of generativity types. Kotre developed a classification system that provides two modes of expression (agency and communion) that exist at four levels (biological, parental, technical, and cultural) therefore producing eight types of generativity. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1998), along with Kotre, created a model outlining seven features of generativity including inner desire, cultural demand, concern for the next generation, belief in the species, commitment, action, and narration.

Generativity does have its critics. Thomas (1995) argues that the concept is simply a “cheerful assumption that we gain symbolic immortality through leaving our stamp on future generations” (p.6). However, Becker (as cited in Berman, 1995), supports the concept, suggesting that “the fear of death energizes the individual to expand into the world and take pleasure in his or her unfolding capacities. The organism works actively against its own fragility by seeking to expand and perpetuate itself in living experience; instead of shrinking, it moves toward more life” (p. 5).

Erikson’s generativity versus stagnation stage is followed by an older adult stage that pits ego integrity against despair. He defines this as a time for reviewing one’s accomplishments, dealing with losses, and preparing for death. Tornstam (1997), in his Gerotranscendence Theory, combines Erikson’s generativity and ego integrity stages, envisioning a “shift in meta-perspective, from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction” (p. 143).

Tornstam writes of five dimensions in his model. These include an increased sense of connection to earlier generations, an acceptance of the mystery of life, a decrease in self-centeredness, a move from duality to plurality, and ego integrity that he describes as “realizing that the pieces of life’s jigsaw puzzle form a wholeness” (p. 11). Hillier and Barrow (2007) place Gerotranscendence Theory within the psychosocial theory of disengagement but others (Atchley, 1989; Hooyman & Kiyak, 2002) place it along side Erikson’s psychosocial stage theory of adult development.

*Transpersonal psychology.* Western psychology, like the individuals it studies, has evolved thorough “forces.” The first, psychoanalysis, is concerned with instincts and unconscious drives. The second, termed behavioral, looks at environmental influences. Third is humanism, representing those stressing self-determinism and free choice. Fourth is transpersonal psychology, which is aimed at transcendence and spirituality (Strohl, 1998).

The transpersonal orientation integrates both Eastern and Western ideas about human nature and the universe (Boucouvalas, 2000). “From this perspective, our ordinary, biological, historical, cultural and personal self is seen as an important, but quite partial, manifestation or expression of this much greater ‘something’ that is our deeper origin and destination” (Tart, 2002. p.39). Ken Wilber (2000), a prolific American philosopher who writes on the transpersonal movement, suggests that, “every major wisdom tradition contains, at its core, a series of contemplative practices, and, at their best, these contemplative practices disclose the transrational and transpersonal waves of consciousness” (p. 81). Wilber warns though that one must develop adequate reasoning capacities in order to engage in the more subtle, non-rational pathways of knowing and being. Wilber’s Spiral of Development model and its nine memes, synthesizes many popular developmental models, ending with a second-tier of consciousness stages. As with other psychological viewpoints, a hierarchy of development is deemed necessary to advance into wisdom.

Pascual-Leone (2000), incorporates Piaget's developmental theories into his model that directs self and personality growth from sensory knowledge, through affective and cognitive function, and finally into various states of consciousness. Strohl (1998) offers a classification system of philosophical positions into which different theorists within psychology fall. Reductionist thinkers comprehend existence by breaking phenomenon into its smallest material components. Psychoanalysis and behaviorism are psychologies from a reductionist perspective. Humanist scholars refute "the subhuman emphasis of reductionism but fail to acknowledge the type of transcendent or super human levels of consciousness proposed by the dualistic and monistic paradigms" (p. 399). Humanism is seen as a transitional link between reductionism and dualism.

Dualistic models accept a consciousness that transcends normal human experience. "Dualists believe that a material bound being is never able to comprehend fully the unbounded, transcendent nature of consciousness" (Stohl, 1998, p. 399). Jungian psychology, general systems theory, and pastoral counseling models exemplify a dualist paradigm. Monism considers all phenomena an illusion, a creative expression of consciousness.

This study is grounded in humanist psychology with Erikson's model (and those theorists associated with it) providing an important lens. As mentioned earlier, ego integrity, wisdom, transcendence, and consciousness are terms commonly found in late-stage development literature (Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 2001; & Zukav, 1989). Erikson stated that wisdom is the virtue most associated with ego integrity. There is a greater depth of



literature on wisdom than on ego integrity and the following section examines this wisdom literature.

*Wisdom.* The Oxford English dictionary (1989) defines wisdom as the capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opp. to *folly*. This definition is heavily influenced by the field of psychology, particularly cognitive development. Psychologists agree that wisdom, as a concept, is multidimensional and even agree on many of its dimensions.

Baltes and Smith's (1990) expertise dimension, which emphasizes factual and procedural knowledge together with judgment, parallels Sternberg's (2001) conception of wisdom as academic and practical intelligence mediated by values. Critical thinking, or the use of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and reflection as a means to a desirable outcome, is equated with wisdom by Halpern (2001); and the role of reflection in judgment is popular with many developmental psychologists and educators (Arlin, 1990; Kitchener and Brenner, 1990; Kramer, 1990). Most research within the field of psychology has involved quantitative methodology, particularly through observation and survey. Several instruments have been created. The Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS) has been validated in measuring five dimensions - experience, emotional regulation, reminiscence and reflectiveness, openness, and humor (Webster, 2003). Brown's Model of Wisdom Scale (2006), which measures orientation to learning,

experiences, interactions with others, and learning from life as wisdom indicators, is a relatively new instrument.

Randall and Kenyon (2001) view wisdom as a personal construct. Their contribution to wisdom studies is that of ‘ordinary wisdom’ – a concept that accepts individual narratives as valid vehicles of wisdom at a time when there is eroding confidence in the grand narratives of family, work, religion, and outer management (socially and bureaucratically created). “Ordinary wisdom is about finding meaning in life and suffering (the spiritual-mystical dimension). It is about accepting, owning, and valuing our lives and our life stories, including our un-lived lives and untold stories” (p. 13).

Randall and Kenyon (2001) describe six dimensions of wisdom, the first of which pertains to cognitive aspects, including one’s beliefs, values, knowledge, information, abilities, and skills. The second dimension is termed practical-experiential and is wisdom based on knowledge that is practical, related to the world, and based on experience and “in most traditions involves an element of contemplation or personal reflection” (p. 25). Interpersonal is the third dimension and equates to Erikson’s generativity concept with a concern for the good that one does for family and society.

Good intentions and appropriate action or ‘contextual ethical insight’ describe dimension four while dimension five is described as idiosyncratic expression. The sixth and final dimension is termed spiritual-mystical. Randall and Kenyon explain that,

Wisdom is fundamentally a spiritual phenomenon, since it has to do with meaning: meaning of life, of relationships, of ourselves, of the cosmos. The range of meaning extends from concern with everyday judgments in the cognitive tradition to the experience of ultimate enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition to union with God in the Christian tradition and everything in between (Randall & Kenyon, 2001, p. 29).

Evolutionary hermeneutics is a term Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) apply to concepts that evaluate human behavior. These include virtue, courage, freedom, and wisdom. Evolutionary hermeneutics, is described as,

The reconciliation of what has been said in the past about certain important concepts with what is being said about them now...the aim being to integrate the experience of previous generations with our own, trying to understand the adaptive value of former responses, thereby providing deeper and richer context for present understanding (p. 27).

The example provided by these scholars is that “science may be a more evolved eye, but it does not compensate for being blind. For the same reason, science may not be a substitute for earlier epistemologies such as religion or wisdom” (p. 27).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) provide three dimensions of wisdom: wisdom as a cognitive process, wisdom as a virtue, and wisdom as a personal good. Wisdom as cognitive would entertain such processes as critical thinking, academic and practical intelligence, reasoning, and judgment. These authors warn, however, that “holistic

cognitive processes move beyond fragmented and impassive relativity, toward a more ‘universal’ or metasystemic awareness of interrelated systems” (p. 31). The attribute they point to as necessary to avoid ‘relativistic intellectualization’ is reflectivity or the capacity for self-examination.

Wisdom as a virtue asks, what is the optimal course of action I should take? “The great ‘width’ (empathy), ‘height’ (intelligence), and ‘depth’ (reflectivity) of the wise person allows him or her to form a more complex or concrete and abstract perspective...thus attaining the possibility of seeing the wisest course of action” (p. 35). Ironically, we don’t necessarily see the empathy, intelligence, or reflectivity of a wise person yet many individuals sense when they are in the presence of a wise person. And wisdom, claim the authors, is the foremost public virtue because it is the only approach that recognizes long-term consequences for an entire social system.

Finally, wisdom as a personal good addresses the idea that wisdom brings intense joy. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) this third dimension has barely been noticed, yet “there are likely to be many ways for contemporary thinkers to approach this task and attempt to provide new support of the notion that the pursuit of wisdom is a joy in itself” (p. 38).

Based on the above conceptions of wisdom, several overlaps occur between the theories and models. The following chart summarizing the wisdom literature helps to illuminate shared connections.

Table 1

*Wisdom Literature*

Theorist	Characteristics
J. Erikson (1988) Developmental approach	Interdependence and interrelatedness Humor Sense of the complexity of life Non-possessive attachment
Baltes & Smith (1990) Expertise approach (WRP – Wisdom Related Performance)	Good judgment about life pragmatics (life planning, life management, and life review) and functional consequence based on: Factual knowledge Procedural knowledge Life-span contextualism Relativism Uncertainty
Robinson (1990) Three approaches of wisdom	Contemplative search for truth Practical knowledge Scientific knowledge
Sternberg (2001) Balance theory –	Academic and practical intelligence mediated by values. Values mediated by achieving common good through a balance of 1) Intrapersonal and interpersonal 2) Short term and long term 3) Adaptation to environment, shaping of existing environment, and introduction of new environment

Table 1 (continued).

Holliday and Chandler (1986)	Exceptional understanding Judgment and communication skills General competencies Interpersonal skills Social unobtrusiveness
Randall and Kenyon (2001)	Cognitive (attitude toward beliefs, values, knowledge, skills) Practical-experiential including reflection Interpersonal Contextual ethical insight (good intentions and appropriate action) Idiosyncratic expression Spiritual-mystical
Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990)	Cognitive (critical thinking, academic, and practical intelligence, reasoning, and judgment) Virtue (empathy, intelligence, and reflectivity) Personal good (joy)
Webster (2003) SAWS – Self Assessed Wisdom Scale	Experience Emotional regulation Reminiscence and reflectiveness Openness Humor
Birren and Fisher (1990)	Integration of cognitive, affective, conative, and reflective abilities in association with life's problems with balance between opposing 'valences
Ardelt (2000)	Cognitive components Reflective components Affective components
Maxwell (1984)	Learning how to live, to see, to experience, and to participate in and create what is of value in existence
Brown (2006) Model of Wisdom Development	Orientation to learning, experiences, interactions with others, and learning from life

The above section on adult development explored the various elements of being human over time. It included a review of literature on aging theory and psychosocial theories. The next section provides an overview of how stories construct a record of personal experience. In this section, I present the literature on experience followed by

interpretation and context, particularly generational, because of the influence I have seen context assert in the stories I have been studying.

### *Learning from Experience*

Based on a constructivist ideology, an individual filters new perceptions through an existing cognitive schema so it would follow then that over the course of one's life, an elaborate schema of sense-making is formed. Individuals in their fifth decade or beyond therefore have not only lived a vast number of years, they've accumulated a vast number of experiences. Eduard Lindeman (1989) wrote in 1926, "Experience is the adult learner's textbook", (p. 7). Because this study focuses on the capturing past experience, I've looked at learning from experience for its applicability.

### *Experience*

Early models of experiential learning, which persist today, deconstruct the experiential process. Lewin's model, associated with action research and laboratory method, conceives of experiential learning as a four-stage cycle incorporating concrete experience, observation and reflection, formation of theory, and testing (Burke, 2002). Kolb (1984) took these models and added learning-style theory. The idea that an individual's learning style or, more broadly, personality style can impact one's perception of experience has fascinated psychologists and educational researchers since Carl Jung's time. Jung's personality theory (Campbell, 1971) is now applied widely through the Myers-Briggs instrument. Models that narrow learning to an individual's preferred mode

of perception include Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligence and its eight types of intelligence and Gregorc's (1985) learning style instrument.

Process models of experiential learning invariably stress the importance of reflection on experience in completing the learning cycle (Boud & Walker, 1998; Cervero, 1989; Dawson, 2003; Dewey, 1916; Eylar, 2002; Lange, 2004; Schon, 1987; Senge, 1990). In returning to Dewey and his observation that it is abnormal to divorce bodily activity from the perception of meaning, we can conclude that the pairing of reflection with experience has a long history. The above reflection models reflect the pragmatic roots of Deweyism that separates reflection from the experience. Such critical reflection emphasizes ordering, clarifying, critiquing, and qualifying experience (Brookfield, 1998; Mezirow, 1998). This mentalist perspective has been criticized as creating a dualism that privileges the mind over the body (Fenwick, 2000; Weiss, 2001). Michelson (1998) suggests that the sensory organs of perception and sensation are not distinct from meaning but are sites of learning as opposed to merely sensory apparatus or measurement tools. She also criticizes some feminisms that endorse further dualism by placing emotional above rational, bodily above mental, and maternal above paternal.

Britzman (1998) and Sawada (1991) maintain that the reflective constructivist model popular in adult education is simplistic and reductionist. Fenwick (2000) adds that the concept lacks an understanding of the role of desire in learning as well as further instilling the mind/world duality that context is important but separate from the learner. Knowledge is seen as a substance. Some of these concerns appear in the work of Strike



and Posner (1992) who suggest that, “conceptual change is less a case of replacement and more a part of developmental process that involves concepts embedded within a broader conceptual ecology that consists of ‘anomalies, analogies, metaphors, epistemological beliefs, metaphysical beliefs, knowledge from other areas of inquiry, and knowledge of competing conceptions’” (p. 4).

Embodied knowledge takes a more holistic approach. Fenwick (2003) speaks of the “fluidity between actions, bodies, identities, objects, and environments” (p. 133). Davis (1997) refers to Dabrowski’s five perceptions within experience: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional in her discussion on embodied practice while Michelson (1998) points to “bodily processes [that] include emotions, desire, pain and pleasure, needs, and physical abilities and disabilities in addition to cognitive thought” (p. 223). In their discussion on experience and affect, Yorks and Kasl (2002), look at Heron’s (1992) four modes of psyche function: affective, imaginal, conceptual, and practical. Breaking these down further, Heron places feeling and emotion under affective, intuition and image under imaginal, reflection and discrimination under conceptual, and intention and action under practical.

Neisser’s (1993) model offers five ‘self-specifying information’ types that constitute experience and relationship to self. These include the ecological self (perceived with respect to the physical environment), the interpersonal self (unreflective engagement in social interaction), the extended self (existence outside the present moment through memory and anticipation), the private self (conscious experience unavailable to others),

and the conceptual self (social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind either implicit or explicit).

A person is not a substance but an idea constructed contended William James (Polkinghorne, 1988). He outlines three components to this constructed self: A material self derived from an awareness of physical being; a social self, including the perceptions and images believed to be held by others, as well as, social values and norms; and a spiritual self that holds an awareness of dispositions, judgments, self-knowledge, and frailties.

Polkinghorne's typology conceptualizes human existence in three realms: material, organic, and meaning. These are comparable to the metamodels outlined by Pepper. Pepper (as cited in Webster, 1999) asserted three metamodels – mechanistic, which is metaphorically linked to the machine; organismic with biological leanings; and contextual. Development within the contextual model is explained through adaptation to change over time through experience and ultimately, interpretation. These models reflect various deconstructions of experience. Next, the role of interpretation of experience is described.

### *Interpretation*

As demonstrated above, experience is difficult if not impossible to separate from identity and self because our experiences are personalized through our unique interpretations. Cell (1984) suggests that the interpretations we form as children about experiences stay with us. Out of a tendency to generalize, humans seek recurrent patterns

and regularities as a means of anticipating the future. Accordingly, the reasoning that develops becomes based in generalization. Unfortunately, this primary reflection on experience, based on generalization, is often bound up with prejudice and dysfunctional premise. Changing generalizations requires what Cell terms transsituation learning.

Improving our ability to examine and change our interpretations involves both developing the needed skills and deepening our understanding of what it means to create interpretation...By getting in touch with our powers to form our interpretations, we strengthen the power that lies deeper than powerlessness (p. 52).

Self-narratives provide a vehicle for making tacit interpretations, explicit.

Kegan's (1982) fourth order of consciousness, self-authoring, involves personal and biographical interpretations. At this advanced developmental stage, which few individuals reach according to Kegan, he suggests that an individual's meaning-making is influenced by, but not determined by, external sources. In other words, an internal identity forms that is capable of coordinating, integrating, and acting on experience (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning rests on one's ability to change his or her frame of reference through critical reflection thereby resulting in deeper understandings. The impetus for such transformative learning is tied to a disorienting dilemma. Mezirow's emphasis on cognitive processes and linearity have been questioned by those with a more holistic viewpoint (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Cranton & Roy, 2003).

Cell's (1984) transcendent learning, which appears to be a hierarchical step above transsitional learning, allows for the modification of available concepts or the creation of new ones. For instance, "Einstein modified the Newtonian concept of simultaneity; Freud created the concept of the unconscious; Marx, surplus labor; Skinner, reinforcement; and Maslow, the values of *being*" (p. 53). Transcendent learning, which proposes new or revised concepts and their importance in interpretation, relies on social transactions. "The creation of new concepts is brought to a successful completion only when they become part of the transactions of one or more groups" (Cell, 1984 , p. 53). This introduces the influence of context.

### *Context*

If our lives are a compilation of experiences and the interpretations of those experiences are tightly bound to the context in which they occur, it is not surprising that the older we get, the more unique we become as human beings. Neugarten and Baltes, who have each extensively studied older adults, found that there is great heterogeneity in adults as they age. Although Neugarten agrees that there is order to the life cycle, as claimed by developmental psychologists, she points to social occurrences and expectations. Baltes, Reese, and Lipsitt (Tennant & Pogson, 1995) offer three developmental influences with contextual aspects: normative age-graded, normative history-graded, and nonnormative. Physical maturation and traditional events such as primary education, career, childbearing, and retirement would be normative age-graded influences. Wars, epidemics, economic recessions, and natural disasters would be

normative history-graded influences while individual events like religious conversion, lottery winning, or traffic accidents reflect nonnormative influences (Tennant & Pogson, 1995).

In working with older adult story writers, I have found history-graded influences to be strongly influence story settings, characters and plots. Grabinski (1998), in a review of Strauss and Howe' theory of generations provides several experience-interpretation-identity aspects pertaining to the participants in this study. As an aside, I've included education recommendations made within this literature because these could help identify success strategies in the teaching of story writing to various age groups.

The Silents were born between 1925 and 1942. These are the children of the Great Depression and World War II. Many of them as young adults attended college, served in the Peace Corp, and were activists in the Civil Rights Movement. Out of this group, came a surge of growth in the helping professions of teaching, medicine, ministry, and government as well as public-interest advocacy groups. Silents were the youngest to marry and youngest to have babies of any American generation. Many are now in or on the cusp of affluent elderhood (age 66 to 87). Many male college grads became executives while female college grads entered male-only fields then opted for marriage and children over career. The Silents are typed as having a sense of "power inadequacy" choosing to "defer or learning to live with problems [rather] than taking aggressive steps to solve them" (Grabinski, 1998, p 76). Silents' legacy includes personal communication to help others solve conflict, a willingness to give to others (family obligations and

charities), a focus on process rather than outcome, and leadership in transitioning from the nuclear age to the information age.

Instructional implications for the Silents include a preference for formal educational opportunities versus self-guided or informal learning. They like to discuss and are drawn to Great Discussion programs, book clubs, and Town Halls. They enjoy travel. Because rote learning was the primary mode of learning in their childhood, they tend to prefer experiences with rote strategies.

This study's population draws from another cohort group that followed the Silents, the Baby Boomers. Strauss and Howe set the birth year of Boomers between 1943 and 1960. Note: many social scientists set this range between 1946 and 1964. This generation has been characterized as dominant idealists. It is a large, influential cohort group that grew up on television. Because of the size of this group, many demographers separate the Boomers into groups. The first-wave – the Victory babies – are the most self-absorbed while the last wavers demonstrate “Boomish streaks of intellectual arrogance and social immaturity” (Grabinski, 1998 , p. 77). Post-adolescence is a term applied to this generation that seemed to get “stuck in the sixties.” “Their self-fixation led Boomers to use internal standards and an unwavering sense of right and wrong to shape their plans, decisions, and judgments. Their career preferences are meaningful, creative, and independent” (Grabinski, 1998 , p. 78).

School curricula during Boomer adolescence emphasized skills over subject matter, social relevance over fact. Implications for late life learning for this group may

need to focus on 'how-to' especially in regard to ideas and ideals. Many may opt to be the teacher rather than the student. "With their insistence on meaningful experience, programs and courses must have well-defined goals, objectives, and outcomes relevant for each individual student" (Grabinski, 1998 , p. 78).

As mentioned earlier, both internal and external context impact experience and its interpretation, which then form the story dimensions of character, setting, and plot. In the next section, I discuss the literature on the practice of remembering the events of our lives as discussed in the reminiscence literature.

### *Reminiscence*

Reminiscence as used in this study is defined as stimulation of an older person's memory of positive and negative events of their past. As Webster and Haight (2002) reported, the research on reminiscence has become prolific. Their review of peer-reviewed journals from 1994 to 2000 shows that the number of articles on reminiscence, life review, life story, and remembering the past has gone from 68 between the years of 1960 and 1990 to over 150 in the last ten years.

### *Life Review*

Robert Butler is attributed with the assertion that life review is a necessary aspect of ego integrity in late life. However, a number of research studies have reputed Butler's (1963) premise that life review is necessary to accommodate older age development. The process of sorting and restructuring the past, according to Lieberman and Tobin (1983) requires high levels of skills built by a lifelong habit of introspection, which many people

don't have. Parker (1995) submits that based on Atchley's Continuity Theory, life review in old age is a practice of individuals who feel adrift, are confronting a crisis, or exhibit lower level functioning.

One reason I choose the sample I did was that these individuals do not reflect the typical demographic of reminiscence research which involves primarily institutionalized individuals or those receiving mental health assistance. The participants in this study are not a cross-section of American society, but healthy, fully-functioning, highly educated adults that learners who actively seek educational opportunities both formally and informally.

### *Narrative Knowing*

Understanding the world through narrative has been the focus of study in numerous fields including anthropology (Bruner, 1984), psychology (Bruner, 1991), linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Polkinghorne, 1988), gerontology (Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Kenyon, Clark & deVries, 2001), and adult education (Nelson, 1997; Rossiter, 2002; Wiessner, 2005). Jerome Bruner (1991) explains narrative knowing as a human phenomenon that "organizes our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reason for doing and not doing, and so on" (p. 4). This is in contrast to paradigmatic knowing, which Bruner (1991) defines as knowledge of generalities and universals or absolute truths, narrative knowing explains experience and particulars with interpretive understanding as the goal (Irwin, 2002).



Constructivism is a perspective illuminated when one looks at narrative knowing, self-authoring, autobiographical learning, and autobiographical writing. Polkinghorne's (1988) conception of narrative knowing follows a constructivist perspective, suggesting that "the realm of meaning is not static: it is enlarged by the new experiences it is continuously configuring as well as by its own refiguring process, which is carried out through reflection and recollection" (p. 15).

Edward Bruner (1984) makes a distinction between a life as lived, a life as experienced, and a life as told. "A life lived is what actually happens. A life experienced consists of the images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person....A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context" (p. 7). Turning one's life experience into written story has several benefits beyond the obvious of aiding one's memory. As Rossiter's work shows, self-narratives provide several important implications in relation to adult development and learning, including: we are experts on our own development and a narrative perspective allows us to look at development as lived; telling stories about our experiences outside habitual meaning systems accommodates new and revised meanings; telling of life narrative externalizes our life story, creating an awareness of themes and topics; and transformation is possible through re-storying.

*Autobiography and Life Story*

Nelson (1997) proposed that autobiographical learning occurs when one “encompasses reflection on experience, critical thinking, and imagining that leads to a transformation of perspectives and lifestyles [bringing] a change to the life story that learners tell to themselves and to others” (p. 2). Additionally, any retelling of the life story is “neither mere reiteration, nor even paraphrase, it is the serial reconstruction of the life story that takes form within and through the process of the author’s ongoing self-interpretation” (p. 4).

Autobiographical writing requires authors to reconstruct their lives through the process of reviewing and reflecting on lived experience. This concept hinges on Kenyon and Randall’s (Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries, 2001) view that we are not just biological or social constructions but aesthetic compositions – biographical beings. Scholars looking at autobiographical writing are generally studying narratives that span a life course. Narratives that involve a slice-of-life story, limited both spatially and temporally are termed life stories. For the purposes of this study, I focus on these life stories.

The field of narrative gerontology provides a view of storytelling that encompasses both autobiography and life story. Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries (2001) trace the origins of narrative gerontology to the early 1990s and the work of Birren and Schroots (2006) who studied the metaphors of aging. Kenyon and his colleagues have developed five assumptions applicable to narrative gerontology. First is the suggestion that storytelling is fundamental to being human. Second is the idea that stories include

both fact and possibility, indicating that life is open to change. Third is the assumption that we are connected to life through meaning and time. In other words, we experience more than one kind of time. Clock time is linear and closed with distinctions made between past, present and future. Story time moves subjectively with the events defining order and duration. Fourth is the contention that our stories involve structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, and personal dimensions (2001). When Kenyon refers to fact, it is assumed his intention is interpretation of memory, an on-going reinterpretation. Clearly, from the discussion above, story writing supports remembering experience but through new filters. The fifth and final assumption is that our life stories are fundamentally a paradox. “We will never have, ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’ about our lives either our own or others” Kenyon, Clark, & deVries, 2001). This fifth assumption runs counter with the constructivist perspective that knowledge is actively constructed and that the function of cognition is adaptive, serving to organize experience rather than discover reality. Plurality is reality therefore there is no “whole truth” as the authors claim.

The literature reviewed in this chapter is meant to bring meaning to the data collected and answer the research questions: How does the life story process foster and shape the writers’ understanding of their life experience and what insights emerge from this process. Adult development models with humanist tendencies would indicate that older learners may interpret experience in a way that reflects wisdom. The literature also suggests that life story might be a means of expressing such wisdom explicitly. In

Chapter 3, the methodology of this qualitative case study is defined in detail including research rationale, design, data collection, and analysis.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the life-story writing process termed Writing-to-Remember as a tool for facilitating legacy creation. As Merriam (2002) states, “questions of meaning, understanding, and process are appropriate for qualitative research” (p. 19). Several strengths of qualitative research support its use in this study of lifelong learners involved in a life-story process. In this chapter, I provide the rationale for a qualitative research paradigm and a case study approach and explain the design, data collection, data analysis, data display, limitations and strengths, researcher positionality, ethics, and verification as these relate to the research questions: How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy? What insights emerge from those engaged in this process?

### Research Approach Rationale

Because I approached this study from a constructivist viewpoint, it was appropriate to apply an interpretive paradigm, which is integral to qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This research was exploratory in nature, focusing on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context so case study was the chosen research approach (Yin, 1994). The focus on writers within a particular writers group who had completed a life-story writing course made this study bounded and integrated, two additional requirements of case study (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The type of research questions posed – “how does the process foster and shape” and “what insights emerge” – come from an exploratory perspective and confirm case study as the preferred

research strategy (Yin, 1994). Finally, case study research results in thick, rich data (Merriam, 1998) which is what emerged in analyzing the writers' experiences and personal insights.

Stake (1995) splits case study by interest, either intrinsic or instrumental. An intrinsic case study is used when one wants to better understand a particular case. An instrumental case study facilitates the examination of an issue or generalization. This study focused on older learners who completed a writing course, participated in a writer's group, and composed and shared stories throughout this experience. The choice of this population was intrinsic to the scheme of the research, therefore this case study is considered intrinsic. In addition, my constructivist perspective focuses "on local context and on the social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality where knowledge is validated through practice (Kvale, 1992, p. 24).

Merriam (2002) provides a delineation of case study based on special features. Her three-pronged delineation includes particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. A particularistic case study focuses on "a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon" (p. 29). Three elements help define particularistic case study: It can lead to advice to the reader in a similar situation; it can illuminate a general issue even though it examines a specific situation; and, it may or may not be influenced by author bias. Based on these aspects, this case study of lifelong learners in a life-story process is particularistic. Stake equates particularistic with intrinsic. Because intrinsic is more widely used and defined as a methodology, I have chosen the term intrinsic.

### Research Design: Setting

Constructivism is most consonant with natural settings wherein the inquirer is the primary collector and interpreter of meanings and contextual and holistic understandings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mishler, 1986; Patton, 1990). The setting for this research was a life-story writing class titled Writing to Remember and a subsequent monthly writers' group. The class, offered through a university learning-in-retirement program, met three hours once a week for six weeks. The writers' group which was suggested and coordinated by one of the students met monthly for an hour and a half at a local bookstore. The writers were separated into two groups, allowing sharing time for half the writers every other month. Stories were emailed to the facilitator two to five days prior to the meeting to provide the opportunity for the other writers to read, and the facilitator to edit, the stories that were then shared orally. I was the instructor of the course and continued as the facilitator of the monthly writers' group.

### Research Design: Participants

Purposeful sampling suggested by Patton (1990) requires the identification of criteria to ensure information-rich cases. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) use the term criterion-based selection. Criteria used to determine this bounded sample included individuals over age 50 that had completed the Writing-to-Remember course at a local university's learning-in-retirement program and who continued to participate in writing and sharing life stories at a monthly writer's group. Twelve individuals initially joined

the writers' group following the story-writing course. Of these 12, two dropped out and the remaining 10 volunteered to participate in the study.

The participants followed similar trajectories of experience likely resulting from a shared culture further supporting this as an intrinsic study chosen to better understand this particular case. Other than Jackie, who was born in Essex, England, all were born in the U.S. Except for Sandy, who was native of Ohio, all were born in states along the Atlantic Seaboard—New York, Connecticut, Vermont, Virginia, and North Carolina. All had some higher education, most terminating in a bachelor's degree. All would be considered middle-class and owned or co-owned their own homes. All but one was married or had been at one time and all but two had children and grandchildren. More than half quit their careers to stay at home and raise their children. All were white and over 55 and under 90 years of age with the majority in their 60s at the time of the interviews. Nine were female, one was male. Appendix B provides gender, age, education, vocation, birthplace, and family demographics. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity.

#### Data Collection

The collection of data, regardless of method, requires a systematic and logical approach (Burgess, 1984). As the instrument of data collection (Creswell, 1998), I spent time with these participants, collecting their stories and their experiences as I gathered data to answer the two questions guiding this research: How does the life-story process foster and shape the writers' understanding of their life experiences and what personal insights emerge? The primary methods of data collection for this case study were semi-



structured interviews, documents (specifically life stories), and field notes with participant observations.

### *Interviews*

Qualitative interviews, unlike survey interviews, reflect a constructionist approach, with the participants viewed as meaning makers not passive conduits (Warren, 2002). This type of interview has been described as guided conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and results in communication and joint construction of meaning between the participant and interviewer. Because interpretation relies on implicit assumptions, it is vital that interviewers and respondents arrive at meanings understood through repeated reformulation of both the questions and the responses (Mishler, 1986). Through this joint construction of the interview, “we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived...and we can learn about people’s interior experiences” (Gubrium & Holsten, 2002, p. 9).

Each participant was interviewed twice, once before submitting two to seven life-stories and once after. I taped and transcribed these interviews myself. The first interview, lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and focused on the process of writing, remembering, and sharing the writer’s life stories. This first interview also included the compiling of demographics including birth year, geographic history, and educational history. Because context has relevant influence on experience and subsequent knowledge construction, these characteristics shaped the lens that both the participants and I used,

either consciously or subconsciously, to interpret the life-story process and the life-story documents.

The settings for the two interviews performed in this research were the homes of the writers. The writers were given the opportunity to interview at the learning-in-retirement offices but all choose to have me to their homes, where all of them did their composing. Several showed me the area they set aside for writing their stories. Field notes and observations were made following each of the two interviews with additional notes and research memos written at or following the monthly writers' group meetings.

Original interview questions such as "tell me about your experience with sharing in class" (and in group) often led to follow-up questions like "why do you think you found it intimidating?" Some follow-up questions were aimed at clarifying the process of remembering, composing, and sharing while other follow-up questions focused on context, such as when a participant wrote to discover her ties to gardening. Two additional questions emerged during the first round of interviews with the first participant and these were then asked of each subsequent participant. One question was, do you remember doing a lot of reading and writing growing up, and the other was, is letter writing something you recall doing much of? Adding questions and using follow-up questions supports Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) belief that questions guiding qualitative research need to be open-ended and focus on process and meaning rather than cause and effect. This method of questioning provides both breadth and depth, allowing for a more intrinsic understanding of the study participants. Additionally, it supports the iterative

versus linear nature of qualitative research. “A good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis” (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spires, 2002, p. 10). This is a form of verification which is discussed later in this chapter.

At the end of the first interview, the participant provided two to seven life stories. Some of these stories were from readings at the monthly writers’ group, others were composed specifically for the second interview. The second interview, one to two weeks later and of comparable length to the first interview, focused on the stories submitted. I read these composed stories prior to the second interview with an initial coding scheme drawn from the literature and the first interview.

### *Documents*

The composed life stories served to articulate the writer’s life experience. For the purpose of this study, life story indicates a slice-of-life narrative, a story limited both spatially and temporally. The reason for choosing life stories versus autobiography was to allow spontaneous and value-laden stories to emerge. In addition, for equitable sharing time, the length of compositions required time constraints.

Stories averaged one to two pages, single-spaced and took the writer approximately three to five minutes to read aloud. Stories were specific to time and place. For instance, one participant shared a story from when she was nine and living on a military compound in New York. Her mother joined her and her brothers one afternoon in a snowball fight

against some neighborhood bullies. “I can’t recall what words were spoken but that sense of having a mother bear in our corner has been a delicious memory for nearly 60 years.”

Initially, the inclusion of written stories in this study was solely to create second interview questions. Chase (2005) notes that when researchers view interviewees as narrators, there is an attendance not only to the stories told but also to those stories emerging by invitation during the interview. Additional stories did emerge in the second interview as the original stories were discussed. What I did not expect was to use the collected stories themselves as data, yet themes emerged from these stories that provided thick, rich description of people, places, and things, illuminating the second research question, what insights emerge from this process.

Once the stories became data in and of themselves, the use of narrative analysis interceded. Narrative analysis is multidisciplinary in application. Labov (1994) presents a structuralist formulation popular with discourse analysts in linguistics while Greimas and Propp (Segal, 1996; Schleifer, 1987) mainstreamed the use of semiotics (signs and their use) in schemes applied to fairy tales. Chase (2005) provides alternative approaches to narrative inquiry. The approach applied in this study, she terms psychological inquiry in that it “focuses on the relationship between individual’s life stories and the quality of their lives, especially their psychosocial development” (p. 658). These approaches emphasize the ‘what’ of the story – characters, settings, plot – versus the ‘how’ of storytelling. In research designs where the core of the study is not in text analysis but serves more of a complementary role, informal approaches may be the best approach

(Perakyla, 2005). In this study on life-long learners experience involved in a life-story process, the stories are supplemental in the answering of developmental inquiries.

From a qualitative research perspective, the data from documents such as these life stories provide what Tesch (1990) defines as a meaningful unit – “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode or piece of information” (p. 116). These stories provided necessary context and an illumination of multiple realities that should not be underestimated in qualitative research. As Bradley (1993) notes, the qualitative researcher “seeks understanding of specific situations and communicates that understanding through description” (p. 438). For this reason, entire portions of the participants’ stories are included in Chapter 4 under The Essence theme. Permission to use these stories was part of the IRB.

#### *Field Notes with Participant Observation*

Field notes and participant observations were composed after each interview and were an integral part of data collection. Because I created and taught the Writing-to-Remember course and facilitated the affiliated writers’ group, I became familiar with each of the ten participants. “There is increasing willingness of the part of ethnographers to affirm or develop a ‘membership’ identity in the communities they study” (Angrosino, 2005, p. 733). During the interviews, I met several pets, a few spouses, and drank a fair amount of coffee. I made notes about the participants’ homes and what seemed important to them based on books, pictures, and knickknacks. Several participants held strong connections to nature. Six of the participants led me on a tour of their yards and gardens

after the first interview. Membership identity as demonstrated above supports an intrinsic understanding of the case under study.

As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), the field notes and observations were coded between interviews to avoid backlog and illuminate emerging phenomenon. Reflective remarks and margin notes were rewritten for legibility. To bring order and structure to the mass of data captured, I transcribed the recorded interviews within two weeks to maximize comparisons of data sets and to amend coding schemes. Total pages of double-spaced transcripts equaled 304. The total number of stories submitted for second interviews was 54. Fifteen pages of field notes and participant observations were included as data. Data reduction is discussed below under data analysis.

### Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative analysis typically consists of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and the drawing of conclusions. Because of the voluminous amount of data typical of qualitative research, I revisited the conceptual framework and research questions of this study frequently to maintain focus and avoid data overload.

The conceptual framework guiding this research is constructivism which claims that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed and that the function of cognition is adaptive, serving to organize experience rather than discover reality. In addition, I view individuals through the eyes of a humanist, focusing on individual needs,

capacities, values, interests, welfare, and worth. Finally, the research questions – how does the life-story process foster and shape the writers’ understanding of their life experiences and what personal insights emerge from this process – were ever-present during the coding process.

Traditional qualitative methods, including intrinsic or particularistic case study, incorporate a theme-oriented method of analysis. Coding is the preferred tool for data reduction and for display of interview transcripts and field observations. Codes tag descriptive and inferential information with meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These are usually attached to ‘chunks’ of data varying in size - words, phrases, sentences, patterns of behavior, subjects’ ways of thinking, events that repeat, or in some cases, categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Creating a provisional ‘start list’ prior to fieldwork is meant to help manage data from the beginning (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this study, I created a start grid from the literature on experience and wisdom. The three wisdom categories were based on Ardel’s (2000) compilation of wisdom constructs and included interpretive knowledge, significant old truths, and intrapersonal and interpersonal knowledge. The experience typology was borrowed from Neisser’s model (1993) and included ecological self (respect to physical world), interpersonal self (unreflective engagement in social interaction), extended self (existence outside the present moment through memory and anticipation), private self (conscious experience unavailable to others), and conceptual self (social roles, personal traits, theories of body and mind either implicit or explicit).

As the data was reduced, these start codes proved not to be useful in explaining the process or the emerging insights. The initial themes emerging reflected the Writing-to-Remember process design including purpose, remembering, composing, sharing, and outcomes. In the end, open coding was the most helpful in data analysis and reduction. Open coding is the process of examining, comparing, contrasting, contextualizing and categorizing data. Codes pulled directly from the data allow the researcher to identify their own and other's assumptions about phenomenon while leading to new discoveries (Ryan, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### Data Reduction

Data reduction continued by reading the transcripts and making margin notes. Once all interviews were transcribed, the resulting transcripts and field notes were read three times and words, ideas, and concepts were noted in the margins. These notes were then typed into a participant chart (See Table 1 under Data Display). Out of this document emerged three themes: Purpose, Process, and Outcomes.

Next, I went back to the margin notes and transferred the idea, word, or concept onto post-it notes. Each theme was assigned a different color post-it note: Pink for purpose, green from process, and orange for outcome. Each post-it note referenced the participant, interview number, and page number to facilitate data display in Chapter 4. The post-it notes were then sorted onto flip-chart pages so that all data sets could be viewed together to determine if the three main themes held together. The categories were still distinct but the titles were changed to Writer Intentions, the Writing-to-Remember



Process, and Writer Expression. These themes and their subcategories are displayed in chart form below.

### Data Display

Data display refers to a visual formatting of information such that a researcher can draw valid conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The 304 pages of interview transcripts, 19 pages of field notes, and 54 life stories making up the data in this study required a systematic method of analysis, reduction, and display. As described above, margin notes on the transcripts and field notes assisted in organizing the data along with post-it notes and flip charts. The writers brought context to the data. “One of the goals that many forms of qualitative research share is the cultivation, in addition to the understanding of the data, of an understanding of the context from which the data are derived” (Sutton, 1993, p. 413). To keep stories, demographics, and transcript notes together by writer, I developed a three-column table that served as an audit trail. Beth’s table is shared below.

Table 2

*Participant Context—Beth*

<p><b>Demographics</b>  born VA, 67, retired elementary school teacher  married  3 children,  3 grandchildren  sister and brother  both parents deceased</p> <p><b>Stories</b>  Pa Pa my Hero  Life at Grandmama's  Little Girls, Big Girls  The Piano  Grandmother Jones  North Main Street</p>	<p><b>Transcript notes</b>  Dad transferred when between her 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade - new kid in school - stopped imaginary play Siblings: she is the oldest - husband in military spent time in Germany - in France - Stay at home mom until last child 12 - retired at 65 read as a child published in school paper mother a reader non-fiction all her children read hasn't really shared stories with children father wrote factual memoirs brother would love to be seen as a writer large, extended family – 23 cousins coordinated a book for the reunion taught language arts, always looking for teaching ideas to encourage writing loved journal writing workshop used prompts with her students motivation for “push” to write it down  “the more you know who you are, the more grounded you are” writing as self-defining  Importance of family connect to roots closeness of siblings – husband's not “I'm probably not as polished as a writer”polite class write for group but could spend more time group brings discipline writing I didn't have time for before retired at 60 difficult transition husband loves to travel Student's she'd touched – silver lining of teaching – still volunteers in the schools don't see others outside of group Put the stories down for the grandchildren awareness of death – lost mother at the age she is now “you didn't make us feel self-conscious” – comment on my teaching skill building mechanics  “I have a lot of my dad in me” “any quote I have ever had it is because I truly remember that verbatim (authentic dialogue – truthfulness) “I'm not one to embellish” Grandmother as important figure when you assume a role – you look at your role model differently (referring to herself as a grandmother) lived with grandmother/ showed her “how much I was loved” Moved away – visits and letterwriting “Family is really important” Categorized personalities – granddad jolly, grandmother worrier, close marriage  Grandfather limited in formal education but inquisitive and well read but very accomplished “pretty phenomenal” skill building: organize story to flow better share traits of grandfather (quote: “there's nothing so perfect that there isn't room for improvement and there is nothing so bad that there isn't some good somewhere” asked every cousin (23) to write a paragraph about being at grandmother's house mother was 18 so she was more like big sister, grandmother like mom this set of grandparents (p.9) lots of cousins so less time with her their house still in family granddaughters reminded her of her own imaginary world at their age love dressing up still love clothes – in France they dress up to go to the supermarket moved at 12 – discontinued play world Granddaughter's prompt piano story metaphor of piano and house – neither taken care of more about the house – place stories ground those in the family – show connection/relationship wants to write stories from pre-children</p>
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As mentioned above, open codes proved the most applicable to the data as themes emerged. In Chapter 4, these themes and the data sets that support these themes and subcategories are presented. Because this study is intrinsic and heavily dependent on the written word to provide context to each individual's experience, quotes are many and lengthy, as would be expected in this narrative environment. First, however, I present the limitations of this study.

#### Limitations and Strengths

Limitations of the research design include the sample being one of convenience. The participants were involved in a life-story writing group that I facilitated and had completed a life-story writing class which I instructed. Although this might implicate bias as a limitation, it also served as a strength in the level of trust formed between researcher and participant over the course of the class and the writers' group (see Verification). The participants were local, as was the institution through which this study was performed. In addition, the study's sample was not age, race, or socioculturally diverse. As described above, all writers were healthy, white, middle-class, highly literate individuals, ranging in age from 50 to 90. This is an acceptable limitation considering this is an intrinsic case study.

The lens through which a researcher focuses creates a limitation. I viewed this study through a humanist perspective, focusing on individual needs, capacities, values, interests, welfare, and worth. Had this study been looked at from a critical cultural orientation, an emphasis would have been placed on assessing and challenging unequal

relations of power (Fenwick, 2003). As noted in Chapter 2, humanist developmental models have been criticized for their lack in acknowledging gender and cultural differences, their linear and hierarchical underpinnings, and the assumption of an inherent drive for personal growth (Courtenay, 1994). Daloz (1988) demonstrated, there is not necessarily an inherent motivation for personal growth. Humanist models have also been denounced for their predilection for independence and individuality at the expense of social justice and reform.

#### Researcher Positionality and Ethics

As outlined under the conceptual framework in Chapter 2, I viewed this study through a constructivist lens. I consider knowledge to be constructed by an individual through his or her interactions with society and the environment. By considering knowledge constructed and subjective, personal stories are not expected to conform to a coherence of truth with an objective reality. As a humanist, I looked for an intrinsic drive for personal growth as verification of inherent developmental needs. In addition, verification techniques were applied to the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure rigor. These are discussed under Verification.

“Since the 1980s, it has become common practice for qualitative researchers in general to ‘write themselves into’ their research, on the grounds that personal background information will enhance the rigor of their work by making potential biases explicit” (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 35). As I mentioned in limitations, I taught the life-story writing class and facilitated the writers group from which the participants were drawn.

Although this may implicate bias, I do believe it heightened the trust and confidence level between me and the writers.

As I read the participants stories, I noted personal reflections that emerged for me from hearing the compositions. As a forty-nine-year-old, college educated female who grew up in a predominately white, middle-class neighborhood in the western United States with a college-educated father and vocationally trained mother; I could relate to the context of many of the writers' stories. These writers ranged from several years (55) to several decades (90) my senior with the majority of participants in their 60s. Some of the stories reminded me of those told by my parents or even grandparents such as WWII events, while others including television and radio programs, popular music and entertainers, the Vietnam war, the Kennedy assassination, the moon walk, and the attempt to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, rekindled stories within my own memory bank.

Remembering past events can illicit emotions ranging from joy to pain. Regression therapy is based in this process of re-living traumatic experiences as a means of identifying and working through painful emotions 'trapped' in one's psyche. In the initial life-writing course I teach, I cover the ethics of trust in regards to sharing personal stories. I emphasize that the course is not structured as therapy. As part of a welcome package to the writer's group, a letter encourages members to seek professional guidance should emerging memories cause them discomfort. A resource sheet of local mental health agencies is included. Finally, each participant in the study signed an Institutional Review Board release of human subject research.

### Verification

“Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, it refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, rigor” (Morse, et.al., 2004, p. 9). Morse and her colleagues note a tendency on the part of qualitative researchers to emphasize validity and reliability at the outcome of the study rather than throughout the research using verification strategies.

Strategies of trustworthiness - a term substituted for validity and reliability by Guba and Lincoln in the early 1980s – tend to “evaluate” rigor at the end of the study rather than “ensure” rigor from the beginning. Trustworthiness as described by Merriam (2002) is a function of internal validity (including triangulation, member checks, and peer review), reliability, and external validity or generalizability. Triangulation, according to Denzin (1970), can be of four types: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) tie trustworthiness to transferability, or the degree of similarity with a previous situation. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) provide a history of qualitative validities noting a criterion proposed by Smith that bases validity upon the paradigm of the researchers. “For constructivists, a valid study is one that demonstrates solidarity, its results are based on and open to negotiation and dialogue within participant and research communities” (p. 325).

Investigator responsiveness is a vital aspect of both trustworthiness and verification, “the lack of responsiveness of the investigator at all stages of the research process is the greatest hidden threat to validity” according to Morse and her colleagues (2004, p. 11). They suggest this responsiveness is reflected in researchers who demonstrate creativity, open mindedness, sensitivity, and insight. Prolonged engagement of the investigator with the study participants allows for persistent and on-going observation, feedback, and ultimately verification.

Verification strategies in addition to investigator responsiveness include methodological coherence (ensuring congruence of research questions with method components), appropriateness of sample through saturation and replication (Morse, 1991), and the concurrent activity of collecting and analyzing data.

Prolonged engagement, methodological coherence, concurrent collecting and analyzing, and triangulation were pursued in this study. Through prolonged engagement - in this case over the course of two years - I became a member of the culture. I developed a sensitivity and insight into the life-story process and the writers’ life experiences. The research questions were woven into the data analysis with the analysis beginning during the first interview. As noted earlier, interview questions were added and amended as analysis and collection evolved.

Theory triangulation was applied through the application of various models discovered and described in the literature reviewed from the fields of adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence. Methodological triangulation was

accomplished through the four sources of data: interviews, participant observation, field notes, and life stories.

Additional validation strategies included member checking and peer review. My findings were communicated to the participants several times throughout the analysis phase at the monthly writers group. This served as a means of member checking. Merriam (2002) suggests that “in one sense, all graduate students have a peer review process built into their thesis or dissertation committee – as each member reads and comments on findings” (p. 26). The peer who reviewed this document completed her doctoral dissertation in higher education one year prior to the completion of this text and provided a perspective unfamiliar with the fields of adult development and aging.

### Summary

In this chapter, I provided the rationale for choosing a qualitative paradigm and an intrinsic case study approach. I described the setting and participants including the selection process. Data collection and analysis methods were presented as were the limitations, researcher positionality, ethics, and verification. In Chapter 4, I present the data by theme in an attempt to gain a better understanding of a specific life review process and its connection to adult development including the expression of wisdom. The affiliated research questions: How does the life-story process foster and shape the writers’ understandings of their life experiences and what personal insights emerge from the process, continue to guide this study.



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The Writing-to-Remember course was designed to help students capture their memories, improve their writing skills, and experience sharing of their composed memories, orally. The monthly writer's group that followed the completion of this course further supported the capturing and composing of life stories. In this intrinsic case study, I explored the Writing-to-Remember process and its connection to older adult development specifically legacy creation. For data, I interacted with the study participants, interviewing them about the class and the writers' group experience, their interpretations of several composed stories, together with observation and field notes.

In analyzing the data, three major themes emerged – Writer Intentions, the Writing-to-Remember Process, and Writer Expressions. The participant's purpose for enrolling in the class and continuing with the writers' group produced data within the theme: Writer Intentions. The second theme – the Writing-to-Remember Process – had three subcategories: remembering, composing, and sharing. The Writing-to-Remember Process, though seemingly linear, is more accurately described as interactive. For instance, composing tapped additional memories as did sharing. Sharing clarified and strengthened composing. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the Writing-to-Remember (or W2R) Process involves revision to both memories and compositions, both internally and externally.

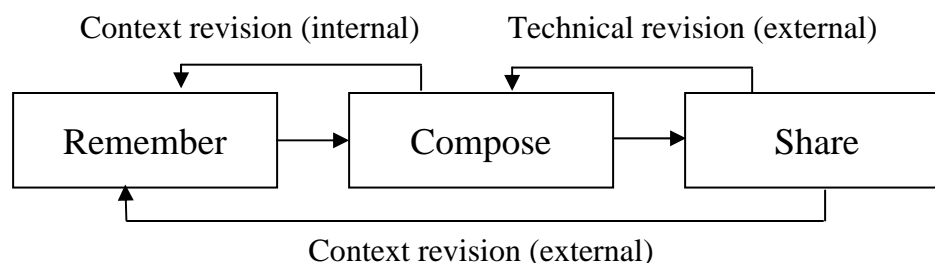


Figure 1. W2R Process

The third theme is Writer Expressions and delves into story elements including people, places, and things. Within each of these three major themes, sub-categories emerged that helped organize the data. Table 3 provides the themes graphically.

Table 3

*Data Themes and Subcategories*

<b>Writer Intentions</b>	Story as Legacy		
	Story as Therapy		
<b>Writing-to-Remember Process</b>	Remembering	Journals as Memory Joggers	
		Truthfulness	
	Composing	Writing Preferences	Internal vs. External
			Computer vs. Handwritten
		Being a Writer	Early Experiences
	Sharing	Entertainment	
Audience Influence			
<b>Writer Expressions</b>	Self-Care	Working Through Grief	
		Self-Validation	
	Change in Perspectives		
The Essence of Place, People, and Things			

Themes emerging in this qualitative research answered the case study's two research questions bounding this study: How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy and what insights emerge from those engaged in this process? The data within the theme Writer Intentions, while not linked to one of the two research questions, offers explanation regarding why an individual seeks out a life-story writing class and writers' group. The Writing-to-Remember Process theme addresses the first research question by dissecting the three elements of the W2R process: remembering, composing, and sharing. The final theme, Writer Expressions, combines the writers' words and stories to answer the question, "What insights emerge from those engaged in this process?"

#### Writer Intentions

On the first day of class, students are asked to share their purpose for taking the course. This information, together with comments from the two interviews, is presented under the subcategories that convey Writer Intentions: Story as Legacy and Story as Therapeutic.

#### *Story as Legacy*

A majority of the writers came to the Writing-to-Remember course with the purpose of capturing stories for their children or grandchildren. McAdams life story theory (1996) and Erikson's two final life stages (1980) support Hunter's (2007) claim that "a cogent story of one's life enhances the possibility of passing along wisdom to future generations, thereby helping with the generative process" (p. 314). Hunter divides

the transmission of legacy – the process of passing one’s self through generations – into three areas: identity, value, and history. “Identity is what each individual creates out of all the facets of a life (p. 320). Identity was reflected in the stories chosen to write and share. Values emerged from the underlying lesson or moral of these stories. History is in the details - “legacy is about the times in which we live and the people and events that have helped shape us” (p. 322). Identities, values, and histories were revealed most readily in the Writer Expression themes of self-care, change in perspective, and the essence of people, places, and things.

In talking about the writers group, Carol said, “I think we’re motivated, we’re trying to leave something for our children.” Karen, thinking of her grandchildren, said,

I just need to write some of my thoughts about this and the more I got thinking about this, yes, I really need to write some of this for the grandchildren. We don’t get that much time to sit down and talk to the grandchildren so I can tell them about what things were like when I grew up because they’re not that interested now but later on. And then, I guess the other thing is photo albums. I need to write something to go with these pictures so I can tell a more complete story.

Ellen is a grandmother who recognizes that interest can skip a generation.

When my father was with my son a couple years ago, we went to the museum where they have coal mining exhibits, ore exhibits and Dad started talking and boy was my son interested....He couldn’t hear enough. As for my stories, they’re

not as interested. What's interesting is when I tell stories to the grandchildren, I give one of the characters in the story their name and that thrills them.

A couple of the writers mentioned being the keepers of their family's history.

Carol inherited this role from a cousin.

I have a cousin who has since died who was the inspiration of family stories and her son sent me...they were cleaning out his mother's house...and he said "We have a whole bunch of genealogy stuff, would you like it?" And I said sure because I'm kind of the depository of this stuff.

Jenny plays a similar role.

I feel that I am the family historian. I have been the one that has kept the family histories filed. I've got the birth and death certificates. I've got all that stuff or trying to get that stuff, to leave behind in someplace, who and what and when.

Several of the writers came from storytelling families or were involved in some way with storytelling. For Chris, who was born on the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the late 40s when there was no electricity so no television, "the only real entertainment was to get together and talk, so there was talking all the time, sharing ideas, and stories, absolutely stories. I've heard a lot of stories in my life." Chris is one who articulated his belief in a connection between stories and life lessons.

Before there was mass media and all the different opportunities for entertainment, which have caused a lot of generational layering - back in the days before all that - people would get together and share stories all the time and so this wisdom of

people would be translated between people and the wisdom of the elderly would be transmitted that way too because they were a part of those in the room.

For Ellen, it was her father who shared tales, “My family is traditional in that we’re a storytelling family. My father would just make up stories and we treasured these and he told them over and over again.” Like Chris, Sandy’s early childhood did not include television. The Ohio native remembers listening to her father’s stories. “I just love stories, I mean, because I do enjoy reading. My dad...we all gathered around the table and would enjoy his stories.” Both Sandy and Jackie mentioned storytelling festivals.

When the international [storytelling] festival came to Raleigh, which has been going on probably close to 20 years...the first year I went, I said “I’ve got get involved in this” and I got a job in ticket distribution which was okay, it got me involved but wasn’t where I really wanted to be. Joyce S. was head of the storytelling, actually the whole festival, and I said Joyce “You’ve got the food, you’ve got the dance, you’ve got the equipment but we don’t have the stories, I’d like to organize the storytellers.” So, I did that for a great number of years. I did my research and found some really good storytellers to tell stories from different cultures [Sandy].

Although, no participants mentioned sharing stories in a festival forum, several shared how they have distributed their stories. Sandy used the holidays as a venue for sharing.

At Christmas I made a notebook and we gave [our children] those. We are not big gift givers. If you make preserves or you stitch something, that’s our giving. So I

started that and told the girls...and I got my husband to tell his stories...and his style is way different than mine because he just puts it down and that's it so I'm hoping to get him to do more of that too. I'm thinking that for Mother's Day I'm going to give them some of the stories.

Sandy wants to leave memories for her grandchildren. "When each of the grandchildren was born, I started journals to each of them. Yesterday, I just picked up number five because number five is due this month. So the first one started with a dream I had of Abby months before she was born. Just those special times we've shared together."

Sandy was not the only participant to create a 'product' for her stories. Beth shared how the evolution of a 'cousin book' came about.

Back about three years ago, I'd gone to a funeral in the winter and I thought we just never see each other except at funerals or an occasional wedding. I'm number three of the cousins, two older cousins – there were 23 cousins on my dad's side (of the nine children) – and I wrote about that some – life at Grandma Dayne's house. Those cousins at that time, 22 of us were still living, only one had died at her desk suddenly in her forties with a heart attack, who was younger than I. So I decided we need to have a family reunion so my brother and sister and I really pushed. I tried to get every cousin – it was really a cousin book – to tell me memories they had at Grandmother Dayne's house. Some were much more verbose, some were just a paragraph, some I would call and say tell me some memory and I'll just write it up. So I made this book that listed all the parents,

children, birthdays, those that had died, pictures, and all the cousins. And at that time, I did get the three sisters plus my dad to give me some memories to put in that... then each cousin got to have a book and they could make copies, or whatever. That was a really neat kind of thing.

Legacy, defined as something received from an ancestor or predecessor, was an important driving force with most of the participants. However, one student came to the course with the intent to heal past injustices.

#### *Story as Therapeutic*

As previously mentioned, the majority of participants came to the 2006 Writing-to-Remember class as a means of capturing their stories to share with family members. Karen took the course in 2004 and again in 2006 to revisit her story writing for her grandchildren. Sandy took the course in 2004 and returned in 2006 for the writers' group as a means to jumpstart her story writing. Grace, who lost her husband the year before taking the class, didn't know much about the course until the first day.

My friend Beth, who I've known since high school and who was a friend of my husband...She was very close to me during this time of grief and she just saw something when she read that and called me and said "Grace, there's a course we've got to take." And I said, "Oh really." I didn't even know what I was signing up for, I just said okay.

Grace was surprised at what happened that first day.



So [Beth] insisted that I do this and she was right, it's been a great thing for me. The course helped me very much to sort through my grief. The initial things I have done have not been about my childhood or my past because the trauma of the last two years has been so close. It's hard to think back. It helped me very much. I wrote it down somewhere and I'll try to find it. I wrote down my reactions the day I drove away from your class. Because I felt I had made a breakthrough.

Grace had not come to the course with the intention of working through grief or for therapeutic reasons. A discussion I had with the writers' group following the completion of my analysis is worth noting here because it pertains to the writers' intentions with regard to therapeutic benefits. Two months following my analysis, I shared the findings with the monthly writers' group. Five of the ten participants were in attendance. When I mentioned that Story as Legacy was the overwhelming intent of the participants attending the Writing-to-Remember course, each agreed that this was their initial intent, however, the therapeutic value of the process had in many ways come to outweigh the legacy aspect. Two writers related their shift in perspective concerning a parent including Ellen who acknowledged that she has realized her mother had a tough life and she can accept more of her mother's actions because they are now explained. "This is a developmental aspect to the process" [Ellen]. Although the Self-Care and Change in Perspective subcategories within the Writer Expression theme speak to the therapeutic value of the process, these writers were emphatic that the therapeutic benefits

are as important an 'intent' as legacy (Writer Intentions) for taking the course and sharing in the writing community.

Writing has been linked to self-care in the literature of reminiscence (Coleman, 1999; Haight, Michel, Hendrix, 1998; Weiss, 1995), psychology (Pennebaker, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2004) and adult education (DeSalvo, 1999; Jacobs, 2004; Weldon, 2001; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). James Pennebaker, a psychology professor at the University of Texas, has researched the physical and mental benefits of self disclosure over the past 20 years. His books, beginning with *Opening up: The healing powers of confiding in others* in 1990 through his latest, *Writing to heal: A guided journal for recovering from trauma and emotional upheaval*, are cited often by psychological researchers studying writing therapy. Within each area of literature, qualitative and quantitative studies have shown that the composition of life stories is therapeutic.

Jackie, the youngest in the group at 55, a native of England, and a self-proclaimed feminist does write for therapy and has taken numerous writing courses including *The Authentic Self* and *The Artist's Way* as a means of self-understanding. Jackie had approached me the first day of class about writing about childhood abuse. It is worth noting that on the first day, I explain that the course is not structured as therapy nor am I licensed to provide therapy. I distribute a handout of agencies providing help should stories bring up painful memories or issues. In addition, I set out two guidelines regarding trust and confidentiality: 1) Share only what you are comfortable sharing, and 2) Respect each other's right to tell their own story inside and outside of class. My response to

Jackie regarding the abuse topic was that it might not be the most appropriate place to work on it and that the subject could make some of the students uncomfortable. I asked her in the first interview if she remembered our conversation about this topic.

I do, I have this little piece of embarrassment about that – this is the British part – the appropriate...because as soon as I was in the class and looked at these people, who did I think would be here? You know, what am I doing here?...When I came to your [class] I probably needed a psychiatric hospital more than a writing class.... So, I saw it as a way to...sort of a lifeline, something that was stable, structured. And I could just write my little whatevers.

Jackie did write stories about troubled relationships with people and food, and through her unique humor and colorful dialogue brought many vicarious experiences to the group. The group, as a whole however, came to the course and writing group as a means of capturing their stories for future generations. The therapeutic aspects of the Writing-to-Remember Process are further referenced within the Writer Expressions theme. Before discussing these, the writers' responses to the process itself are provided.

#### The Writing-to Remember Process

A primary goal as reflected in the research questions was to look at a specific life-story process and the insights it produced. This life-story process was taught in the Writing-to-Remember course and practiced in the monthly writers' group. Unlike autobiography or life review, the Writing-to-Remember process does not attempt to encompass the entire life span of the writer. The stories are vignette in nature – slice-of-

life. In addition, there are no prompts such as “write about your childhood, your children, or your career.” The focus of the story is entirely up to the writer. The stories are typically two to three pages (three to four minutes) in length. Longer stories are shared in sections.

There are three elements to the Writing-to-Remember Process: remembering, composing, and sharing. Each of these elements has its own skill set. Although the arrangement of these elements may seem linear, what emerged was an interconnectedness that makes the process more of an interactive system (See Figure 1).

Composing can pique additional memories. This is a personal or internal process. Sharing through peer critique strengthens technical aspects of the composition, which is an external process. Sharing can also prompt a reconstruction of memories. In talking to Carol about the sharing aspect of the process, she acknowledged its connection to memory.

It stimulated the brain process. I remember Ida talking about her experiences during integration and it made me think I could write a story about that and there is one brewing around perceptions. Everybody’s little story helped you think about the circumstances because we all were similar so we shared a lot of the same things in our childhood. I think the farm, except for maybe Jackie, is a theme, and Karen, with her camping. I wanted to camp every summer.

Jenny spoke of a similar experience.

People would mention things which would trigger a recollection. Sometimes I'm in the process of writing and something comes in. As a matter a fact, the other day I realized I left out something...in describing the physical environment of this house...I had completely forgotten to mention the falling down barns behind it.

Grace, who wrote and shared a story on the loss of her diamond followed by the loss of her husband, realized that, "losing the diamond was a premonition, an unrecognized premonition. During the course, doing the writing, as I was putting things down on paper, it all came to me." In a more recent story, *The Porch*, Grace witnessed sharing as a means of rekindling others' memories.

I refer to peanuts from Mackey's Ferry, North Carolina, salted in the shell and after the reading [Chris] said when you talked about Mackey's Ferry peanuts, I've got to tell you about Mackey's Ferry because he had a story about it. Then somebody else had a story about...it was so generic to everyone, everyone could see themselves someplace in the story even the men.

Carol shared a story about learning to drive her mother's Metropolitan automobile with a standard transmission on the hilly countryside of Connecticut. "Everybody reiterated their fear of the Peace Street hill." In addition, the group identified a flaw in her story. "One correction I got from everybody was, what was the clutch doing on the right side? I had it on the wrong side."

It wasn't until I got the feedback from the others who wondered, "How did you get all that stuff up into the attic?" It was the fact that we had two entrances, one

in the hall of the house and one in the garage. The questions and comments the writers' group had...it reminded me what I really needed to add in there [Karen].

The data above demonstrates that the W2R process is an interaction between three elements: Remembering, composing, and sharing. Each aspect of the process is discussed below.

### *Remembering*

The first element taught in the course is Remembering. Two methods of piquing memory demonstrated were freewriting and concept mapping. Freewriting is a form of informal writing free of constraints such as punctuation and grammar. Concept mapping is a technique for visualizing relationships between different concepts. For some of the writers, concept mapping was equally, if not more, helpful in composing their stories – aiding with organization and presentation. Note-taking, outlining, and journaling were also discussed. Two themes revealed through the interviewing process were journaling and truthfulness.

### *Journals as Memory Joggers*

Within the literature on writing therapy, journals are commonly referenced. Journals are a checkpoint between emotions and the world, allowing one to view feelings from a distance (Jacobs, 2004). Smyth and Greenberg (2000) found that this writing organizes chaotic emotional impressions in ways that are compatible with brain structure. Six of the ten participants referred to journals as helping them both remember and compose. Several participants had numerous journals, each holding a different function,

while others' journals followed a more linear or chronological sequence. Grace used gratitude journals. Ellen incorporated journals when the following event brought out the need for historical records.

When Sandy was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was 35, he stepped on a copperhead and it bit him and in the aftermath I thought you know we don't have any records, we don't take movies, we don't know what has been going on in this family. I need to start writing a journal. I pour my soul into my journals.

Carol said the Writing-to-Remember course got her journaling again. Sandy keeps multiple journals, "I've got a number of journals because there are also some special moments, I've started calling them mystical moments or magical moments, special occurrences or experiences that I had so I have a journal of those. Another spiritual one on where I come from." Jackie has written journals since she was 13 and Chris uses journals to develop writing ideas.

While journals jogged memories, those memories were then questioned by the writers for truthfulness. As demonstrated below, truthfulness is closely tied to reality, which is subject to plurality. This is demonstrated below and in Chapter 5. Several of the writers relied on consensus, passing their stories by family members who were present during the story event.

### *Truthfulness*

When working with memory and story, the issue of truth versus fiction comes to the forefront. Truth is a contested construct because the idea of what can be known is a

function of individual epistemology. An objectivist holds that truths are independent of beliefs, proposing that true statements copy objective reality. Pragmatists accept some subjectivity of truth, believing that facts are relative to specific problems and therefore mutable but still is verifiable. Those with a subjectivist proposition hold that truth depends on what we believe. For the radical constructivist there is no truth, only belief. Social constructivists hold that truth is historically and culturally constructed and shared through social processes.

Because of my constructivist epistemology, I handled this issue by emphasizing each individual's responsibility to draw that line. The writers ranged from objectivist through pragmatist in their 'truth checking'. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, Tornstam's gerotranscendence characteristic of a movement from duality to plurality emerged.

The writers incorporated several tactics to ensure the truthfulness of their memories. Additionally, the aspect of truthfulness was valued differently by the different writers. Chris checked his memories by thinking in greater detail and through the use of logic.

I remember in Ocracoke that one of my first summers, there were no roads but lots of sand and juniper trees and juniper berries and as soon as we'd get close, if the wind was blowing just right, you could smell the juniper berries where the summer sun had beat it to a sap and it had this sweet smell to it. As I remember the smell, I wondered, if I had it all rationalized in my head - that smell. Now



when I drive down I-40, that smell of the hog farms reminds me of smells around the outhouses and I thought, I remember the sweet smell, and I remember something about the outhouses, but how much of that sweet smell might have been the other smell. I guess the point I'm getting to is at this age I'm more aware that I need to be thinking when it comes to describing something. I have written some stuff that I've made a conscious effort to be more descriptive.

At the same time, Chris was in the minority when it came to story truthfulness.

I heard early on that it's not lying if it's entertaining. What I realized was that people tell tall tales and that's what humor is, you have to have some glimmer of reality then you can embellish it in some way. It might not be 100 percent true but it might be 100 percent entertaining. That's kind of what I do but in the train story and my first date, those were told pretty much the way they happened.

Of all the writers, Jenny was the most vocal regarding truthfulness. She incorporates several means to ensure that what she is writing is true to the time, place, and event.

It's just one of those bizarre things, how memory works. I know, I understand that memory is tricky. I'm trying to do research so that what I'm actually talking about is true. I've gone into deeds. I've gone into histories. I've gone to the National Geological Society. All kinds of detail stuff so I'm not relying just on what comes into my head....What you remember is memories from another time and you want to put it back in that time so I'm trying to be true to the time. I'm paying attention

to what was going on historically. I look at Time magazine so I'm keeping grounded with what was really going on in the cultural world at that time. I will read newspapers of that area when I'm back.

Another important source of fact checking for many of the writers was a member of their family—a sibling, parent, uncle or other relative.

I've tried to interview everyone connected. Not everyone was interested in participating but I have a lot of stories that I'm going to incorporate, not quotes but the elements that they introduce, I may attribute it to them, I don't know [Jenny].

When my sister read this, she said, "Do you remember fishing for the cutthroat trout?" Hmm, no, I'll have to remember that. Do you remember this, do you remember that? No, hmm, none of that. When I spoke to mom and she said she remembered it differently. I thought that the way I remembered it means something about what was important to me. Not that I remembered it incorrectly but I had placed emphasis on other things [Ellen].

Sandy attributes differences in she and her sister's memories to their contrasting personalities.

My memories are different than my sister's memories. She remembers things quite differently and maybe I write something that mother will later say, "No, this isn't the way it was but that's okay because it's my memory." And my memories won't be the same as hers [sister] because we've sat and talked and she'll say,

“Well, I don’t remember that.” But that’s the pessimist and optimist. She’s filtered out much of the negative from her memory.

Carol’s brother does not see their history identically, “We both remember different; not opposing, just different.” Still, Carol relies on family.

I had just come home from Connecticut and I had talked to my uncles about their memories and I wanted to confirm about grandma, everyone putting corn cobs on her plate. I thought that I was right about that and they confirmed that that indeed had happened.

Karen found personal documents helpful, particularly old diaries she found in the attic while cleaning it out recently.

I had already written the Backlog story but there were some holes in it and I wasn’t sure of the dates. I was having trouble trying to figure out did I do this, was I off this summer, or was it a summer job or real job or just what and then when I found the diaries in the attic, I thought “Oh good, now I know exactly when I did this and also exactly what I did.”...When I write, I tend to, if I’m not certain of the facts, I probably wouldn’t write it down. I’m not to the point of writing fiction.

However, Karen is one who began to add dialogue to her stories after hearing Jackie’s stories that involved extensive dialogue. I asked Beth, a retired school teacher, if she had ever thought about adding dialogue to her stories.

If I have any dialogue it is what I remember hearing and there are probably times I could put in dialogue but I would be making it up and sometimes I listen to Jackie and think, do you truly remember each of those conversations but she has a wonderful way of doing that. Any quote I have ever had in is because I truly remember it verbatim. That's not real easy...to remember exact quotes unless it was repeated many times. I'm not one to embellish. I want to share these as non-fiction. Not something I've made up.

As shown above, several of the writers did acknowledge differences in memories by those who had shared the same experience and many held a place on the continuum between fact versus fiction because there is not clear delineation.

Turning memories into stories to be shared was the overriding purpose of the writers in this research. How these individuals converted the thoughts and ideas that comprised their memories into written prose is the focus of the next section on the theme Composing.

### *Composing*

Each writer demonstrated a unique story-writing style that became apparent on the last day of class as each read aloud the story they had been working on. Those continuing in the writers' group have further developed and refined their personal styles. Below, the writers share both their writing preferences and their views on being writers.

### *Writing Preferences*

Two lines of questioning focused on the participants' techniques in writing. The first questions focused on whether the writers composed a story in their heads before putting ink to paper or if they 'dumped' their ideas onto paper then crafted them. The second line of questioning, involved using the computer versus handwriting in composing their stories. It should be noted that in the Writing-to-Remember class, students worked on one story over the six-week semester. During the final class, each author read his or her story aloud whether computer generated or handwritten. For the writer's group, stories were composed prior to the monthly meeting and disseminated via email. Access to a computer and the internet was therefore required and some classmates were limited from continuing with the writers' group. All participants in this research took the course and attended the writers' group.

Writing preferences emerged as a theme as the writers discussed techniques that supported and strategies that hindered them in their remembering, composing, and sharing. There was no particular technique that all writers used, though many experimented with strategies brought up on class such as concept mapping and sharing in the writers' group of such artifacts as journals, diaries, photos, news articles, and even cookie cutters.

*Internal versus external drafting.* Comments made during the monthly writers' group indicated that some of the participants composed their stories mentally before physically committing them to paper. During the first interview, I asked the writers if they composed their stories in their minds or if they let them take shape on paper. When

posed this question, Ellen answered immediately, “It’s in my head. That’s why Carol gets so mad at me because she says it takes her a long time to write her stories and I write mine in a half hour.” But Ellen does not necessarily wish to be this kind of writer.

For me I think this is a flaw...this is a failure. If you have to write papers, you have to develop a thought. My writing is terse because it is difficult for me to really develop a thought which is what an author of a book needs to do which is why they get writers block because they have to keep developing and I can’t do that at all. But I saw that some people, like Jackie, on and on and on and this is so spectacular that she can keep developing this.

Jackie is another who composes in her head.

It is so similar to what I do in my improv performance and I once said to a teacher, “Oh, I don’t craft” and she said, “You do craft but you craft in the moment.” So I think, yes, I’m an improv queen and my writing is not nearly as crafted or polished as I want it to be, however, it does come out pretty clearly.

When asked if she composed in her head before writing, Karen answered, “Yes, I think subconsciously I must have thought it through exactly what the story was, how things went, have it pretty much...what I wanted to say.” Grace was similar in her process, “That’s the way I write. I think a long time then I just sit down and write.”

For other writers, composing occurs primarily outside of their heads.

I remember getting started by making a list and I still do that, maybe not with all the circles [concept mapping] even on my computer, I will put the title of the

story and just start listing what I want to include to get back to it at another time [Sandy].

When Sandy is ready to compose the story, she allows time to reflect. "I put the stories down and go away from it then come back. Some of our members are doing it and turning it in. I like to write and rework it and reflect on it." Jenny is another who spends extensive time rewriting, "Oh, I'm an editor ad nauseam because what sounded right today, a week from now sounds artificial. What I want this to read like is something like a conversation you are having." Although Karen stated that she does a lot of the composing in her head, ideas from the class have impacted her writing process.

I think in your class, having that thought to just go ahead and write, don't worry about punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, anything like that, just get your thoughts down on paper - some way to release your inhibitions and just write. Afterwards I might go back and outline but the freedom to just sit down and writing it out to remember it.

Technology has impacted the way writers are able to massage their compositions. Carol is one writer who has seen a difference from handwriting to the white-out tape of the IBM Selectric typewriter to the spell-check and cut-and-paste functions of the computer.

I think some of the editing has come with the use of the computer. It is so much easier. For instance, when I write handwritten letters, now unfortunately they are sympathy letters and those you can't just dash out. I will do a draft and insert and

scratch. When I write for the League [of Women Voters], for the most part, I compose on the computer. I find myself sort of concentrating in the beginning and it starts to flow and I can get going. Be less edited. Maybe I'm tired of editing at that point.

All the participants in the study were in different phases of computer competence. All used a computer. There seemed to be no difference based on age or gender. Ninety-year-old Ida, a retired Extension Specialist, was more comfortable with email than Jackie, a 55-year-old yoga instructor. Because all the participants were born and raised prior to the introduction of the personal computer, several questions revolved around these tools for composing.

*Computer-assisted versus handwritten.* The generation represented in this study may be the last to reflect the digital divide our society has experienced. The children of these writers were schooled with computers in the classroom, at least by the time they entered college. Although all participants had access to a computer, some still preferred to compose by hand.

I'd just write the thoughts as they came to me. I could write better with pen and paper then doing it on the computer. I'd go back to the computer when I was ready to share in class. Writing it longhand, I would write on every other line so if I thought of something different, I could stick it in there [Karen].

I write in longhand. I'm a good typist but I don't like to think and type. I'd rather write than think. I just sit right here at this [round table in the dining area], decide



how long it's going to be and just write until it's down. I don't stop and redo, I just do it and then I go back of course before I take it to class. Make sure there are no grammatical errors [Grace].

When asked if finishing the computer course she is currently taking will change her process, Grace answered, "I think I'll still write longhand and move it over." At 55, Jackie is the youngest of the group. She is a native of Essex, England and a free-spirit with an irreverent view of modern convenience and convention.

I swore I wouldn't have a computer but then I got a husband so I got a computer. So I've had a computer but I just had never been able to craft in the moment on the computer because writing is a visceral action [waving arms wildly] and I'm a dancer and physical person. So during the class I didn't make that shift. During the writing group phase, I've made that shift, where I pour the shitty first draft...this is my real shitty first draft and even so, I've got it down, I've got the story down on the computer, no writing first, I've told the story but I hadn't written it down before. And I've done it all on the computer.

Jackie can remember her first encounter with the computer.

I remember going to a writers' conference at the beach, years ago, the whole week, and I was out dancing in the water thinking "Where are these people?" It's beautiful out and they were on laptops. They took them everywhere. And I thought I'm a dancer not a writer. I cannot...but I was always impressed how they could just... so then I thought one day I'm going to have a laptop so I can sit

down and write a story. I've realized that goal, if you like, by being in the writers group.

The flexibility in composing wherever you are or in a more supportive environment is why Sandy was learning to use a laptop.

I have gotten a laptop because I think sitting [in the sunroom] would be much more pleasurable than sitting in that dark room down there. But I haven't gotten going on that computer enough to be comfortable with a new machine. I've got to give the laptop time.

Regardless of the writing tool used, all of the participants have a history of writing; be it a story published in a high school publication or letters written to grandparents who moved away when the writer was young. The next section looks at the idea of "being a writer."

### *Being a Writer*

I remember saying to a friend of mine, who was a writer, if I write everyday can I say I'm a writer? So, it's kind of like I'm a writer if I write everyday as opposed to I've published something, because I couldn't give a shit about publishing. It was something that one day maybe but that wasn't the motivation [Jackie].  
 "I don't know if I'll ever call myself a writer, more the holder of family history [Carol].

This section on Being a Writer looks at the 'writing life'. The two youngest participants had published written work and would consider themselves writers. The remainder of the group struggled with labeling themselves writers. This observation led

to questions regarding the participants early experiences with writing including early role modeling, encouragement (or discouragement), and letterwriting. In addition to writing history, I delved into each writers habits including when and where they write and what motivates them to sit and write.

*Early experiences.* In some instances, writing at an early age filled a need as demonstrated by Jenny and Ellen.

Because I was the only girl in the family and I was kind of a solitary person, the eldest. My mother and I did not have a great relationship, let's put it that way, that's not the issue, what gets me to the point is that I spent a lot of time in my room when I was a little girl and I ended up writing a lot. I would write letters to pen pals. I'd write poems and little stories. And even in high school, I won a prize for writing and people have frequently exclaimed about letters I've written...about the quality of them, so I've been that kind of writer...I've always fantasized about writing. I've taken a couple of writing classes, most of them comp type of writing. I have a hard time sticking with facts. I start with facts and I want to make it more than it actually is so I enjoy it. I've never actually done anything until the current project that I'm trying to do [Jenny].

While Jenny spent a lot of time alone growing up, Ellen moved a lot, leaving friends behind. Her response was to escape through reading. The practices of letter writing and reading came out early in the first interviews, subsequently I asked about the role of these in each participant's past.

We moved a lot so my friendships were interrupted and I was pretty lonely. So I did extensive reading. My parents were very well educated and they read to us, gave us books. We didn't have television until I was 15. There was a lot of good stuff for kids to read... I think that people who do not do an extensive amount of reading have more trouble with [writing]. I was amazed to find in high school and even in college, brilliant people – in engineering and medicine – who couldn't fight their way through an English class. Clearly it is not a question of intelligence. I just think it's heavy reading.

Beth, a retired language arts teacher, remembers that there was not the emphasis on writing when she was growing up.

I remember particularly doing a lot of reading. And I do remember doing some writing, it wasn't a big emphasis back in those days. I remember we had a little school newspaper in elementary school and I would often have something published in that little paper, a poem or story, or something that had happened in the classroom.

All of the participants mentioned an affinity for reading, many from an early age.

At least four of the ten in the research group were currently active in book clubs.

I think I liked to read. I think I had a lousy education in the language arts. I know mother got books from the parochial school to help me because I was in the public schools with phonics. But as far as writing, I don't think I ever got decent writing...True story...when I went to college we all took freshman English and I

had a man teacher and one of the first assignments was to write about what is a college man. Finally, the night before the paper was due I'm sitting in the library and I had this inspiration and I wrote the paper on the analogy of a college man is like a fountain, it spews all this... he took that paper and read it to the class and said, "Just look at this analogy, this is wonderful." I'm not sure I knew what analogy was but believe me, everything I wrote after that had an analogy [Sandy].

The first participant I interviewed spoke of letter writing, so I asked each subsequent participant about their letter-writing histories. "There were periods where I was a very good letter writer – long, descriptive letters but once the kids came that ended" [Ellen]. Ida has a long history of letter-writing. "I write letters. And all my life I've written letters. I had a little boyfriend from the third grade on that I wrote to."

Well, in my youth everyone wrote letters because you couldn't afford phone calls and there were no computers. So letter writing was a big deal. Like when you went off to college, you wrote letters to your mom because you couldn't afford to call her...I loved writing letters. I'm not much of an email person but I love to write letters. It is something I did to stay close. Then one time there was a subject I wanted to write about so I sent the same letter to about seven people...they knew I was sending it...it was something I wanted to share from my heart...that I had lost a friend. So, I still write letters all the time [Grace].

Both Jackie and Beth were close to their grandparents. Moves interrupted these relationships but for Jackie, her letters attempted to maintain a connection.

When I was about 11, my grandparents moved away and I was really close to my grandfather and mother. They moved to the other side of the country which in England might as well have been Siberia. We went once a year, a day's drive. And I wrote them 13-page letters for years and occasionally got a postcard back. But I think that is when I started to write and save.

Jackie did not receive the encouragement she sought from her mother regarding her writing. Her dad, however, was somewhat of a role model, leading Jackie down the path of irreverent story-writing.

I remember writing a poem about a stupid, bloody fairy when I was about 9 or 10 and she said that's nice, go study the wildflowers and learn their names. She read a lot but she didn't write. She was a teacher. She spent her life reading good stories and that kind of thing but she didn't write. Well that's not true. She had notebooks everywhere filled with facts on trees, buildings, art. Proper things...My dad was an accountant who wrote prose on legal size accounting paper. And he would say the stars had to be just right and the right amount of alcohol in his bloodstream for the words to flow. So, he was sort of mystical...he was totally anti-religion, he hated religion but there was a sort of naughty, mysterious, fun, irreverent streak that he had that came out in his writing.

Other participants had writers in the family. According to Beth, "my brother is the one who truly would love in his heart to be a writer. At one time he made an office and would go there and write and he has a lot of rejection letters and stuff like that. And my

sister is also really creative.” Her father wrote as well. “After my dad died, in Wilmington there was an article in the paper about the fact that when he retired he wrote down all of his memoirs from the time he was a little boy to...he did not write with such emotion as facts.” Beth’s brother is now entering these memoirs into the computer.

Sandy feels a twinge of competition with her sister. “She’s an excellent writer. And my daughters are good writers. And I had to see if I could write.” Grace has family ties to writing as well. “My father was very eloquent in his writing and his speech but he was not a writer. My mother was an avid reader. I have a brother who has his doctorate in education and he’s a writer. Not fiction, texts for his field. He’s published.” She also received early encouragement regarding her writing from a professor and continues to have her writing validated through her brother.

It was my salvation in school, because I could always put something on paper and get by. When I was a freshman, my advisor was my English professor and he said that I should nurture that gift. That I had a little bit of a gift. Which of course I never did but I’ve always enjoyed writing....I sent [my brother] some of my writing and he said he never knew I could write. He was so thrilled. And he said, “promise me that you will just sit down once a day for an hour and do that” and I wrote him back and told him that I hadn’t been doing any of that because things kept getting in my way. So he sent me a book, something about getting out of your own way. The blocks that prevent art from happening, whatever your creative thing is.

The book that Grace is referring to is *The War of Art* by Stephen Pressfield (2002). In this book, the author writes about the discipline required of creative endeavors. The next section covers the writer's routines, habits, and tactics including their motivation and discipline to keep writing.

*Writing habits.* The writers struggled with making time for their writing. Developing habits such as outlining, drafting, and editing at the same time every day or in the same place helped some to discipline themselves. Some writers wrote in the mornings, several in 'writing-friendly' rooms, and a couple looked forward to the flexibility laptops would bring to their writing in regard to location. "When I write...I think the period from when I actually open my eyes and 3-4 hours later is my time to do that, if I'm going to do it, that's the time." [Chris]. When asked if he writes in the same place, he replied, "Yes, and I've started writing everything on the computer because I'm a terrible speller and when I can see it in print, it improved my spelling." Carol is also a morning writer and admittedly bad speller. "I go into that room, I get up early in the morning, make myself some special coffee, and go in there when it is all quiet and write for 45 minutes." Even though Carol has a preferred routine, it often gets pushed aside. "The problem is too many things pop up. I need to walk. And I like to walk when it's cold so that butts into my writing habit. But I like to write when I'm fresh, right out of bed. I like to do lots of things in the morning. If I could get up at 5 in the morning but I don't want to do that anymore."



Many participants mentioned a lack of time in retirement. Ellen complained, “Here I am retired and I manage to have a schedule that looks like a shotgun pattern. You can’t put a chunk of time together because you have this, this, and this.” Sandy feels the same, “I have a list of those stories that I want to do. I just need to get busy. There are too many things in life I want to do.”

Discipline emerged as a theme in answering the question of “Why did you take this course?” Sandy took the Writing-to-Remember course in 2004. “I thought writing memories is something I wanted to do and I wasn’t getting it done so it was motivation, now you are going to do it, which is why I came back to the follow-up session. And it’s been good that I can do some of those things.” She continued in the writers’ group for the same reason. “To keep me motivated with writing. I needed the discipline so instead of thinking ‘I’m going to do this someday,’ I got busy and did it.” Beth agreed. “I thought this will just kind of push and I needed that push. If I hadn’t been coming to that little group [my stories] would have been in my head but I wouldn’t have written them down.” Jenny echoes their sentiments. “I wanted discipline, being forced to put things on paper. It just seemed like this was an avenue.” When asked why she stayed on with the writers’ group after the class ended, Ellen admitted, “in a word, enjoyment. I enjoyed the discipline of writing. I know that if I don’t have a discipline, I won’t force myself to do the writing.”

Karen, like Sandy, took the writing course in 2004, returned in 2006 then proceeded to coordinate the writers’ group.

I'm one of these people that would probably not write stories if I didn't have to come up with it. It's not that high a priority in my life, that it might just give me that little nudge that I would need to keep writing, that I would have to do this every month or so. And the people that were in the class seemed to me to be the kind of people I would be comfortable doing that with.

The pressure of having to share was motivation for most of the writers to keep producing stories. "I think the most important thing was that we had to do this story at the end [of the course]. It was to me the best part. It forced me to journal, to figure out what I wanted to write about, then actually doing it with a deadline. And that's what I like about this writing group, it forces me to an every-other-month deadline. Actually, I wish it was every month so I was a little more prolific" [Carol].

Grace also mentioned the sharing aspect, particularly in the writers' group.

Well just the fact that I have to produce something. I like to go the times I'm not writing. I love to go listen to everyone else and I just enjoy being with the people but when it is my turn, I want to go first and get it over with. I have enjoyed it overall or I wouldn't be there.

Although Jackie signed up for the course to write about some difficult issues only to realize that her peers were writing uplifting stories to share with family, she still discovered motivation in the writers' group.

The motivation for the writing group was a monthly commitment to getting something on a computer because I've got slews of things that I don't have

anywhere other than...so to start to document if you like for posterity, whatever that means. Probably for my creative journey is what it means...and the sense that in a group, a culling, caring, community would develop more so than it does in a class.

Deadlines motivated Chris. "I knew I had to come up with a story so the day I got your email I jotted down on my computer seven or eight topics that I could write about and filed those away and thought the first one I'll write about is the Fort Fisher Hermit."

The writers' preferences for composing in their heads or on paper, and their inclination to write longhand or on the computer together with their early writing experiences and current writing habits defined their practice of composing. However, it was sharing that most motivated the writers' compositions. Sharing occurred in the final session of the class and was the purpose of the monthly writers' group. The next theme includes data sets supporting the sharing aspect of the W2R process.

### *Sharing*

Two subcategories emerged under the sharing aspect of the W2R process. The first was the idea of making stories entertaining. The second was the impact of the intended audience.

### *Entertainment*

When asked about sharing her stories, Carol was quick to respond. "If I'm going to bother to write, I'm going to share it." Karen agreed. "Once you write something, you really do like to share." The extension of the sharing aspect of the class through the

creation of a monthly writers' group ensured an on-going forum. This required a commitment on the part of the writers and the facilitator, as well as the bookstore that furnished the meeting space, but it ensured the continuation of story development for legacy purposes.

Another characteristics specific to the Writing-to-Remember process that enabled sharing was the limit placed on story length to allow for more readings per meeting. This limit encouraged short, entertaining stories about specific events within particular contexts. Writers were pressed to be concise yet complete in their narratives.

Karen is one writer who initially came to class wanting to write an autobiography but ended up writing life stories. I asked her about this shift, whether it was a personal choice or the way the course was directed.

I think it was the way the class was directed. I think the autobiographical stuff is more to go with my pictures than anything else and I think I've mostly done that. These [stories] are more events. Also, to make it more like stories to share publicly with people so you want them to be a little more interesting than just an autobiographical... Stories can be more fun to do.

Karen's more recent stories have included dialogue.

Yes, I thought it would make it more interesting. I guess with Jackie, she has dialogue in her stories, and not being a writer, or not having done much writing, I'd like to learn some of these techniques to make the stories more interesting so I thought "dialogue."

The aspect of entertaining the audience came up with Ellen when we were discussing a story of about a snowball fight when she was young. “This was sort of early on in the writing, after we’d started the class and I was looking for something, casting about in my memory for something that was short, succinct but a striking memory that I thought other people would find interesting and that one popped to mind.”

Well, I had to come up with a writing and I think it started with “What should I write about?” Should I bore them with this or that and it can’t last more than four minutes so it has to keep their attention so what can I tell that would keep their attention and I list those and think none of this will work. So, I had just had a little party that week out on my porch and we had a wonderful time, a group of women my age. All of them widowed or divorced. We just got together and had wine and I fixed a good meal and we just sat on the porch with the fans going, so we were cool and we ate peanuts and laughed and giggled [Grace].

Of all the writers, Chris spoke most about entertaining his readers. The singer-songwriter explained that, “Some of the people were reading pretty poignant stories and I wanted something more lighthearted...I like to help people to laugh, even at my own expense. I don’t have this big need to be admired. I don’t mind people laughing at me so if I have a funny story that happens to me I don’t mind telling it.”

Chris was not alone in writing humor into his stories and bringing laughter to the group. In a story on her family’s first trip to Yellowstone National Park, Ellen shares an encounter with a bear. “The other time a bear approached we were around the campsite at

suppertime and [my brother] protected us by jumping into the car, locking the doors, and blowing the horn, leaving us all outside the car with the bear. It went away after awhile.” Ellen’s gift of humor may have come from her father after listening to her story about his unfortunate choking incident on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. “Dad left the hospital after six days...he wanted to find the man who removed the chunk of meat from his airway, since it was a big piece and he had been enjoying it. Now we know he doesn’t have brain damage.”

Sandy also shared stories of her father that showed her (and his) humorous side. One in particular, recounts his “disdain” for a family pet.

I can remember my dad complaining about not sleeping nights because that darn cat would stomp through the living room. Now our living room floors were carpeted with a plush green pile carpet so even this must have been one almighty cat to stomp hard enough to make a sound. In his later years, Toby claimed the leather top of my father’s desk to stretch out for his afternoon nap. Not wanting to disturb Toby’s slumber, Dad was often seen sitting sideways and working on a clipboard laid over the side drawer.”

Story characters, like Ellen and Sandy’s fathers, frequently added an element of amusement. In a story Karen shared, two cafeteria cooks add an entertaining punch to the story.

The kitchen staff was a motley crew. Our two head cooks were ex-military, trained by the U.S. army with lots of experience feeding men. One was a

grandfatherly type, rather plump, soft spoken and thoughtful. The other one reminded me of a Bantam rooster, small, fast moving, full of spirit and energy. They had both honed their cooking skills in the military, a more basic approach to food preparation than my home economics training. I will never forget looking at the stockpot where they were making chicken broth for soup and seeing chicken feet sticking out of the top of the broth in the pot. "The feet add to the flavor" I was told when I questioned the cook. I convinced myself the long cooking time would take care of any impurities that came from the feet. [Karen]

Sometimes the entire story was a retelling of a comical event, such as Beth's Little Girls and Big Girls, Carol's Clutched by the Clutch, and Jackie's recounting of her frequent name changes in What's in a Name. It was not just in the sharing of the stories in class and in the writers' group that humor emerged. Throughout the interviews, as noted in the transcripts, laughter erupted between the writer and myself as we revisited stories and events triggered by the W2R class and group.

Although many of the stories shared were to entertain children, grandchildren, or relatives at some point, at least one of the writer's stories shared with me was not shared with the group. Ellen was not sure she could mask the characters identities such that friends in the group would not recognize them. This introduces the theme that emerged on Audience Influence.

*Audience Influence*

The theme of writing to entertain introduces the notion that audience influences what and how a story is told. The dynamics of the group or audience is an important element that a life-story facilitator must gauge whether for a class session or storytelling forum. Some of the participants in this study shared negative experiences they or someone they knew had in sharing a story. Carol's aunt, a published author, was rebuked by the family for sharing information in her memoirs that several relatives preferred to keep private. Carol, in response, looks carefully at who will be reading or hearing her stories.

The breakdown comes with whom I want to share it with. My stories are more aimed at my family although I have to say I think of cousin Net and what happened when she did her little Connecticut Yankee thing and it was not good. I worry about some of my perceptions and sharing with my brother Tad, who I have a pretty good relationship with. He can get prickly sometimes and I worry about whether I'm remembering it the way he does and whether that will tick him off.

Jackie had a bad experience with a local writers group.

I had driven from Raleigh to Durham and one man grumped the whole way. I noticed he was incredibly critical about everybody and I was defending everybody so I was reading, thinking I was in a safe place, and then I saw his scowl and so all my stuff came up. But I didn't realized until later, I went into a



yoga class after that, lost my voice while I was teaching, when I got home, I journaled knowing that it was something to do with reading that piece.

For the most part, the participants found the Writing-to-Remember group a safe place to share.

I think that once we started sharing stories and people had this feeling that so many had these stories inside them and its no good to have a story inside if you can't share it with someone and I just thought, that would be really nice. I would like to have a group that could sit down and feel comfortable in sharing stories and that it might put a little pressure on me to write stories [Karen].

Jenny had some trepidation in the beginning. "At first it was extremely difficult but once I did it, it was not a problem. It was okay. Because it was a totally non-threatening environment, there was no critique, it was a lot easier."

Everyone was very gentle with feedback to each other...I didn't have any trouble reading, I do a lot of public reading, but I was more guarded about what I wrote. I did not take off the gloves. In this last story, I take off the gloves a lot more. This is to you... I will have to do some name changing. I don't know if I'll share it or not. But I was aware that my writing style and what I was saying was not what I'd done in class [Ellen].

Creating a safe environment for sharing is an integral part of the W2R Process both in the class and in the monthly group. Karen and I reminisced about a writer in the

first course offered in 2004 who was particularly shy but shared openly about his love of music and dancing.

He passed away. I think he had heart problems. Yes, I loved to hear his stories... really did strike a chord with me. In fact, after he was gone, I was sorry I had never, you know, tried to make more contact and try to discuss that, because as an individual he was very, very reserved and until he said something about his dancing, I had no clue what he was really like. And I think this is often the way with these Learning-in-Retirement folks. I think they don't let their hair down enough. It's just maybe the way we were brought up [Karen].

I proceeded to question Karen on whether she thought this phenomenon was generational. "Maybe generational, where you just didn't spill your guts, you didn't get too personal with people, you didn't tell them what you were really thinking or where you were at."

Gender makeup of the writers group came up with several of the female participants. "I wish there were more guys...men in the group. I think that other points of view are important" [Karen].

I was so surprised, interested, in the men telling stories of wartime and how important that was in their lives. And I think there is a lot there to understand about what happened. In every civilization, the women have never fully understood because it has not been their story. Another thing that was striking was the commonality in our stories because we're 65 and older, many of us, there's

commonality that we don't talk about much. Things we did as children. We all knew what we were talking about. Everyone was very gentle with feedback to each other instead of "that is a superficial whatever", no one ever said anything like that [Ellen].

I asked Ellen if she thought this phenomenon was developmental or generational. "Developmental, and that is a piece of wisdom learned right there. We are so much more respectful to each other now than a smart mouthed 16-year-old. Respectful of what other people have dealt with." I pursued this line of questioning by asking if commonality in experience plays a role. "I think there is respect for the differences too. That was another thing that surprised me. That was interesting. It was so interesting to hear people's Germanic background, their farm background, their camping background. Not all of us did camping. Not all of us had cookie cutters handed down" [Ellen].

Many of the writers were open to talking about differences and commonalities.

In some ways our backgrounds are very similar and so we're "Oh yes, I remember that, too." On the other hand, there are some people who've had quite different backgrounds and it's like reading a novel to listen to Jackie read and see where she's come from and dealt with. People come through these difficult times and evolve and that is wonderful and of course the men...by the time I started, I think there was only one story from one of the men. There is certainly a comradery that comes when you share stories [Sandy].

Karen had mentioned that the typical individual in this Learning-in-Retirement program is somewhat reserved, “that you just didn’t spill your guts.” Jackie is of a different mold – sharing embarrassing and traumatic experiences as a means of working through grief and self-validation. For this reason, Jackie found the group to be somewhat unsafe.

There’s not a lot of struggle in [this group’s] writing. I learn more about what it was like for people I don’t really know, more middle-class, white American people who are quite nice. I just come and try to learn everything I can. What it doesn’t provide me, because of the way they write, I don’t feel as much safety. If I were in a group where everyone was revealing their stuff and I keep thinking that this time I’m just going to write a couple of pages and it’s going to be short and sweet. That’s the goal. So, that I can prove I can be just as casual and light. They bring up a lot of correctness and Britishness and middle-class – this is what we do, we just talk about the nice things. My lifestyle is very different and the boxes I’m trying to get out of, it’s nice to know that for some people it’s not a box. I mean, maybe in this lifetime, I’ll have a life like that. I don’t know.

Although Jackie completed the course and stayed with the writers’ group for a year and a half, she has since found a new writing course aimed at connecting writers “to their deepest levels of intuition and healing.”

The process of remembering, composing, and sharing as a means of tapping the unique creations of the study’s 10 participants was illuminated in the eight emerging

themes. These themes were: journals as memory joggers, truthfulness, internal versus external drafting, computer versus handwritten, early experiences, writing habits, entertainment and audience influence.

Based on the data from interviews and field and participant notes, the majority of the participants found the W2R process an enjoyable and productive one, creating connections and community. The themes discussed up to this point regarding the writer's intentions and more specifically, the process itself, connect to the first research question: How does the life-story process foster and shape the writers' understanding of their experiences? The second interview question – What insights emerge? – is answered in part by the stories themselves.

### Writer Expressions

Within the theme of Writer Expressions, the outcomes of the W2R process are explored. Subcategories of themes include self-care, change in perspective, and the essence of place, people, and things. The first two subcategories – Self-Care and Change in Perspective – include data from the interviews. The third subcategory – The Essence of People, Places, and Things – presents data from the stories themselves. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I had originally sought the writers' stories as prompts for the second interview and they were used this way. However, what became apparent was how insightful the stories themselves were.

### *Self-care*

Many of the participants used journals as a means of understanding and healing pain. The use of story as self-care came as a surprise to several writers. As mentioned in the first section, Jackie was the only student who came to the course with the specific purpose of writing to heal. While Jackie did not find the therapeutic outlet she was searching for, she did discover the power in this writing experience.

What I'm realizing is that I have an inner belief that I didn't realize I had. That what I write down is important and that is a liberation part for me coming from where I've come from. And what I have to say is important even if I don't share it with everyone, it's important...that if one person gets one thing that touches them.

Two sub-themes emerged within Self-Care: Working through Grief and Self-Validation. Dealing with the loss of a loved one was mentioned by four of the writers. Grace had recently lost her husband, while Beth and Sandy were working through grief at the loss of parents and Ida the loss of a longtime friend. Self-Validation was reflected in the writers' coming to a better understanding of themselves through their stories. Many participants shared comparisons with themselves and parents.

#### *Working through Grief*

As mentioned earlier, writing can serve a self-care function including the support of healthy grieving due to the death of a loved one or the loss of one's health, career, or important relationship. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1973), who has studied countless numbers of people both young and old who were dying, found that people pass through

the following stages: denial & isolation, rage and anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and hope. Stories are commonly shared at funerals to unite those grieving. These stories hold emotional remnants of isolation, anger, depression, and in the case of the majority of stories shared in this study, acceptance and hope. Acceptance and hope are demonstrated under the themes of Self-Validation, Change in Perspective and The Essence of People, Places, and Thinks.

Grace was one, who used her story of losing her husband as a means of moving through grief. Grace began writing *The Loss* during the Writing-to-Remember class but it was in the writers' group that Grace shared this story.

I didn't know if I could do it without crying. I was very apprehensive because I didn't want it to be an emotional thing. But I wanted to share with the group because if we were writing about our guts then that's what I would write about and I was hoping I could get through without tears which I think I did. Well, when I read it to them, it was like my catharsis to read it to someone out loud and these people are basically strangers in my life. I only know them through this writing group. I did read this to my children and my grandchildren and that was easier than the strangers.

Some writers captured images of lost loved ones, whom they have come to see differently. Sandy wrote about her father, who passed away less than two years ago. "Some of these stories I've written since he died, and that has been part of my healing process and also it's been important...dad was a difficult person to live with but there

was a soft heart there.” Beth was close to her grandparents and wrote several stories about them.

One of the things that made [my grandmother] such a strong figure is that I lived in the same house with her until I was 6 years old. And then from the time I was six until I was twelve, I could walk to her house in two minutes.... I think as you can see, she was certainly just a very large figure in my life and I guess the older I’ve gotten the larger she’s become in my mind. It is interesting, I always knew she was there and she was very special to me...I think I must have thought about how much I was loved. That was certainly a feeling especially when I write about my Grandma Johns.

Ida, who turned 90 during the first year of the writers’ group, plans to write about a longtime friend who died recently.

We met when I first came to Raleigh and we’ve already had our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary - that was 1993. I would talk about how we met and how much I enjoyed her. As time went by, my mother came to live with me and eventually [Nettie] came to marry. Oh, both of us came to Raleigh at different times. After 50 years we decided to celebrate.

### *Self-validation*

Writers found self validation (the act of affirming oneself through one’s beliefs and actions) through the process of writing their stories. Sandy came to the 2004 class to better understand her connection to her gardens.



What I thought I'd do when I started your class was to put a book together of photos...I have plants in the garden that I carried from Ohio back in 1970 so thinking where does this gardening come from, where is the beginning. In fact, I gave you, it is only half a page, Gardening in Tiffin which is my answer to "Where did I get grounded in the soil?" We had a garden club in Ohio that was actually a garden club not a social...a big disappointment when I got here was it was more social, it was not the same thing.... Gardening is my therapy. It all comes naturally if I can just get outside.

Ellen, a biologist who served in the Peace Corp after college, also shares a connection to the natural world. "I must tell you that what's going on in the natural world is my heart. My family is important but I can't live five minutes without thinking about what's going on in the natural world." Jackie speaks of a connection to the earth on a broader scale; a female and humanitarian scale.

It has to do with women finding voice, speaking their truth, knowing that it is important and daring to be bodacious enough and daring enough to live anyway and to believe, to be able to self-validate what we really know is important. For me, it's predominantly a woman's issue because in my stories, it was usually, it was male qualities, it wasn't always just men, but it was masculine qualities in my mother and men, the patriarchal, punitive, hurtful, power-over patterns that got in the way of humanity flourishing in my life. And so, being a part of that channeling of energy, a rebirth...there is something about women's bodies, I'm

just getting more of a connection on this...women's bodies and the earth, the parallels of what society is to do, especially the empires. This whole thing about power, sharing power...and I see women so often doing it so well.

All but one of the participants in the study held bachelor's degrees and several earned Master's degrees. There is a definite thread of independence and individualism among the writers. For instance, Karen, age 77 and a retired dietician wrote several stories of her camping experiences. The Backlog story is about working at a summer camp when she was 24 years of age.

We camped as a family when I was growing up and it went all the way through my husband and I camping and the travel trailer and that I still need to work on and finish. But I'm going to have this long thing on camping and tie all that together. The Backlog was kind of in the middle of all that. It reminded me especially in writing about it that I was capable and independent, I got there on my own, I didn't have a parent take me, it probably reminded me that I was more independent than I realized when I went there.

Chris, age 60 and retired from the merchant marines, had a realization as he was writing a story for the group.

From the time I was three years old until I was 12 we moved about 13 times so we were constantly moving and that's the other thing by the way, now that I know that you may not remember that story I have to tell you that that story helps to explain a lot about my personality because I came to understand my relationship

with materialism. I am as poor as a church mouse and I feel good about it. That is the weird thing and I've been that way for a long time and when I was making good money and I ...then in writing that story I realized that when we moved we could only move what we could fit into the back of the car. So I had to start over again and because of that I don't hold on to material things much because I realize that things that are really important, I can get again. Things like photographs, went in the car, things that couldn't be replaced. So, the story about all the moving brought that realization.

Beth spent time overseas and this experience influenced her in the writing of her story *Little Girls, Big Girls*. "I absolutely loved dressing up. And I still love clothes today which I think got enhanced when we lived in France for awhile. There, they dress up for the supermarket."

While Beth was influenced by the French in the 70s, Ida was impacted by the civil rights movement in the 50s and 60s. Several of her stories involved the process of integration. In one story, Ida writes about a young African American couple obviously on their honeymoon whom had stopped at a diner in North Carolina where Ida was just finishing eating.

I just cannot forget that I didn't go help that black couple get food that day. It's haunted me ever since that I didn't help them yet I knew and other people that I've told agree with me that that [man serving food in the restaurant] would have tracked me up the road. Yes, he would have. At the time, they had a KKK

network that wouldn't quit. My coworkers, they were sympathizers of the KKK, and they would be looking after me but nevertheless they would have doubts in their mind, or they wouldn't have appreciated that I wanted to help that couple get some food.

I asked Ida where her beliefs in racial equality came from.

I was from the mountains [Virginia]. We had very few black people and I think...my father was not prejudiced. My mother's mother lived in a town where there was the Civil War...and she was pretty much against Lincoln. One of the cousins asked, "Where did grandma get all that prejudice?" Well she lived with it. I think she passed it on. So mother didn't think she was, but she was, it was just a part of her. I remember that after daddy stopped teaching he had a store that we worked and a Bible disappeared and he couldn't find it. He was friends with this old black fellow that would come in and [dad] said, "Did you steal my Bible?" And he said "Now look, I would steal anything but not a Bible." So, the fact that I wasn't very prejudice meant that I wanted to help that black couple.

Ida could empathize with being different. Being left-handed, she was in the minority and growing up at a time when children were taught to use their right hands. Once again her father, who was the principal of her elementary school, influenced her.

I was left handed or at least [father] wanted me to be because he was left handed. And the teachers always turned the paper for left-handed people that way so you had to write upside down. He told the teachers to turn the paper for me so that I

could write right-side up. And I don't remember seeing any other children who were left handed. There could have been, but I didn't see them until I was in the fourth grade and then I saw them. And that is when we learned to write with ink. This boy that sat beside me and he'd get his hand all messed up in ink and he'd try so hard...he was in WWII and he was the one that didn't get back and I think it was because he was left handed, even in shooting it was probably very awkward doing it the way they told him he had to do it. It killed his mother. It did kill her, she just couldn't recover.

Ida's stories incorporate many facts that she acquired by using the internet. She researched the song "God Bless America" for her story on patriotism and her changing feelings about this country. She researched AIDS for a story, connecting the battle with this disease to David and Goliath. I asked Ida if her love of learning also came from her father. "Daddy was interested in outer space and that was before the space walk." I asked her if he was alive to see a man walk on the moon.

No, but he had those magazines and he said they will never make it because the friction of the speed will burn up the plane, so you know they put ceramic noses on them and the latest thing is they make fabric and a certain kind of glue that will not burn and its lightweight for the nose. There has been so much happen since he died that it would thrill him to pieces. And of course I think of him every time they launch. And he was very much interested in politics and I take a magazine called Foreign Affairs.

Ida identifies several other traits she shares with her father.

He was the first, the only member of his family to go to college. His father was an awfully big man and strong and he'd kill daddy. He was the first boy and he'd come in and lay down on the grass there at the house and just die there at the backdoor and his mother would rub his legs...so he did share [stories]...He took after her side of the family, being a small person and that is why the farm work was difficult. But the others were all big so they stayed at the farm. He went to college near us and they required Latin back then and he said that's a dead language and no sense learning it so he went north to a university and got his degree.

Validating or affirming who we are by comparing ourselves to our parents (or grandparents, or siblings) emerged on several occasions. Sandy, who wrote about her father being difficult but with a soft heart, is more like him than she would like to admit.

Personality-wise, character-wise, emotion-wise, I'm more like dad than mom.

How we deal with different things. Mom is more of the visionary. And I have to say that a good part of my adult development has been to overcome that pessimism that dad had.

Like Ida, it was from her father that Sandy learned a respect for diversity.

Dad graduated Phi Beta Kappa with an engineering degree, brilliant man, hated chemical engineering and went into sales of automotive parts, driving a truck around town but he had a great respect for people and in our neighborhood it

didn't matter what someone's degree was, what their religion was, everyone was treated the same.

Although Sandy has written several stories in tribute to her father, it was something her sister said that brought up a point of contention she had with an inquiry I made in the first interview, which was "Describe the type of work you did throughout your life."

That question set me back because of the general concept that work means having a job and making money. And I've always had the choice. I've been very fortunate not to have to go out and have a 9 to 5 job so I probably started off rather defensive at that point [in the interview]. At least that was my feeling...I can remember my sister who didn't have children, finally adopted because she wasn't able to have children, so she was teaching while I was raising children and I just remember her saying to me one time, look at all that education you've got and you've never used it. And I just about flew out the door when she said that. In fact, someplace I have a letter that I wrote to my daughters in response to that. So, those early years, I did a lot of creative things, learned a lot of skills from upholstering to wallpapering to caning to all kinds of things because these are things I wanted and we didn't have the money to go out and do them so I learned to do these things, before I worked for pay.

Whether or not the writers validated their actions and thoughts in the interviews, the affirmation of themselves and their lives was present in their stories. Both Working

through Grief and Self-Validation were significant themes in the stories shared with me and the writers group.

Conceivably, what is happening in this process, this writing, what we're doing is keeping ourselves healthy, it's a form of self-care. I have a friend who is a geriatric specialist who does journaling. Journaling is her specialty and she works with seniors in a hospital setting. They found that people recovered better and were released sooner if they were actively involved in this memory process.

The next theme contains data from interviews that indicate a perspective shift or transformation. Sandy seeing her father through fresh eyes could be considered a shift in perspective as well as working through grief, again showing crossover between themes.

#### *Change in Perspective*

Several writers spoke of changes in perspective or attitude over time. Jackie, a native of England and the youngest in the group spoke of a change in herself particularly in regard to recognizing commonality with her writing peers.

When I heard their stories, I thought...because you could tell me all the things that are different but I knew that feeling, I knew that experience, that embarrassment or that delight. Bare in mind that I've been going to the storytelling festival in Jonestown, Tennessee for five or six years in a row, with lots and lots of American people, often very country American people and loving the storytelling. So, I have been listening to stories that often had dissimilar face value or appearances on the surface. There is really something about that



expertise, I would have been bored out of my skull at age 30, who wants to listen to these old people. I have important things to do. There is something about having a leg injury where I could hardly walk and this emotional crisis that its like, these things are important, you know, remembering to listen to my husband when I think I have much more important things to do is really important. It certainly was a part of me being in my 50s rather than say in my 30s...Maybe what it is, is that sometimes you can't write about something until you are at a different place. Like after 9-11, writers couldn't just whip up a piece about what had happened.

Tornstam's gerotranscendence model offers personal characteristics that help explain developmental movement over time. These are reflected in a sense of connection to earlier generations, an acceptance of the mystery of life, a decrease in self-centeredness, a move from duality to plurality, and ego integrity. Like Jackie, the necessity of time to provide distance is demonstrated by Chris in his Amtrak adventure.

At the time it was happening, it wasn't very comical but after I came to see some comical aspects to this thing and I thought, shoot, I'm just going to write this down because sometime in the future someone might want to hear about this adventure. For me, I don't even mind writing something that's not very complimentary to myself because I've reached an age where I don't need to be complimentary, I can be realistic.

Grace can write from a different place as well.

I have multiple sclerosis. I was diagnosed at 28 and was paralyzed and lost sight in both eyes. There were seven years, from the time I was 28 to 35 that I was paralyzed from my backbone down and I had to learn to walk again. I couldn't drive. My equilibrium is still very bad and I still have bladder issues and I have eye issues but I'm so fortunate, I'm not complaining....So, when I was young I was old, if that makes sense. I've been in a place where only old people go so I know a lot about being old even though I'm not there yet. My husband always begged me, Ginny you have so much inside, let me get you a computer just for you and you just write, he begged me ten years before he died but I was busy working for our health insurance. So, it just didn't happen and now I have no excuse. If it doesn't happen it will be because I didn't do it. I would like to write something that would be of help to someone. Not to make money or to be a published writer.

Jenny does not write to make money or get published but to share the context of her world as it was and in the process, her eyes are opened to what she missed going on around her.

I think it is a delightful thing to do, to try to reflect and try to record. It evokes all kinds of memories and feelings that may have just got buried. But I really found that it has helped me to treasure something. I've not been the kind of person who thought about the past. The past was past. I cared about the future. My whole career, everything was orienting things to the future. So, this time spent in the past

has caused me to read a lot of history. I just finished a book about the town this property is in just to make sure I had my facts right about time and place. I couldn't believe that ten years ago I'd have read a book of town history. I loved it, I could connect to the people and so forth so I'm doing a lot more of that than I ever was before.

Ellen is another who has discovered 'new' eyes through her stories. She shared two pieces on Yellowstone National Park, one from a family vacation when she was young and the other from a recent educational trip with a natural science museum.

The thing that I missed the first time around at Yellowstone...I realized that there is something about maturity and traveling, when you see a place like Yellowstone you realize that this is stunning and precious beyond imagination and in the winter, it is even more so.

In another of Ellen's stories, Solo Road Trip, she visits friends and her mother, driving a long distance by herself.

I was feeling relief that I had looked at [my friends] wonderful situation. I had felt envious, I had wanted it for myself but then I looked around and I felt relieved that I'm not still feeling envy and I felt grateful that what I have here [gesturing around her house] is limited in terms of my vision, of what I wanted. On the other hand, it is beyond what I could have achieved. I can afford to be grateful for what I have here. That little pool is just a little plastic pool and yet... They have a huge garden, they have strawberries up the wazoo. I have two new eight-foot beds and

yet I get veggies from my little beds so I'm grateful and as I point out in here if I had four eight-foot beds, I would never get around to taking care of them. I have the exact amount of gardens that I'm willing to handle. If I had a big place like that out in the country, I would feel guilty all the time that I wasn't doing more with it.

Ellen's insight, gained on her drive back to Raleigh, was partly influenced by the second part of her journey in which she visited her Mom.

I was noticing when I got up there, at this fruit stand, I picked up a gallon of gorgeous strawberries and I thought, "A gallon, wow," and they were in a little basket and I got the basket with them. So, Mom was just so extremely gratified to know that this fruit stand was down the road. We went out to lunch at a seafood restaurant and she said grace and she was giving thanks that there was a fruit stand down there that she had not known about. Isn't that interesting? It would not have occurred to me to include that in a grace. And, there were several little things. She's gardening, growing vegetables and she was proudly showing me around her garden and what she was growing and I thought at 94, I'm going to be thinking about when am I dying and she's thinking about life. And, she is filled with gratitude. And she doesn't worry about little slights or little personality flaws that people have. It's about that. Life is short.

Jenny and her friend Betsy attended a story-dance performance by Jackie. As they glanced around, it became evident that they were older than most in attendance.

It had a very 70s feeling in part because this was a younger group, most in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, probably. This business about mining down, digging the meat out, doesn't feel necessary at this point in my life. I know who I am. But what I like to do is look back. If I am looking back, I see a bigger picture. I'm not focusing on me. How things connect in the world and that's the wisdom. You bring in your experience and your knowledge and you can see how things interact.

I asked Jenny if she saw this process as developmental or a function of age.

I think it is more of a pyramid, hierarchy. People who don't have to worry about food, clothing and shelter, they don't have any huge emotional problem going on in their life, the relationship stuff is done, settled, and we've done a lot of things, a lot of traveling, a lot of careers, highly educated and now we can say, hmm, I have time now to think about how this all works. I'm not immersed in it anymore. I can fill the gaps in my own knowledge about what was going on and when you look back at these individuals in their 30s, 40s, and 50s and see this deep digging work, which they need to do because they've been busy being girls, women, mothers. There is a horrible word, crone, which I hate the word but it is a wise woman and you can't do that unless you've done the work. And some women reach this stage much earlier than others do but I think for most of us it is later.

Transformation was not limited to the females in the group. Chris shares a spiritual awakening in his story, A Profound Meditation.

I'd been meditating for several years but I'd never had a meditation anything like this before on the Hopi lands. I'm sitting there and...for the first time in my life I experienced profound silence. I heard this fellow off to my right. He may have been...in my mind I thought two miles away but I could hear him chanting at the top of his lungs until the sun was above the horizon and the wind came up and a dog started barking and a school bus went by on the highway. At that precise instant, I realized how profound what had just happened was and I wanted to document that. I did jot down a few notes and when I got back home I wrote this long poem about it. I thought it was important for people to know that this stuff could happen. I'm very open to all possibilities. I'm a very spiritual person but I've never had anything happen like this that I could tell somebody about that was profound.

While Chris ponders a metaphysical existence, Beth attributes an individual's contentment to an earthly connection to family.

It's important to share memories and one of the things I think you may have mentioned in class and I know I've read...the more you know who you are, the more grounded you are. And now it's very interesting to me, I found that the people I know who really are zeroed in on family, they are much more grounded, stable people than people who are sort of estranged. And maybe as you grow up and you are older and you look back and don't know a lot about "Who was I, Where did I come from, What about those people?...maybe the more lost. I have

a son-in-law who is probably going to be an ex-son-in-law but I've watched him and he is not a happy person and he was an only child, his parents were only children, there are no cousins, there are no aunts, and he seems.... It seems like he's just grappling for something but I'm not sure he knows what and sometimes I've wondered about who you truly are, who were those people, he seems to be sort of cut off.

This connection to the past is illustrated in the next theme, Writers Expressions, in which the writers' stories are shared. The data sets within this theme are long. I choose to capture large chunks of text because it gives the reader a better grasp of the story elements including setting, characters, and plot. The voice inflections and gestures of the storyteller are obviously missing but added as well to the story experience and had this study included a structuralist narrative analysis, the conventions used to capture inflection and gesture would have been included.

*The Essence of People, Places, and Things*

From the first story shared, it was clear that specific places, people, and things drove the writer's stories. All the participants shared amazing snapshots of their lives through their life stories. Karen, who is getting ready to move with her husband into an assisted living community, wrote about the experience of cleaning out their attic. Before starting the story, a friend had asked Karen what made her attic so special.

I got to thinking about it and I thought "Yes, this is a special attic." It has more things in it and I thought that would make a story - everything that is in the attic,

the big things and how they got there, the process. It's an accumulation of 30 years.

The idea of an attic as an accumulation of 30 years creates a metaphor for a mind full of life stories.

The stories shared both in class and in the writers' group involved personal connections to people, places, and things. Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs model from the late '60s suggests five stages of requirements to reach a healthy adulthood. The first is hunger and thirst followed by security and protection, then belonging and love, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization. What became apparent was that the primary needs of food, shelter, and family, though met, remained important values.

Jenny's stories revolve around a childhood summer home that stood in the New Hampshire countryside. Her purpose for writing about "the farm" is that it was recently sold out of the family by her youngest brother and there had been disagreement over this sale. Jenny, through her stories, hopes to capture the joy of this property. Her first story, told in first person, has Jenny traveling in the family car with her two younger brothers, the pet dog, and her parents. This trip would last for the summer, however, the family would also drive the 30 minutes from their year-round home to see the leaves in the fall, survey the house for storm damage in the winter, and tap the maple trees in March.

There, at the crest of the hill perched on a slight knoll, bounded by low mountains on two sides and a pine woods on a third, silently and patiently facing the dirt road, the north side of the pond, and an overgrown field filled with blackberries



and low-bush blueberries, stood the red-shingled, white-shuttered Cape Cod-style house. There, fronted by a large maple tree nearly as old as it was and ringed with stonewalls, stood the classic New England farmhouse that had endured approximately 200 years of harsh winters, periods of abandonment and neglect, and, since 1950, an active family of five with lots of visiting relatives and friends.

In Jenny's second story, she explains the importance of this residence. "It was only a house...but to us, this particular house was more than a residence, more than a dwelling. The house was a link to what had come before. The farm was a place with a past and with stories to be uncovered."

This house, like many in rural New Hampshire during the depression had been abandoned in the '40s but this house held a tragic tale. According to neighbors, a tragedy occurred there in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Minks family, bereft at the drowning of one of their children in the pond, had walked away from their home and their possessions and relocated to Maine. When we acquired the house some years later, everything was just as they had left it. The furnishings, including an oak pedestal dining table and a large roll-top desk with secret compartments, probably reflected possessions that were typical of a reasonably prosperous, rural New England homeowner of the time. The hand cranked Victrola with a stack of post WWI 78 rpm records and an upright parlor piano with cracked ivory keys might have provided entertainment on a winter evening. A wood-fired, cast-iron cooking stove could well have baked the bread

and simmered the stews. Clothing hung on pegs, ready for tomorrow's wear, and grooming items waited for use atop oak dressers. Medical texts and implement in the attic suggested that one long-gone family member had been a physician.

Jenny had mentioned in our first interview a commitment to facts yet as she admits, "I have a hard time sticking with facts. I start with facts and I want to make it more than it actually is so I enjoy it." Her visualization of the baked bread and simmered stews; and the hand-cranked Victrola and upright piano providing entertainment demonstrates her imagination as well as the urge to entertain as she composes this story. Jenny moves from a personal glimpse of previous owners into formal county records and deeds, tracing owners prior to the tragedy-stricken Minks.

So, when Dad and Mom signed the contract to purchase the farm, they acquired more than a summer retreat, more than a place for a growing family to experience rural life. In 1950, our family's story joined the stories of the farm's previous owners, turning "only a house" into part of a larger history.

A family homestead was also the focus of one of Grace's stories. She writes of a home half a block from the Governor's Mansion in downtown Raleigh, where three generations of her family resided. Now, black-iron fencing and surveillance cameras surround the Mansion whereas before such security concerns the atmosphere was quite different.

Children were welcomed to play on the expansive yard and the governor himself would sip iced beverages, seemingly enjoying being in the midst of carefree, non-

voting, happy neighbors who did cartwheels and giggled a lot...Do [the current owners] even wonder about who lived, played, and even died there?

Another place of special memories for Grace is her back porch.

I had just had a little party that week out on my porch and we had a wonderful time, a group of women my age. All of them widowed or divorced. We just got together and had wine and I fixed a good meal and we just sat on the porch with the fans going, so we were cool and we ate peanuts and laughed and giggled. It was refreshing. Some of the stories were very heavy and I compare it to a night in *Steel Magnolias* where you have these women with all the strength in the world and all this sadness to share but they can giggle and laugh and love being together as women together. And not needing their lover or husbands to be in the midst to enjoy life. This porch out here has held many happy memories because whenever we get together as a family, everybody ends up on the porch. It's not big enough to hold everyone but somehow we all get out there and it's just something magical about the porch.

Food appears in many of the writers' stories. Grace's porch story is one of them.

It just had to be a Low Country Boil – piping hot shrimp, Kielbasa, fresh corn-on-the-cob slathered in butter, salt and pepper. Baguettes from the bakery and marinated mushrooms deviated from the strictly southern coastal fare....After moaning and groaning about how stuffed we were, we absolutely had to taste the

fruit dessert, packed with shredded coconut and marshmallows and a few heaping dips of Snickers ice cream.

Grace's first story to the writers group was a poignant account of losing the diamond out of her wedding ring in the flowerbed next to the front porch, 10 months before the unexpected death of her husband of 45 years. As mentioned earlier, this story helped Grace move through her grief. Later stories, like *The Porch and the Governor's Mansion* reflect more joyful times. In *Blue Jeans Before They Were Cool*, Grace gives us a glimpse of her life in 1947. "The war was long over, bubblegum was available and leather sole shoes were back in use by the masses. Margarine could be bought already yellow, and sugar was again a household staple." Due to illness of her grandmother in New York, Grace's mother had to leave her, age 7, and her brother, age 12, in the hands of their father and childless Aunt Marsha.

Washing, ironing, cooking breakfast and supper, packing lunches, as well as being home in the evenings after a full day at work was more than a hardship for Aunt Marsha. Her current boyfriend had to join us for supper at home so they could continue dating, and that was disastrous for their relationship as I could not stand this male person and let it be known every chance I could. He asked me to call him "Unc" and being a second-grade speller I said "Okay" putting an SK in front of it. I think that was when Marsha chased me from the table and ordered me to bed.

In those far distant days, little girls wore dresses to school; pants or blue denim “jeans” were absolutely not allowed. My aunt, stressed to the max by now, declared early one morning that I would wear pants to school as there were no more pre-ironed dresses in the modest collection in my closet. Mortified and in tears, I set out on my walk to school, knowing that my teacher would be extremely displeased. Trying to enter the classroom without being noticed as if everything was just fine, I sank into my desk seat and began my morning board work. With her hands on her hips, and her blue-gray hair standing on end, Mrs. Wertz asked me, through clenched teeth, how I dared arrive dressed in such a manner. Before I could plead my case, I was being dragged by the arm to the principal’s office where such breaches in conduct were addressed, severely so I had been told. Somehow, she reached Aunt Marsha at work and after much discussion via telephone, a decision was made. Until such time as my mother returned, she would allow me to wear unironed pants and shirts to school. My aunt had communicated, most probably in her unique brand of profanity, that she had no time, energy, or desire to iron dresses with collars, sashes, ruffles, and petticoats. If I were to remain in school, it would be in rough dried pants. As far as I know, I was the first little girl in Raleigh Public Schools to wear blue jeans – years before blue jeans were cool.

Dress was the focus of Beth’s story titled, *Little Girls and Big Girls*.

When I was about five years of age, I remember standing one evening in early summer next to the low hedge which separated our home from the church next door. This church seemed to have eternal revivals, maybe because it was 1945 and the nation's emotions were quite stressed. Mine were certainly not stressed. I was observing the parade of people entering the church, especially the women in their gloves, hats, and high heels. The windows of the church were opened since there was no air conditioning in the steamy South in those days. What a wonderful time they were having singing and shouting so I decided that I had to join them. But first I had to get dressed for the part. I went to my dress-up boxes and chose a long, light blue dress, long pearl beads, white pumps and purse, and a straw hat. Seeing me dressed in my finest attire was nothing unusual for the family so they did not take note when I decided to clomp down the front walkway. I just beamed from ear to ear and imagined that I was at least 18. With my purse swinging from my arm, I then wobble up the steps to the church. Everyone was standing, singing, and praising the Lord so they didn't even notice me as I headed up the center aisle and took a seat on the front row. There was a hymnal on the seat and I pretended to be reading and singing the words. I thought I was in heaven. My heavenly happiness ended when the usher came to tell me that my Dad was at the back of the church and that I would have to leave. I didn't want to leave, but I was scared to say "no." The usher gathering me up from my seat of joy and took me in his arms down the aisle while I held onto my purse and

heels. My dad was quite relieved to find me safe and sound, but I was a little miffed that my Big Girl adventure was ended.

Karen, like Beth, spent part of her childhood imitating grown-ups. In capturing stories from their earlier years, writer's often shared what would be termed imaginative play. Karen remembers playing house at both home, school, and on vacation.

Growing up in the 1930s, a popular pastime that could include any number of children at home or school was playing house. In the schoolyard, there were bushes with branches bending down to form an enclosure where we marked the spaces for rooms. At home, there were large boxes or corners of the yard or other spaces designated by trees or blankets, tent shelters to use of our play. When it was a mixed group of boys and girls, the spaces were used to play our roles: the father, the mother, the baby or one of the children. If the group included just girls, the play space was usually just for our dolls which played a very large part in our lives.

Our pretend "house" would have room for baby. Baby dolls were the most popular and when there was a real baby in the neighborhood our dolls had to have all the things a real baby had. There were diapers, bottles, knit shirts, booties, sweaters, nightgowns and all sorts of things that copied what the "real" baby had. The kitchen space always needed dishes. I remember doll dishes that were small, ping and green enamel. There was another set of shiny aluminum with plates, cups and saucers and a teapot. A complete set of dishes always had a sugar bowl

and cream pitcher. Once we had a set of dishes we were all ready to have tea parties. Boys were definitely not included in our tea parties.

There were times when we were away from home and did not have many toys with us. The key here was to improvise. I remember being in northern Ontario on an island in the Muskoka Lake region where we used acorn caps of various sizes and other natural materials to create a tea set for the chipmunks....All those early years of playing house were the beginnings of my enjoyment in making a home for myself and my family in various apartments, tents, travel trailers, cottages and houses over the years.

Places connected with relatives, particularly grandparents, proved a popular theme with several of the writers. Some of Beth's fondest memories are from Grandma Dayne's house.

It was a large, white frame house with the red tin roof, set down a dusty country road in the Virginia countryside....where every July, twins Grandma Dayne and Aunt Alice celebrated their birthday with tables and tables of food, fried chicken, deviled eggs, Aunt Jenny's pies, Aunt Evelyn's cakes and Aunt Bessie's spaghetti. Ice cream cones were served from the back of a flatbed truck, and we could have as many as we wanted....Grandma Dayne eventually had 23 grandchildren, raising nine children on her own after losing her husband in her early 50s. Life at Grandmama Dayne's always seemed deeply rich with family ties.



As close as Beth was to Grandmama Dayne, it was her relationship with Grandmother Steele and Pa Pa, whom she and her parents lived with in her early years that holds memories of a deep connection.

A feeling of love and warmth would come over me as soon as I entered her house. She always had time to sit, to talk, and to listen. Any wish was mine as far as she was concerned. We'd order things off cereal boxes, and I'd wait excitedly for the mail each day after we sent off the order. Sometimes we'd cook together. I can still taste the buttery cornbread and yummy turnip greens sprinkled with vinegar. Then we would drink pot liquor together. (For those unknowing folks, that is the juice which can be drained from the cooked turnip greens.) In the refrigerator, I'd often find a strawberry cake piled with mounds of whipped cream and decorated with strawberries....A mainstay at her house was a crystal candy jar filled with candy sitting on the table of her living room. The corn candy would be there in the fall, Christmas assorted candy in the winter, and lemon drops in the spring, but orange slices still slide into my mouth with a fond thought of Grandmother Steele.

Ellen was another writer who spent some early years in a three-generation living arrangement. She recalls the years between 1943 and 1947 in her story *Early Days of Happy Exploration*.

We moved in with Dad's parents due to a shortage of money. Dad was a recent medical school graduate with plenty of debt. Practicing general medicine in the

foothills around Caldwell County was not especially lucrative either. Dad often received a dozen eggs or a ham for services rendered, including delivering babies.

We were allowed the run of the house although Mom tried to keep us in bounds. We slid down the banister and pounced on the hall rug, sliding the length of the hall. We ran around the big double lot, climbed the Mimosa tree, sniffed the puffy blossoms, and played in the huge vegetable garden behind the house. Bobby threw insects into a series of spiderwebs each day and I selected favorite colorful rocks in the gravel driveway.

We loved to get in the garage and attached tool house which were full of the fascinating and secret smells of oil and gasoline and machinery. There were axes and hoes, chains and canes, toolboxes with odd (to us) items, containers of various undoubtedly poisonous auto fluids, spiderwebs, garden seeds and fertilizers, beetles, and all manner of wonderful things. Beside the garage was the chicken run, with a standpipe dripping water for the chickens and a mint patch taking advantage of the moisture.

Just outside the back door was the wash house with piles of laundry and a big wringer washer. Long clotheslines across the backyard were full every day of freshly washed clothes, sheets, and diapers. One day we found that the house cat Blackie (all the successive house cats were named Blackie) had produced a litter in a basket of laundry.

On Sundays there was a family dinner in the dining room downstairs with Mommy Stone's good china (I have one cup and saucer of hers) and all the relatives who were available, including Mommy Stones' sister Aunt Mattie. The menu rarely varied: Fried chicken with cream gravy, mashed potatoes, biscuits, string beans cooked with fatback, and lattice cherry pie. And of course great lashings of extra sweet mint iced tea. (I have yet to make a lattice cherry pie and my biscuits do not make the grade.)

The pantry off the kitchen was designed to be a little cooler than the kitchen in summer and warmer in the winter than outside- a good storage design. The shelves were filled with rows of gleaming jars of garden produce, all put up by Mommy Stone and Mom. There was the standard soup mix- okra, tomato and corn, as well as string beans, applesauce, tomatoes, creamed corn, beets, peaches and more. There were potatoes and onions in baskets on the floor. My son crawled into the pantry as a baby, selected a nice looking onion, and took a large bite out of it. Didn't seem to upset him much but it did the rest of us.

After Granddaddy died in 1961 and Mommy Stone was getting a little older she replaced the beloved clawfoot bathtub with a stall shower. The wash house was torn down and the chickens were done away with. The Mimosa in the front yard died and the coal furnace was replaced with an oil model. But the garage and tool shed remained and the house was basically the same; even smelled slightly of Granddaddy's cigars. The big front porch still had a metal glider and rocking chairs

and begonias in boxes right up until Mommy Stone died in 1992 at the age of 97.

All those years her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren loved to go and be there, in that place all of us thought of as our real home, no matter where we lived in this world.

Homesteads, family, and food were often brought together because of special occasions throughout the year. Holidays are recurring themes in many of the writers' stories. Carol came to the course with the intention of preserving her Grandma Kane's heirloom Christmas cookie recipe and the memories behind it.

An apothecary jar filled with antique cookie cutters sits on my kitchen counter...Four generations of women in my family used these cutters at Christmastime...I don't know which women measured or mixed or cutout the shapes or what they talked about as they worked. That's because no children were ever present when they made the cookies. Dad and his brothers stayed down at the farm; me and my brothers and all of our cousins remained in our homes while the mothers participated in this time-honored tradition...

Making the cookies took three days. The first day was dedicated to making the dough. The two women creamed 2 pounds of butter with six pounds of sugar. Then, they separated 12 egg yolks and thoroughly mixed them in to the creamed mixture. (The 12 egg whites were saved for making icing.) Next, five quarts of flour were added into the blend with about a pint of milk for liquid. The cookie dough was flavored with the rind of ten lemons including the juice of

three. How Donna and Mindy were ever to work with such a large recipe is unknown, as no children were present to recount the process...The next day was devoted to rolling, cutting out, and baking. A lemon aroma flowed from the kitchen through the rest of the house...The final day was spent decorating the cookies...

The first time that my father and my uncles saw the annual cookie yield was when the doors were opened to the living room revealing the glistening, candle-lit tree. There, hanging all over the tree, were the sugared and white Christmas cookies offering a sharp contrast to the green of the pine needles.

I've cut Grandma's recipe drastically and my brother tells me that my cookies taste only somewhat like those that he remembers. However, whenever I look at those cutters, I think of Grandma Kane, my own grandmother, my mother and aunts, and those Connecticut Christmases of yesteryear.

Carol's Grandmother was the daughter of German immigrants who settled in Litchfield, Connecticut. This heritage emerges in several traditions and cuisines in Carol's later stories. Sandy's German ancestors landed in Ohio. Her Germanic roots emerge in the cuisine described in the following excerpt from a story about her grandparents' farm in Republic, Ohio.

Holidays were always festive family occasions. Thanksgiving, Easter, and Mother's Day most often meant piling into the Nash to go up home [Ohio]. At the end of the 2-hour ride through small one and two stoplight towns, past farms that

smelled of “fresh country air,” over two land roads with cherry bumps, Grandma NeNe, Grandpa Bill, and Grandma Nelson walked away from their chores to give us a warm welcome. For Thanksgiving, we often arrived the night before, under the glow of the barnyard lamp. Often at Easter, we were greeted with a box full of cheeping chicks under the dining room table. A heat lamp had been hung over them from the table struts. On Mother’s Day, the men folk would take the awnings from the barn and put them over the windows on the west side of the house in anticipation of the summer heat.

The oak dining room table would have been extended to fill the main room. Dinner was ready by noon and included an array of made-from-scratch savory dishes: platters of fried chicken and sliced ham, bowls of a huge mound of fluffy mashed potatoes with a yellow pool of butter on the peak and sweet potatoes bathed in a brown sugar glaze, and pies stuffed with apples or peaches that had been canned the previous seasons. In the warmer months, when the hens were laying well, there would be two sectioned egg dishes, one for deviled eggs, the other for the family favorite, beet eggs. The beet brine colored the whites a vivid purple right up to the bright yellow yolks [Sandy].

Sandy describes a different kind of meal in *The Evolution of Childhood Tents*.

When I think of safe, cozy places of my childhood, I remember snuggling into a tent that I had spent hours constructing with my sister Mary Ellen and sometimes, our neighborhood friends. The simplest and most instant one was created under a

card table. We rummaged through the hall linen closet for a blanket to throw over the table, and presto, we had our tent.

Since dad wasn't hurrying off to work on Saturday mornings, we were slower to get up and out of bed...in these lazy hours, Mary Ellen and I each pulled our lemon yellow cord bedspreads over the posts of our rack maple twin beds. We used wide rubber bands to secure the spreads at each corner on the egg shaped knobs, thus forming our individual tents, higher at the end of the bed than at the foot.

Far more involved were the backyard tents. We would throw two Indian blankets over mom's clothesline, pass around clothespins taken from the cloth bag that hung at the end of the line and secure the long edges to the line. A run to the garage brought out the long notched poles that mom used to raise her sparkling white sheets above the ground. By noon, construction was complete and we scattered to our homes to pack our own lunches in our lunch boxes. My favorite sandwich was slices of braunsweiger between soft white slices of Wonder bread spread with yellow mustard. I doubt I would have eaten one bite had I know that braunsweiger was really goose liver. Our real treat was a handful of Ballreits; the world's best potato chip made up home in Tiffin [Ohio]. All this was wrapped in wax paper, as there were no plastic bags, Saran wrap, or aluminum foil in my childhood. Together, Mary Ellen and I often emptied a whole can of applesauce. We would wash all this down with cold, fresh milk from our thermoses.

Based on several of the writers' stories, it is quite possible that children's stomachs are more adaptive than the mature digestive system. In one of Chris' stories, he and his teen buddy Roy do not get ill when they happen upon the Fort Fisher [NC] hermit who serves them Van Camp Pork n Beans on moldy bread with a shake of garlic powder. However, during his Amtrak Adventure as an adult, he writes of his introduction to White Castle Burgers and the subsequent visit to the train's water closet. Chris, an ex-merchant marine and a writer with a penchant for description demonstrates his ability to capture the essence of a tragic event through sights and smells in *The Rescue* in 1966.

The IMC system cracked to life with the captain's voice saying that we had just made a major course change to go to the aide of a Greek Ferry Boat that was sinking about 26 miles northwest of our position....On the bridge the captain and watch officer were bending over the chart table discussing the coming operation in low mumbled tones....The name of the ship in distress was the Herakleion. She was a passenger ferry almost 350 feet long and displaced about 15,000 tons. I don't know what her passenger limit was but on this fateful night, she carried over 450 passengers and crew excited for the start of the Christmas season. But now, as we approached her last reported position, there were no lights on the water.

As I walked down the outside ladder on the port side, the boson was turning on the huge spotlight to search the water. Already, the Columbus [his ship] was passing through a debris field. Bunker "C" oil used for firing the boilers of the ferry floated everywhere. Deck chairs, cardboard boxes, planks, loaves of



bread, were all held together by the oil like glue. I think the thing I will never forget is the smell. The smells seemed to defy the gale force wind. It had a pungent, petroleum and salt marsh smell. Mixed in all this was the remainder of every human smell on the ship. Onions from the galley, perfume from the cabins, cocktails from the bar, baby diapers and more all mixed together hung in the air like a spirit reluctant to give up....

During the next 10 hours, we miraculously found 26 people alive and clinging to flotsam. In addition, we picked up about forty bodies wearing life preservers. These poor souls must have entered the water alive, but died from exposure. The seawater that night was 33 degrees (f). It was a miracle that we found anyone alive that night. Out of the more than 450 people on the Herakleion that night, only 26 survived....Perhaps no one will really ever know for sure what caused the Herakleion to founder that night and take so many souls to their cold water grave. The search went on for another day but we left the scene around noon that day to take the survivors on up to Peiraus to salvage whatever they could of their lives. The Columbus continued on the Ismir, Turkey, arriving on Christmas Eve in time for a poignant and much appreciated observance of the holiday. It was my first Christmas away from home.

While many of the stories described joyful and humorous times and places of great comfort, others, like Chris' rescue story dealt with struggle, loss, or tragedy.

Regardless of the temperament of the story, all the writers honed their skill in describing

the context in which they found themselves. Jackie's story, *The Tea*, transports us to the counter of a Mississippi truck stop where her addiction to caffeine has gotten the best of her.

My number one addiction is hot, sweet, milky tea, just like Mummy used to make. Sadly, the caffeine in it hypes my nerves, disrupts my sleep and apparently interferes with calcium absorption for my osteopenial bones.

"May I have a hot tea with milk? Do you have real milk?" I asked.

"Yes, ma'am, half and half," replied the waitress.

"Do you have plain old cow's milk?" I asked.

"Oh yayes hon."

I ripped the teabag out of its paper. I plopped it into the mug of hot water, scooped up the sugar dispenser and let the fine, white flow of sugar into the mug, picked up the spoon, banged the bag a few times, waited and watched the water turn darker and darker brown then poured in the milk. I fished out the teabag and watched as the milk spiraled into a peculiar, curly pattern. The milk didn't seem to be mixing with the tea. Little blobs of white stuff rose to the surface. I lowered my nose to the mug, a sour milk smell hit my nostrils....I sat back and thought about my earlier request for some Divine Intervention. I stared at the curdling milk in the mug. The obsession had vanished, the neediness lifted. I felt humble, grateful, freed from a wicked witch's spell.

"Is everything alright, hon?" asked the waitress.

“Oh, yes thank you, everything’s brilliant. May I have my bill, please?”

“Sure. See you up at the register, hon.”

I opened my wallet. No dollar bills. No fives. I put a \$20 bill down on the table, got out my pen, saw the picture of Jackson, turned it over, wrote “Thanks” under the word “God” and lift it for the waitress.

In addition to her addictions, Jackie wrote of her difficulty adapting to the Deep South after an upbringing in England. She moved to Mississippi with her first husband and proceeded to teach elementary school and give birth to a daughter whom she later lost custody of. One of the most poignant stories shared was Jackie’s letter to her estranged daughter on her 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. Another writer who wrote of culture clashes was Ida. Ida lived through the civil rights movement and, as mentioned under the theme of Change in Perspective, learned that change was inevitable. In Living through the Process of Integration, Ida provides a glimpse of her life in the mid 50s.

The civil rights law was passed by the Supreme Court in 1954. I was working for an organization funded by state and federal funds, the Cooperative Extension service, therefore we had to make some changes to be sure we did not discriminate between race, color, creed nor sex. One of the changes that had to be made was to include the black home economists when we had a district meeting. Since the black headquarters was at A&T University in Greensboro which was in our district, it seemed the correct thing to do was to meet at A&T. The white home economists had never been there, so it was a new experience for us to

become accustomed to. The black home economists were gracious hostesses, of course. The meeting went well.

Within an hour or so it was time for a rest break. We had never been in a black restroom, which we found out was exactly like ours and was scrumptiously clean, of course. But the feeling was there, it was a new experience. We had to take a deep breath. We were becoming conditioned to accepting the black home economists on an equal basis. We had many more new and different experiences of being conditioned so eventually we felt comfortable with each other. And we could talk about our feelings. One “colored” friend confided that she always wondered what we had in those white only restrooms – gold plated toilet seats? Not everyone in the south got this conditioning. It took those people longer to accept changes in customs.

This last sub-theme of *The Essence of People, Places, and Things* demonstrates how life is lived in context. Many physical, mental, and emotional aspects converge to form the writer’s identity at a particular time and place.

#### Summary

The themes *Story as Legacy* and *Story as Therapy* provide purpose for engaging in this life-story writing process and connect to the problem identified in Chapter 1, which is the need for adult education processes that help older adults meet on-going developmental needs, specifically cultural generativity. The gathering and analyzing of data associated with this study was directed at answering two research questions. In

answering the first research question - how does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy - the data indicates that this life-story process, or W2R, creates an interactive system of remembering, composing, and sharing (versus a staged or linear process) that motivates writers to:

- 1) connect with the people, places, and things of their past
- 2) capture their memories in entertaining and informative narratives, and
- 3) share their narratives with their W2R peers then with family or friends, a demonstration of cultural generativity (Kotre, 1984).

For the second research question - what insights emerge from those engaged in this process – the Writer Expressions theme provides insight. As witnessed in the sub-category on The Essence of People, Places, and Things; the writers were physically and emotionally invested in the context and plot of the stories as they remembered and composed them. Then, when they shared these stories, the rest of us became enlightened by the power of their memories and compositions. Regardless of the topic – grandparents, homesteads, traditions, tragedies, or injustices – the accumulation of these ‘life plots’ created not just a snapshot of the individual but of a particular time and place.

I’m always amazed and surprised at what some of the people write about and what they are doing. I did not know what Ellen was doing [outreach to the Malawi Children’s Village] in Africa until she started writing. I’m so glad she shared this, it’s wonderful. And some of the other stories I’ve really enjoyed hearing. What they did growing up and the things that were important to them. Sometimes it

makes me think of similar things that happened to me but more often I'm just real interested in them and what the stories mean for them. I think it is almost to the point that people in the group, their ability to share their stories, is as important as anything. These are things they want to say and they want someone around to listen and I think that is getting to be an important part [Karen].

To clarify how the themes and subcategories related to the research questions, the following chart is provided.

Table 4

*Themes by Research Question*

How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy?	What insights emerge from those engaged in this process?
<i>Remembering</i> Journals as Memory Joggers Truthfulness	Working through Grief Self-Validation Change in Perspective
<i>Composing</i> Internal vs. External Writing Preference Computer vs. Handwritten Writing Preference Early Experiences as a Writer Writing Habits	The Essence of People, Places, and Things
<i>Sharing</i> Entertainment Audience Influence	

This chapter has laid the groundwork for Chapter 5. In Chapter 5, I view the research questions through the literature on adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence together with the data themes.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I continue my exploration of a life-story writing process through the eyes of 10 participants in a qualitative, intrinsic case study. As discussed in Chapter 4, themes from stories, interviews, participant observation, and field notes emerged to answer the two guiding research questions: How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy and what insights emerge from those engaged in this process? In watching the writers construct their lives through stories, I have come to understand life-story writing as a constructivist process. In Chapter 5, I revisit the literature from adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence to better understand the themes presented in Chapter 4.

The three areas of literature used in this analysis are adult development, learning from experience, and reminiscence. Because I view situations through constructivist eyes, I continually apply the assumption that knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed and that the function of cognition is adaptive, serving to organize experience rather than discover reality. It is worth noting again that the participants in this study followed similar trajectories of experience likely resulting from a shared culture. The participant's voices are shared below in the three literature areas beginning with adult development.

### Adult Development

As noted in Chapter 1, for more than half a century individual needs have been defined by developmental models from psychology and these in turn have influenced

adult education theory and practice (Courtenay, 1994; Merriam & Clark, 2006 Rachal, 1989). As an educator of older adults, I chose to look at the findings in this case study of a life-story writing process through a developmental lens, specifically humanist. Humanism is a psychological construct that focuses on human needs, capacities, values, interests, welfare, and worth. Because the primary focus of this study is adults over 50, I begin with models within the literature on aging and their relation to the findings in Chapter 4.

#### *Aging Models*

Two of the primary aging theories introduced in Chapter 2 – Activity and Continuity – apply in this study. Activity Theory (Havighurst, 1957) proposes that individuals are happier and healthier if they stay active and engaged; not becoming a burden to family and society. It is a theory consistent with a Protestant work ethic promoting individualism, wealth, and productivity (Malcolmson, 1999). All but one of the participants is retired yet none of the retirees have found their retirement years to be less busy than pre-retirement. While seven of the ten participants left full-time positions upon the birth of their children and stayed at home until their children entered primary school, these individuals either went back to work fulltime or worked part-time, volunteered, and attended civic and educational activities.

Carol has been active in the League of Women Voters since joining the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972. Ellen and Sandy also are League members. Ellen volunteers at the natural history museum and has written of her travels to Africa as part of



a malaria relief effort. Sandy helps place foreign refugees in Raleigh, teaches ESL, and wrote recently of a trip to Nicaragua to build houses with Habitat for Humanity. Karen has volunteered as a nutrition consultant at assisted living and nursing homes. Beth tutors at her grandson's kindergarten class. Jane and Karen are volunteer board members in the learning-in-retirement program while Sandy, Ellen, Karen, and Carol are active in book clubs. Ida, Grace, Karen, Sandy, and Beth serve various functions in their churches. A high level of activity is further demonstrated in informal discussions at the writer's group when child and grandchild visits and travel and recreation activities are shared.

Although Ida at 90 and Karen at 77 have some chronic health issues that have slowed them down physically, all the participants are mentally and physically able and socially inclined to maintain a high level of activity. Not all older adults have such an advantage. Besides good genes and a healthy lifestyle, many of these participants reflect actions and behaviors today that they displayed as youth. The participants' interests in learning, reading, and writing; as well as, a connection to family and community could be attributed to Continuity Theory.

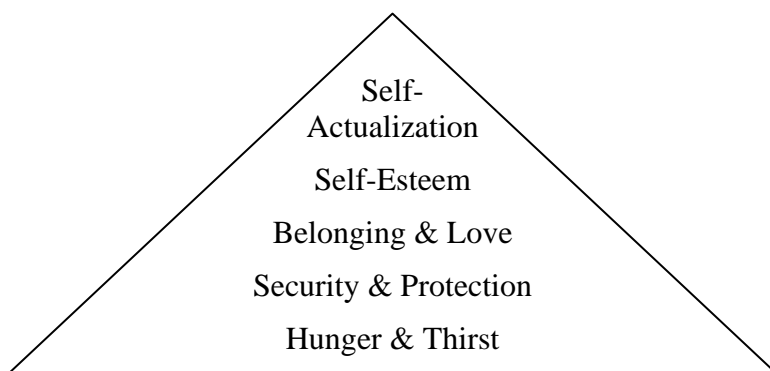
Continuity Theory suggests that adults maintain their satisfaction with life if they have learned to adapt in such a way as to preserve their patterns of former years (Atchley, 1989). The pattern of lifelong learning is reflected in several of the emerging themes including the writers' commitment to learn new technology, specifically computers and the internet. Ida's social consciousness, beginning with integration continues now in her 90s with an interest in educating those around her about AIDS. Ellen, who graduated

from college and joined the Peace Corp, today makes visits to Africa as part of a malaria relief effort. Carol began working on the campaign to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Florida as a young mother, continued to fight for this legislation after moving to Atlanta, and marched in Raleigh following her relocation here. These three states – Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina – never ratified this legislation but Carol continues her activity in the League of Women Voters and with legislative issues impacting her family and community.

Several participants spoke about, or demonstrated, introspection learned from an early age such as Chris' meditative practice and Sandy, Ellen, Jackie, and Grace's reflective journals. The behavior most supportive of Continuity Theory that emerged from this study was the importance of family connection. Not only did the theme, Writing as Legacy demonstrate family connection, interview discussions and composed stories often revolved around children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, siblings, and cousins. The importance of belonging and love which I found with this group of writers' led me to the literature on a developmental model proposed by Abraham Maslow (1970) in the late 1960s. As a humanist like Maslow, my research is grounded in psychology, specifically development of the individual as he or she passes through the second half of the lifespan. The next section addresses Maslow's Hierarchy-of-Needs model as well as a later model by Lars Tornstam (1997) termed Gerotranscendence.

### *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

Humanist Abraham Maslow (1970) developed his Hierarchy of Needs model in the late '60s. The model suggests five stages starting with hunger and thirst followed by security and protection, belonging and love, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization. To summarize Maslow's model, the following pyramid is provided, with the most basic needs forming the foundation of the triangle.



*Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

No stories were shared that would indicate that any of these needs went unfulfilled over the course of these individual's lives. However, what emerged from the stories was how integral food, shelter, and family were to the writers. This would seem reflective of the first three stages in the hierarchy. For instance, Jenny, Sandy, Beth, and Carol shared stories that captured intricate descriptions of family gatherings at family homesteads around tables crowded with traditional foods. The protagonists in these stories were in early childhood and likely dealing with stage four self-esteem issues yet food, shelter, and belonging still figured prominently. Stories such as Grace's The Porch

which focused on a gathering of mature women also placed food and friendship in a prominent position. Although this study did not look at gender differences, Chris, the sole male in the group, writes about his unpleasant experience with White Castle burgers on his Amtrak adventure and his memorable pork 'n bean sandwich with the Fort Fisher hermit.

This focus on food, shelter, and family was not at the expense of self-esteem and self-actualization. For the purposes of this study, self-esteem is defined as a feeling of self-worth and self-respect. Self actualization is the desire to fulfill one's potential. I discovered examples of these later developmental stages in compositions and in conversation about the writers' stories and the writing process. In Grace's *The Porch*, she describes a group of women she shared an evening of food and wine with on her back patio.

You have these women...all of them widowed or divorced...with all the strength in the world and all this sadness to share but they can giggle and laugh and love being together as women. And not needing their lover or husbands to be in the midst to enjoy life.

Jenny indicates moving beyond self-esteem. "This business about mining down, digging the meat out, doesn't feel necessary at this point in my life. I know who I am...I'm not focusing on me."

What becomes evident in applying Maslow's model is that even with basic stages met, they are not simply passed through. They must remain met and are not easily

forgotten. In the case under study, these basic needs remain an integral aspect in the individual's personal history adding rich detail and context to the story. Regardless of the protagonist's age, these stories are infused with details of food, shelter, and relationships.

The Writing-to-Remember process encourages contextual clarity. It forces the writer to remember and compose with details that the intended audience (both peer group and family) will need to make sense of the time, place, characters, and event showcased. This context is further refined through sharing with both peers in the writers' group and with family, particularly those who shared the experience. The limitation of short, single event stories further supports contextual clarity. Additionally, by providing historical context, the writers nest their personal life stories within larger stories or "macro" narratives, creating a cultural connection (Kenyon & Randall, 1997).

As discussed in Chapter 3, other developmental models apply a sequence of stages but the individual grows beyond the previous stage into a more complex process. In Erikson's psychosocial model (1980), stages seven and eight place the individual in conflict over generativity versus stagnation and ego integrity versus despair. Tornstam's (1997) work combines Erikson's two final stages in a model termed Gerotranscendence. I discuss this developmental model next because of its relevance to the study's themes.

### *Gerotranscendence*

Gerotranscendence is the final stage of a natural progression towards maturity and wisdom. There are five traits defining this final developmental stage of Tornstam's model. These are: A sense of connection to earlier generations, an acceptance of the

mystery of life, a decrease in self-centeredness, a move from duality to plurality, and ego integrity. Below I demonstrate coherence between the research data and these five characteristics of gerotranscendence.

As demonstrated in the Writer Intentions theme, most of the participants conveyed in the first interview that they came to the course to create stories as legacy – a sharing of their personal knowledge with their children and grandchildren. Legacy is also reflected in the purpose statements each participant wrote in the first class of the Writing-to-Remember (W2R) course. Beth's participation in the class and writers' group has made her more aware of the importance of a generational connection.

I just find that the people that stay more connected to their roots, even though they may live a long ways away, they are connected to it, they know about it, it's not just the past and I'm just concerned about today. They're connected to it. They're much happier, stable people.

A sense of connection with earlier generations is also reflected in the stories Beth wrote about her grandparents.

Sandy writes of her father helping her gain a better understanding of him and subsequently, herself. Ellen finds a similar connection and appreciation for her mother as she remembers and composes her stories. Chris speaks – in reference to the environment in which he grew up – about people gathering to hear stories with “the wisdom of the elderly transmitted because they were part of all those in the room.”

An interesting familial connection emerged from several of the female writers over the course of the interviews and during monthly writer meetings. Beth wrote a tribute to her mother who had passed away at Beth's current age. It has made her aware of her own mortality. She mentions this connection in both interviews and prior to her reading the tribute to the group. Ida shared four poems about her mother who died at age 91. She noted that she is now 90. Ellen, in her Solo Trip story wrote, "At 94, I'm going to be thinking about when am I dying and [mom is] thinking about life." Webster's research showed that reminiscence by older adults "helps achieve a sense of equanimity in the face of personal mortality" (2002, p. 150) supporting Butler's (1963) contention that the experience of life review enables both personal closure and existential calmness.

Several writers, either in their stories or in our discussions, demonstrated Tornstam's second trait, an acceptance of the mystery of life. Understanding the world as complex, not to mention beautiful in both its enormity and detail, was present in the findings. Ellen had a revelation after a recent trip. "There is something about maturity and traveling, when you see a place like Yellowstone, you realize that this is stunning and precious beyond imagination." Chris shared a spiritual experience in his story, A Profound Meditation. While this meditation provided Chris a profound experience of time in the present standing still, Jenny looked to the past. "If I am looking back, I see a bigger picture...how things connect in the world and that's the wisdom. You bring in your experience and your knowledge and you can see how things interact." Chris has his

own view of wisdom. “Intelligence establishes the boundaries but it is wisdom that fills in the lines between.”

“Wisdom is often seen as the pinnacle or hallmark of adult thinking,” state Merriam and Caffarella” (1999, p. 161). The life-story writers’ insights captured in this intrinsic case study indicate that wisdom in the form of cultural generativity can (and should) be made explicit through processes such as that used in the Writing-to-Remember course and group. An understanding, appreciation, and communication of the world as complex, is followed by a third characteristic in Tornstam’s model.

His third characteristic is a decrease in self-centeredness. Jenny makes the statement, “I’m not focusing on me,” while Chris admits, “I like to help people to laugh, even at my own expense. I don’t have this big need to be admired.” Yet, the activity of life-story writing, in and of itself, might be considered self-centered. As Thomas (1995) wrote in his criticism of generativity, it is nothing more than a “cheerful assumption that we gain symbolic immortality through leaving our stamp on future generations” (p.6). I rarely experienced the writers drawing attention to their selves, even though they were the protagonists, their stories were about connection. Central to the stories were lessons in context—the importance of place, be it a homestead or a national park; a connection with people, whether family or strangers who perished in a ferry tragedy; a tracing of family traditions; or overcoming the embarrassment of learning to drive a standard transmission automobile in the hilly countryside of Connecticut. While legacy might be



consider as a mean of attaining immortality, as Thomas (1995) believes, legacy in this study is something passed on from an ancestor or predecessor.

Tornstam's fourth characteristic is a move from duality to plurality. Duality refers to the condition of being two or twofold. Plurality is the state of being two or more. The writers demonstrate an acknowledgement of plurality as they wrestle with the truthfulness of their stories. In facilitating the W2R process, I found that writers had varying degrees of commitment to truthfulness. For some, truthfulness was aligned with consensus. Many of the writers passed their stories by family members, incorporating some of the suggestions because these piqued a buried memory in the writer's mind; or rejecting the suggestions as indicators of a different perspective. "When I spoke to mom and she said she remembered it differently. I thought that the way I remembered it means something about what was important to me. Not that I remembered it incorrectly but I had placed emphasis on other things" [Ellen]. Carol and Sandy shared similar experiences. "[My brother and I] both remember different; not opposing, just different" [Carol]. And my memories won't be the same as [my sister's] because we've sat and talked and she'll say, "Well, I don't remember that." But that's the pessimist and optimist. She's filtered out much of the negative from her memory [Sandy]. Jenny was the only writer who spoke of checking stories against historic records and accepting the records as more accurate than her own memories.

Sharing with parents, siblings, and other family members; or checking against historic records and documents introduces not just new story elements but conflicting

versions – a plurality of reality. For those with a constructivist perspective, this makes sense. For those holding perspectives with objectivist underpinnings, this plurality is not so easily accepted. This study illuminates the friction between storytelling, memory fallibility, and individual perceptions within time and space. The W2R process with its integral sharing component including peers of similar historic and cultural experience as well as family and friends, offers rare opportunities to discuss truthfulness as it relates to epistemology and overall philosophy.

The fifth trait in the Gerotranscendence model is ego integrity. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, several later-stage developmental models introduce the concept of ego integrity and similar constructs such as wisdom. Erikson claimed that wisdom is the virtue most associated with ego integrity. Wisdom is more widely defined than ego integrity. In analyzing the wisdom traits from Table 1, Chapter 2, I identified the four following categories.

1) interdependence and interrelatedness

(Erikson, 1988; Holiday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 2001)

2) complexity and contextualism

(Baltes & Smith, 1990; Randall & Kenyon, 2001);

3) reflectiveness, and

(Ardelt, 2000; Birren & Fisher, 1990; Robinson, 1990; Webster, 2003).

4) humor and joy

(Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Erikson, 1988; Webster, 2003)

By integrating these four categories with the themes in the data as compiled in Table 3, Chapter 4; Tornstam's gerotranscendence traits; and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Figure 2), a congruence of characteristics emerges as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Wisdom, Tornstam and Maslow, and Themes*

Wisdom	Tornstam and Maslow	Data Themes
Interdependence	A connection to earlier generations	Story as Legacy
Interrelatedness	An acceptance of the mystery of life	Truthfulness
Complexity	A decrease in self-centeredness, and	Change in Perspective
Contextualism	A move from duality to plurality	The Essence of
	Ego integrity	People, Places, and Things
Reflectiveness		Story as Legacy
		Journals as Memory Joggers
		Early Experiences
		Healing
		Self-Validation
		Change in Perspective
		The Essence of People, Places, and Things
Humor and Joy	Food, Shelter, Belonging, Self-esteem, Self-actualization	Entertainment
		Audience Influence
		The Essence of People, Places, and Things

By acknowledging that ego integrity as defined through wisdom is demonstrated in the stories written by and the discussions with W2R participants, I conclude that the process is a tool that supports humanist development in older adults. Next, the aspect of legacy creation is discussed beginning with the literature from experiential learning.

#### Learning from Experience

The Writing-to-Remember (W2R) process is a method of translating experience into words, or more accurately, reflection into story. Many of the early and lasting

models of experiential learning separate the learning event into experience and reflection (Burke, 2000; Boud & Walker, 1998; Dewey, 1916; Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1987). This section provides discussion on Experience and Reflection, and Constructivist Learning.

### *Experience and Reflection*

As discussed in Chapter 2, Fenwick (2003) and others (Britzman, 1998; Michelson, 1998; Sawada, 1991; Yorks & Kasl, 2002) have criticized a pragmatic deconstructionist conception of experiential learning countering that it assumes numerous dualities such as mind over body and object over context. I do agree with those critics who posit that context cannot be separated from the object of the experience. However, I do see reflection and experience as separate and I attribute some of the duality argument to semantics. I do not consider the terms interpretation and reflection interchangeable. For me, the encounter or experience involves concurrent interpretation of the physical, psychological, and social context. Reflection is a mental process that occurs after the encounter and incorporates interpretations that have occurred since the experience. Reflection is always an interpretation of the past.

In attempting to apply the experiential learning literature to the study findings, I discovered three separate occasions of experience and reflection. First was the experience reflected within the composed stories. Second was the experience reflected in the interviews about the class, and third was the experience reflected in the interviews about the writers' group. As discussed in the adult development section of this chapter, the stories proved helpful in making explicit the writers' values, interests, and connections –

a means of better understanding themselves over time. The findings within the truthfulness theme support a perspective of unique and changing interpretations across time.

### *Constructivist Learning*

The W2R process supports a constructivist perspective on experiential learning in that it encourages a reflective process and validates knowledge acquired through personal construction (Fenwick, 2003). To fully understand the first research question, how does this process foster and shape writer insights, I look at the participants' reflections regarding the design and facilitation of the W2R class and group.

Attendance at the six-week course followed by the monthly writers' group was resoundingly heralded by the writers as the impetus for beginning and continuing to write their life stories. Skill-building exercises from the class, such as concept-mapping and free-writing, proved helpful. Karen and Sandy took the concept-mapping lesson from class and tweaked it to fit their personal habits. Chris honed his descriptive skills. Some skills came out of student interaction versus direct instruction. For instance, Karen picked up on Jackie's flair with dialogue during the sharing sessions and added this to her composition repertoire. Many memories were piqued through story settings that included historical events, places, and people. Such communion was created by what Tennant and Pogson (1995) refer to as normative history-graded influences. For example, stories about life during WWII were prevalent during the class sharing period.

The sharing aspects of the W2R process made it both effective and unique. Several participants saw no point in writing the stories if they were not going to be shared. Many participants mentioned that they would not have continued writing had they not gone on to the writers' group. Jackie and Carol both mentioned wishing there was more time to share. Grace needed the discipline of sharing to compose but enjoyed hearing other's stories more than reading her own.

Two elements of the W2R process appear unique when looking through the literature on life review, reminiscence, autobiography, and life story. One is the follow-up to the course with the writers' group which kept the momentum of the writing going. It required an on-going, monthly commitment on the part of the writers' and several of the study's participants have dropped out since the group began over a year ago. The writers' group would not work with all audiences. With this particular group, I have continued to facilitate the monthly session, assigning readers, and giving feedback. The group has become family-like in the support it offers. Because of the longevity of this group, trust has become a non-issue.

For the facilitator, it is important to gauge the comfort level of the group. This depends on the personalities of the individuals, the behavior and class management by the facilitator, and the passage of time. As demonstrated in the section on audience influence, all but Jackie found the class and the group a safe place to share their stories and writing abilities. I found that creating a safe space for the writers to share their stories and writing abilities was integral to this process. This is in accordance with Fenwick's (2003)

description of a constructivist perspective, facilitating reflection and coaching are important tasks of the constructivist educator as he or she assists students in “validating knowledge acquired through personal construction” (p. 107).

Another unique element to the W2R process is the aspect of capturing short stories that the authors themselves choose without prompting. I will discuss this in the following section as it relates more to the reminiscence literature than the experiential learning literature.

### Reminiscence

A number of research studies have questioned Butler’s (1963) premise that life review is integral to accommodate older age development. For instance, Lieberman and Tobin (1983) claim that the process of sorting and restructuring the past requires high levels of skills built by a lifelong habit of introspection, which many people don’t have. In looking at the data within the themes Early Experience and Journals as Memory Jogger, all of the writers came to the W2R process with a history of introspection particularly through the use of journals. Additionally, all participants had advanced literary skills from both formal education and a lifetime of letter-writing, reading, and storytelling.

Parker (1995) submits that based on Atchley’s Continuity Theory (1989)n, life review in old age is a practice of individuals who feel adrift, are confronting a crisis, or exhibit lower level functioning. My findings support Continuity Theory but not Parker’s findings. Although Jackie admits to being in crisis at the time she signed up for the

course and felt adrift at times throughout process, the other nine writers displayed life satisfaction and even joy throughout the process.

One reason I choose the sample I did was that these individuals do not reflect the typical demographic of reminiscence research which involves primarily institutionalized individuals or those receiving mental health assistance. These study participants are not a cross-section of American society but they represent adult learners who actively seek learning opportunities both formally and informally which makes this study beneficial to adult educators and program planners interested in this demographic.

As demonstrated in the literature on reminiscence referenced in Chapter 2, there are two lenses one can look through. One is the cognitive aspect of remembering, termed autobiographical memory, the other is life as literature which are the narrative aspects of telling our stories.

### *Autobiographical Memory*

Technological advances have evolved our understanding of how the brain functions. Reminiscence, when looked at as a cognitive-linguistic phenomenon, has the potential for indicating and supporting neurobiological health. Snowdon's (2001) findings that nuns in their 80s and 90s who had written complex autobiographical essays in early adulthood retained mental acuity is encouraging as are Wolfe's (2001) findings that writing forces narrative-chaining which in turn strengthens synaptic health. This case study of a life-story process cannot confirm direct neurobiological benefits but it does provide a means of encouraging the retrieval of information from long-term memory



which requires cognitive exercise. In addition, the W2R process and its reliance on the writer's choice of memory (not prompted or cued by the facilitator) may encourage additional synaptic connection since free recall is more cognitively demanding than recognition or cued recall.

### *Life as Literature*

Understanding the world through narrative has been the focus of study in numerous fields including anthropology (Bateson, 1990; Bruner, 1984), psychology (Bruner, 1991), linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Polkinghorne, 1988), gerontology (Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Kenyon, Clark & deVries, 2001), and adult education (Nelson, 1997; Rossiter, 2002; Wiessner, 2005). Jerome Bruner (1991) explains narrative knowing as a human phenomenon that “organizes our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative – stories, excuses, myths, reason for doing and not doing, and so on” (p. 4). The stories emerging from the W2R process reflect this type of organizing.

The findings of this study provide additional support for a narrative phenomenon especially when compared to Kenyon (2001) and his colleagues' first four assumptions found in the narrative gerontology literature. Their first assumption is that storytelling is fundamental to being human. The participants choose the W2R course for the purpose of telling their stories. These writers came to the course with strong skills in story development and composition. Part of this is likely attributable to their early literacy and linguistic training as well as their lifelong experience in reading and writing. Another

aspect might be the positive reinforcement many received as shown in the Early Experiences findings.

The writers' interest was not limited to just documenting stories. As demonstrated in the Entertainment theme, the writers wanted to tell a good story and all of them progressed in this area as they continued to write and share. Several writers spoke of parents that were good storytellers. Two were regular attendees at storytelling festivals. They realized that good stories get told over and over again and worked at their 'performance'. One might conclude that a good story has greater legacy potential.

The second assumption is that stories include both fact and possibility, indicating that life is open to change. Bruner (1991) warns that unlike scientific procedures that can be judged through falsification, narratives can only achieve verisimilitude or the appearance of being true. The Truthfulness category of the findings provides examples of the writers dealing with truth of their memories including family checks, historical records, and logical consequences. Plurality of reality was demonstrated. Writing the stories differently based on the audience also emerged from the Audience Influence findings.

Kenyon's third assumption is that we experience more than one kind of time. Clock time is linear and closed with distinctions made between past, present and future. Story time on the other hand moves subjectively with the events and their meaning defining order and duration. One of the reasons I choose to focus on life stories is that they allow for story time. The story is not, in and of itself, embedded in a linear

autobiography. I believe this allowed for a richness of detail and action to emerge.

Limiting the stories to two to three typewritten pages, not only allowed for more sharing time, it forced the writers to compose succinctly, concentrating on plot, characters, and setting, while alleviating irrelevant information.

The fourth assumption is that our stories involve structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, and personal dimensions. The stories shared were embedded with cultural symbols of the times. These symbols held special meaning not just for the author but often for the audience. Because many individuals in the group grew up in the same generation, in the same part of the country, and under similar social and economic conditions, the symbols were recognizable. For example, Germanic food and fresh produce, radio and storytelling as entertainment, and outdoor and imaginary play from an early age were elements that many writers related to. One of the highlights of facilitating the sharing of these stories was watching and delighting in the connection, joy, and humor that such commonality fosters.

The stories as well as their interpretations during the interviews reflected many interpersonal and personal dimensions. Relationships with sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, and grandparents were prevalent. Ellen talking about her envy and Jackie admitting her addictions are two examples of personal insights arising out of the stories.

### Summary

In this chapter I take the findings from Chapter 4 and view them through the literature presented in Chapter 2 as a means of understanding the two guiding research

questions: How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy and what insights emerge from those engaged in this process? The first research question regarding the process was explained most directly through the literature on learning from experience and reminiscence. The use of life stories versus autobiographies encouraged an artistic treatment of the compositions with writers wrestling with issues of truthfulness versus entertainment. Although several participants benefited from skill-building exercises offered in the class, it was the sharing both at the end of the class and continued with the writers' group that most informed their understanding of themselves and their experiences. It was this sharing that undergirds the idea of cultural generativity.

The second research question – what insights emerge from those engaged in this process – was illuminated in the adult development literature. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was shown to permeate the stories with the five-point hierarchy apparent for each of the ten individuals. Tornstam's five characteristics of gerotranscendence were illuminated as was generativity particularly cultural. In the next chapter, I provide an overview of findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion to this intrinsic case study of the Writing-to-Remember process.

## CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative case study of ten lifelong learners in a life-story process has been a journey that began with a search through literature in psychology, gerontology, adult education, and narrative then ventured into the lives and words of ten extraordinary older adults. The purpose of this study was to explore the Writing-to-Remember process as a tool for facilitating legacy creation in the form of life stories. At the root of this research is the premise that cultural generativity is a developmental demand of older adulthood - cultural generativity defined by Kotre and Kotre (1998) as “the conservation, renovation, or creation of collective meaning systems, be those systems religious, artistic, ideological, scientific, or commonsensical” (p.368).

The study’s design and execution was guided by the research questions: How does the Writing-to-Remember process foster and shape life stories written for cultural legacy and what insights emerge from those engaged in this process. In this final chapter, I summarize the findings as they relate to the two research questions and offer implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

### Overview of Findings

In answering the first research question, the Writing-to-Remember (W2R) process provided the participants an avenue for cultural generativity by making tacit memories explicit and transferable in life-story form. The Writing-to-Remember process created this avenue through an interactive combination of remembering, composing, and sharing. Writers relied on various tools particularly journals but also concept maps and free-

writing to organize the events as remembered. These memories then evolved as writers composed their stories and had additional insights.

The composing element of the process informed each writer's understanding of his or her role as a writer. Structural elements such as computer versus handwriting and drafting in one's head or on paper were clarified in the process. Current writing habits, including taking the W2R course and attending the monthly W2R writers group, confirmed a desire for disciplining the composition of stories for legacy. Regarding early experiences, many of the writers were encouraged when young to read and write. Some had role models in parents or siblings. Several found reading and writing at a young age an escape from isolation. The correlation between reading and writing is an area of research that could further illuminate the findings in this study.

In sharing, the participants discovered their unique gifts at story writing and storytelling. By reading and listening to each other, they were able to study dialogue and description, humor and timing. Additionally, family members were used to check truthfulness as a researcher uses member checking to ensure verifiability. Peers in the class and writing group offered their own memories of cultural events during the time period of the story and suggested alternative views if activities or descriptions seemed illogical such as a standard transmission clutch appearing on the right side instead of the left, or the lack of outhouse smells on a steamy summer day on the North Carolina Outer Banks in the 1950s.

Finally, the writers' level of devotion to truthfulness in remembering and composing was influenced by a desire to entertain when sharing their stories. This rather antagonistic relationship between truthfulness and entertainment was an interesting phenomena occurring throughout the process. One's conception of truth negotiation becomes apparent when sharing stories and introduces the question of whose version of reality gets passed along to those reading or hearing the stories. In accordance with Tornstam's gerotranscendence trait of plurality versus duality, the writers became aware of the subjectivity of their memories through the interactive nature of the W2R process. This supports Vygotsky's social constructivist claim that knowledge is determined by social interaction, language, and culture.

The second research question – what insights emerge from those engaged in this process – can be answered individually by the stories shared. Writers searched their mental archives for stories that were worthy of passing on to future generations. These memories were then crafted into entertaining narratives that captured the emotional, physical, and cultural attributes of a specific event. In addition to reflecting the values and priorities of the writer, the stories transported listeners back in time as they related to the joy, humor, tragedy, and grief intrinsic to family relationships and traditions, war and natural disasters, and economic good times and hardship. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, characteristics of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and traits of Tornstam's gerotranscendence align with many of the themes emerging from the writers' stories.

In addition to confirming the existence of cultural generativity through life stories, the writers were adamant about their discovery of the benefit of stories as therapy. Several were surprised but thankful to find their stories a means of self-care and validation, often through the use of humor. Their stories enabled them to see where they had been and where they are now – their perspectives changed. The next section provides implications for practice, recommendations on future research, and a conclusion.

#### Implications for Practice

In applying the Writing-to-Remember process, it is helpful to acknowledge several unique aspects of W2R. These include: the interactivity of the process elements, the emphasis on life events versus autobiography, and the benefit of an ongoing sharing forum, in this case, a monthly writers' group.

First, W2R is interactive not linear. The writer revisits and rewrites compositions as new memories emerge, the composition takes shape, and the story is shared. Even though the process is presented in a somewhat linear fashion – remembering, composing, and sharing – the process is anything but linear. The act of composing brings both additional and different memories. Sharing illuminates the subjectivity of memory. Sharing also encourages highly literate and entertaining compositions. From both a theoretical and practical perspective, the significance of truth negotiation that emerges from the process is one of the major findings of this research.

The decision to encourage life story versus autobiography affected the process in two ways. One, stories were not prompted by providing a topic or time period. Therefore,



what emerged was the writer's personal brainstorming, giving rise to stories that reflected the writer's values and priorities. Secondly, shorter, more succinct stories stimulated a storytelling mode and fostered crisp detail and the colorful context of characters, settings, and plots.

The third unique aspect of the W2R process was the incorporation of a monthly writers' group. The students who joined in the writers' group continued to hone their writing skills and add to their personal legacy vaults. All participants indicated that without the motivation and support provided by the monthly gatherings, they would not have continued to compose their stories even though each saw these stories as valuable contributions to future generations in explaining their family in the context of a specific culture.

#### *Implications for Adult Educators*

The W2R process as practiced in this study involved weekly, 3-hour classroom sessions, held over a month-and-a-half period. Techniques for memory work and elements of composition were presented through lecture, demonstration, and small group activities. There was often class time reserved for writing. Some writers used this time to brainstorm, to outline, to compose, or to edit. In addition, all participants worked on their stories outside of class even though there was no formal homework. At the end of the course, the writers read aloud their stories.

In the subsequent writers' group meetings, my role as facilitator became more scheduler of readings. The advantages that emerged from having this writers' group at the

outset of the class were more and better compositions, a closer group dynamic, and a realization of the therapeutic value associated with insights captured in the shared life stories.

Identifying and addressing individual learning goals up front can curb some group tension later on. As demonstrated in this study, one participant came to the Writing-to-Remember class to work on childhood trauma by flushing out stories and feelings. The remainder of the participants came for legacy creation. Diverse learning goals need to be addressed, as do trust and confidentiality issues in educational settings heavily reliant on sharing. Traumatic memories, shyness with sharing, and self-concepts affiliated with one's writing ability may surface and influence both the group as a whole and each writer's ability to meet his or her expectations of the process. Knowledge of group dynamics is helpful for the facilitator of the W2R process. Balancing the interests of the individual and the group is ongoing.

Several members of the writers' group admitted being more self-conscious about their writing abilities than the stories they chose to write about. It would be helpful for the facilitator to have insight into each student's view of themselves as a writer and his or her writing history early in the semester.

Commonalities of experience and demographic similarities affected this particular offering of the W2R process. Having a homogeneous group who experienced life events such as World War II and the Civil Rights Movement provided a cohesiveness that might have been difficult with a more diverse group. The study participants were healthy,

mobile, and formally educated. Education may have played a role in the participants displaying a subjective-based epistemology. As Hofer (2001) stated in summarizing current theories of cognitive development,

The path of epistemological development begins with an objective, dualistic view of knowledge, followed by a multiplistic stance, as individuals begin to allow for uncertainty. Typically, a period of extreme subjectivity is followed by the ability to acknowledge the relative merits of different points of view and to begin to distinguish the role that evidence plays in supporting one's position. In the final stage, knowledge is actively constructed by the knower, knowledge and truth are evolving, and knowing is coordinated with justification (p. 359).

These cognitive models have been applied in research on the intellectual development of college students and other groups in studies with education as a variable (Kegan, 1982; Kitchener & King, 1981; Kohlberg, 1984; Perry, 1970). As demonstrated through the truthfulness and entertainment themes, one's epistemology will impact not only treatment of one's own memories and compositions but also the degree of acceptance of a peer's stories. It is therefore recommended that adult educators using the W2R process have at least a rudimentary understanding of epistemology and to bracket their own beliefs in order to avoid bias.

#### *Implications for Program Planners*

Continuity theory (Atchley, 1989) suggests that individuals maintain habits and lifestyles across the life span. With each generation exceeding the education levels of the

preceding generation, a presumption can be made that education as a lifetime endeavor is becoming main stream. Program planners and providers can expect to find an increasing number of studies supporting educational programming that addresses the developmental needs of older adults, just as this researcher did in reviewing related literature. The global aging population is tipping educational demands toward the older adult. Developmental needs defined by such constructs as generativity, ego integrity, wisdom, and transcendence will need corresponding programming as well as skilled instructors.

Program planners may encounter logistical and economic issues when offering programs such as W2R. As presented, the W2R process requires both face-to-face class time and computer competence and access; and, an ongoing commitment by the students, facilitator, educational provider, and community (in this case, meeting space at a local bookstore).

Many learning-in-retirement programs, including the one this study worked with, are learner-driven. Attendance is voluntary, homework and tests are discouraged, and course fees are minimal. Instructors either volunteer their time or receive a minimal stipend. Not until an economic benefit is correlated with the personal benefit of lifelong learning will planners have adequate resources necessary for such programs to thrive. A growing elderly population and the connection of lifelong learning to emotional, physical, and cognitive health may be the impetus for such economic support.

There are several changes to the configuration of the W2R process that could broaden its application. In regard to the population under study, what emerges when the

process is tried with adults from different cultural, educational, or economic backgrounds? Is there a gender difference in how the process fosters and shapes the participants and the insights that emerge?

Changes to the course structure beg future research as well. Jackie suggested small group story readings during the six-week course to allow for more sharing. Currently, the W2R model incorporates story sharing only at the end. Prompts could be incorporated, although not supplying prompts was a conscious decision to encourage spontaneous, value-laden stories to emerge.

Finally, how might one configure an online offering? Online facilitation would alleviate logistical issues such as transportation, parking, and accessibility but the oral storytelling aspect would be removed. How important is this oral sharing to the success of the process? How does a facilitator create the same group coherence online as in the on-going, face-to-face meetings? Is this necessary for the process to be successful? What defines success – developmental support, registration numbers, or political agenda?

Life-story work is not limited to the classroom. Since 1987, the Reminiscence Centre at Blackheath in England has served as a national reminiscence training and resource facility. StoryCorps, a partnership between Sound Portraits Productions, the Library of Congress, National Public Radio, and public radio stations nationwide opened its flagship StoryBooth in New York City's Central Terminal in 2003 and began recording and archiving participant's stories. Since adding traveling MobileBooths in

2005, StoryCorp has visited 100 towns and cities in 46 states, accumulating 15,000 interviews, making it the largest oral history project of its kind.

A not-so-new form of cultural legacy gaining popularity outside of the Judaic tradition is the ethical will. Hebrew scripture suggest two types of legacy, material and spiritual. In an ethical will, “people express the wisdom they have gained during their lifetimes and leave to their survivors their insights into what makes for a good and fulfilling life, thus bequeathing a spiritual legacy that may not only outlive whatever material goods they pass on but be of even more real value” (Sapp, 1996, p. 31).

Although justification for personal legacy through life-story writing continues to accumulate from such studies like this intrinsic case, additional areas of research emerged during this research project. These are presented below.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Several areas for potential research were discovered during the researching of this life-story process including: cognitive health, the constructs of time and place, and wisdom. One area of growing interest to adult educators is cognitive science, which is helping to illuminate the physiological side of learning and brain health. There is evidence to suggest that education and learning across the lifespan makes an important contribution to brain health and “may serve to slow down and even prevent or vaccinate against neurodegenerative disorders in later life” (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 36). Learning in general and writing specifically have been shown to have a positive impact on

neurological health (Cunningham & Tomer, 1990; Diamond, 1988; Leamnson, 2000; Paggi & Hayslip, 1999; Snowden, 2001; Sylvester, 1995; Wolfe, 2001).

Writing is a skill that forces narrative-chaining as the brain seeks out pattern and association of new with stored information, which in turn, strengthens synaptic health (Wolfe, 2001). Snowden's (2001) research dubbed the Nun Study, demonstrated that early linguistic level is a significant indicator of Alzheimer's disease development. Nuns whose autobiographical essays, written in early adulthood, displayed complex, dense ideas retained their mental acuity into their 80s and 90s, while those with simpler prose appeared more prone to this form of dementia.

From a collective viewpoint, failing to instill preventative strategies against neurodegenerative disorders could have disastrous effects. In the U.S. population 60 years old and above, the prevalence of dementia doubles every five years, from one percent at age 60 to 40 percent at age 85 (Bolla, 2000). With the fastest growing segment of our nation's population being those 85 years old and older, neurological health could be the greatest health issue facing us this century (Nussbaum, 2002). The connection of writing and cognitive health is one that calls for additional research.

Several avenues of research were circumvented during this study. One was the study of place. Within the theme *Essence of People, Place, and Things*, the importance of physical place emerged. What is the state of research on "place" and how does it foster and shape life stories and how can life stories improve our understanding of place? Along similar lines, how does our relationship with time change over the life span, or within our

stories? How does Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (1997) and the relationship of time fit with life story? Recent research on culture and time could add insight (Griffiths, 2004; Honore, 2004; Norgate, 2006). Additionally, what insights would emerge if these stories were viewed structurally, from the perspective of a discourse analyst?

Wisdom is another area begging future research. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1990) urge further study into the concept, noting that the cognitive dimension of wisdom has attracted research but the moral aspects have seen little empirical work and that wisdom "as a personally rewarding and meaningful experience, has barely even been noticed. Given the vital importance of it for human survival and growth and its role in the regeneration of wisdom itself, it is to be hoped that more effort will be directed in the future to understanding how it works and how it can be used" (p. 49). As Maxwell (1984) contends, "The primary intellectual aim of the humanities and social inquiry, quite generally, is to help us to realize what is of value to us in our personal and social lives. What ultimately matters is personal and social progress towards enlightenment and wisdom: all academic progress is but a means to this end" ( p. 73).

As shown above, there are many directions in which practitioners and researchers can extend this study. For me as a researcher, the experience has been exciting, enlightening, and educational. Outside of my research role, it has been a treasured journey which I attempt to describe in the conclusion below.



## Conclusion

The negotiation of truth, as described in the last three chapters of this dissertation, was a strongly documented finding, adding support for future research on the nature and justification of knowledge and the impact that epistemology has on historical records, both personal and cultural. Good research forces a researcher to question and support his or her conceptual framework. Foundational to my framework is a philosophical affiliation with constructivism and a psychological allegiance to humanism. The negotiation of truth emerging in this study placed a blaring spotlight on the objectivism-subjectivism debate. In the end, I believe the subjectivist perspective of constructivism was supported.

An unexpected result of this research was a personal reflection on my humanist leanings. Humanists are promoters of individuality and personal growth. Critics of the humanist movement view this perspective as self-indulgent and in opposition to the good of society. This begs the question, do good people create a fair and just society or does a fair and just society breed good individuals?

One of the participants in this study could not help but see the life-story process as self-indulgent. Carol related the following in our first interview.

It is really self-indulgent. Because you get all inside of yourself and that's great fun but then I'm still trying to figure out...I'm reading different things on why people are doing this...writing like this, to leave their memories, and I found something. This is out of the *Blind Assassin* by Margaret Atwood. I thought this was a significant thing and I think this is what I am doing. This woman is actually

writing her memoir and she is saying, “Why is it we want so badly to memorialize ourselves? Even while we are still alive we wish to assert our existence like dogs peeing on fire hydrants. We put out displays of framed photographs, of parchment diplomas, our silver-plated cup, we monogram our linens, we carve our names in trees, we scroll on bathroom walls. It’s all the same impulse. What do we hope from it? Applause, envy, respect? Or simply attention of any kind we can get. At the very least, we want a witness. We can’t stand the idea of our own voices falling silent, finally, like a radio running down.

Carol returned to this issue during one of our group sessions, one in which we discussed the gerotranscendence trait of a decrease in self-centeredness. “How can you equate this process to a decrease in self-centeredness?” she asked. I acknowledged that looking at this process from the inside out seems self indulgent. However, in watching the process over the last two years, from the outside in, I have come to find that these stories are not about an individual even though the writer is clearly the protagonist.

I found these stories to be trinkets of culture – family, community, society. The writers are passing on traditions, lessons, identities, and connections. Quite simply, they are preserving cultural artifacts. This research demonstrates an unearthing of treasure in the form of connections between people, places, and things – past, present, and future. A case in point, at 82 my father has begun to share his stories and I am listening. He was 17 and shoveling snow off a neighbor’s driveway in Chicago when someone informed him that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. The next day, he lied about his age and enlisted in

the Navy and was eventually stationed on Guam. I've never been to Guam, certainly not in war time, but I know what he did there and I'm trying to understand what "being there" did to him so that maybe I can better understand why he is the way he is and I am the way I am.

I believe it is important to celebrate our lives in context, in a form that outlives our bodies. We may never know the impact these stories have yet they will have no impact if they die with us.

I've heard it said that what separates men and women from the beasts is that men and women must tell their stories. Our stories unite us with nature and the primitive, bonding us with our own beauty and our own beast. My story belongs to no one else, and yet our stories, yours and mine, are the same under the skin, beyond the facts, beyond the names and dates. Only the heart speaks to the heart...I needed to tell you my story as I need to hear yours, so that we may share our secrets and trust our hearts (Singer Judy Collins).

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APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: Sample Interview Questions

Interview One: Pseudonym

Date:

Introductory comments:

Introduction of researcher:

Demographic information:

Please tell me how old you were on your last birthday:

Where is your birthplace?

Where did you attend school?

Please describe the type of work you did throughout your life:

Writing class information:

What attracted you to this story-writing class?

What has been your experience in taking this writing course as far as:

remembering your stories

composing your stories

interpreting your stories

sharing your stories

Writer's group information:

What attracted you to this life-story writer's group?

What has been your experience in the writer's group as far as:

remembering your stories

composing your stories

interpreting your stories

sharing your stories

What do you like best and least about the writer's group process?

Interview Two: [this will be an open-ended interview as it explores the life stories written by the participant]

Date:

Number of informant:

Review first interview with subject

Describe to subject the purpose of the second interview

Tell me about this story...

Tell me about this story...

Tell me about this story...

## APPENDIX B: Participant Demographics

Name	M/F	Age	Education	Family	Birthplace	Misc.
Beth	F	67	BS Teacher Ed. Teacher	Married; 3 children 3 grand- children	Born VA	sister
Carol	F	63	BS Special Ed. Homemaker Volunteer	Married; 2 children 3 grand- children	Born CT	2 brothers
Chris	M	60	BS Merchant marine Small Business Owner	Divorced 2 children 4 grand- children	Born NC	?
Ellen	F	65	BS Biology Teacher Volunteer	Married 2 children 2 grand- children	Born NY	brother & sister
Grace	F	66	Secretarial school 3 years college Admin assistant	Widowed 2 children 5 grand- children	Born NC	brother
Ida	F	90	BS, M.Ed. Child Development, Adult Education Extension Specialist	Single No children	Born VA	sister & brother
Jenny	F	67	MS library science, Librarian	Divorced 2 children 2 grand- children	Born VT	sister, brothers
Jackie	F	55	Teaching certificate Yoga instructor	Divorced daughter	Born Essex, England	sister
Karen	F	77	BS Nutrition Dietician Homemaker	Married 3 children 4 grand- children	Born NY	?

APPENDIX C: IRB Forms

**North Carolina State University  
Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research  
Submission for New Studies**

**Title of Project:** The expression of wisdom: A case study of life story writers

Principal Investigator Kathy Lohr Miller Department AHE

Source of Funding (**required** information):  
(if externally funded include sponsor name and university account number)

Campus Address (Box Number)

Email: Kmilller24@nc.rr.com Phone: 919-9615176 Fax:

RANK:  Faculty  
 Student:  Undergraduate;  Masters; or  PhD  
 Other (specify): Ed.D.

*As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I have read and understood the University Policy and Procedures for the Use of Human Subjects in Research. I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under this project will be conducted exactly as outlined in the Proposal Narrative and that any modification to this protocol will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.*

**Principal Investigator:**

Kathy Lohr Miller \_\_\_\_\_  
 (typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

*As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application thoroughly and will oversee the research in its entirety. I hereby acknowledge my role as the **principal investigator of record**.*

**Faculty Sponsor:**

Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner \_\_\_\_\_  
 (typed/printed name) (signature) (date)

PLEASE COMPLETE IN DUPLICATE AND DELIVER, ALONG WITH A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE, TO:  
**Institutional Review Board, Box 7514, or email as an attachment to debra\_paxton@ncsu.edu**  
 \*\*\*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

*For SPARCS office use only*

**Reviewer Decision (Expedited or Exempt Review)**

Exempt       Approved       Approved pending modifications       Table

Expedited Review Category:  1       2       3       4       5       6       7       8a       8b  
 8c       9

Reviewer Name

Signature

Date

**North Carolina State University  
 Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research  
 GUIDELINES FOR A PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

**In your narrative, address each of the topics outlined below. Every application for IRB review must contain a proposal narrative, and failure to follow these directions will result in delays in reviewing/processing the protocol.**

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of life story writing as a means of expressing wisdom. Supportive arguments for this study include the developmental and cognitive benefits of the life-story writing process and the potential value of the wisdom articulated. The need for tools that provide developmental support in the second half of the life span is becoming increasingly pressing for adult educators with the largest generation in the history of the United States moving into the retirement years and life expectancy continuing to increase. In this study, I draw on needs outlined in adult development models that indicate a quest for wisdom, ego integrity, and legacy as one enters the mature stages of the life span. The research questions guiding this research are 1) How does the process of life-story remembering, composing, interpreting, and sharing inform the writer’s understanding of their life experiences? 2) How is wisdom, defined as inquiry devoted to enabling one’s realization of what is of most value to one’s life, reflected in the life-writer’s story interpretations?

If student research, indicate whether for a course, thesis, dissertation, or independent research.

dissertation

**B. SUBJECT POPULATION**

1. How many subjects will be involved in the research?

Describe how subjects will be recruited. Please provide the IRB with any recruitment materials that will be used.

Subjects will be volunteers from a writer's group affiliated with Encore – NC State's learning in retirement program

3. List specific eligibility requirements for subjects (or describe screening procedures), including those criteria that would exclude otherwise acceptable subjects.

Subjects will have completed a life-story writing course and have current involvement in a monthly writer's group through Encore. Subjects will be a minimum of 50 years of age because this is an Encore requirement.

4. Explain any sampling procedure that might exclude specific populations.

All subjects within the population defined as students completing the Encore writing class and participating in the writer's group are invited to participate as subjects in the study.

5. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects - such as, teacher/student; employer/employee.

Researcher taught the life-story course, without pay and without grades assigned. Researcher also facilitates the writer's group without pay or compensation.

6. Check any vulnerable populations included in study:

minors (under age 18) - if so, have you included a line on the consent form for the parent/guardian signature

fetuses

pregnant women

persons with mental, psychiatric or emotional disabilities

persons with physical disabilities

economically or educationally disadvantaged

prisoners

elderly

other vulnerable population.

If any of the above are used, state the necessity for doing so. Please indicate the approximate age range of the minors to be involved.

Subjects are students from a class taught by the principal investigator through NC State's learning in retirement program: Encore Encore serves learners who range in age from 50 and up. The current age range of writer's in the group is early 50s to early 80s.

### **C. PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED**

1. In lay language, describe completely all procedures to be followed during the course of the experimentation. Provide sufficient detail so that the Committee is able to assess potential risks to human subjects.

The subjects will be asked to participate in two interviews, estimated at an hour each. These are to be held at McKimmon, where Encore classes and offices reside. The participants will also be submitting life stories for discussion in the second interview. The interviews are semi-structured and will be audio recorded and transcribed.

2. How much time will be required of each subject?

Total of 2 to 4 hours.

**D. POTENTIAL RISKS**

1. State the potential risks (physical, psychological, financial, social, legal or other) connected with the proposed procedures and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

The interviews will be held at the McKimmon Center, a location known and accessible to the participants.

Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive (e.g. private behavior, economic status, sexual issues, religious beliefs, or other matters that if made public might impair their self-esteem or reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability)?

The participants will be asked their age, geographic history, education and work experience for contextual purposes of this study.

If yes, please describe and explain the steps taken to minimize these risks.

Participants will be assigned a pseudonym so that anonymity is upheld. A description of the research and the information sought in the study will be explained in person and in writing before subjects can volunteer. Participants may drop out of the study at any time.

3. Could any of the study procedures produce stress or anxiety, or be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading? If yes, please describe why they are important and what arrangements have been made for handling an emotional reaction from the subject.

Life stories occasionally bring up disturbing memories. In the first session of the writing class, I explain that the course is not designed as therapy and that information shared should be done with sufficient thoughtfulness to oneself and the other writers. I am also providing a listing of counseling resources if such a need should arise. To date, no stress or anxiety has been brought to the attention of the principal investigator during the writing course or the writer's group.

How will data be recorded and stored?

Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed and written stories will be collected.

How will identifiers be used in study notes and other materials?



Each story writer will be assigned a pseudonym with no significance other than gender as an identifier.

How will reports will be written, in aggregate terms, or will individual responses be described?

Interview tapes will be transcribed. As this is a qualitative study in which subjective and contextual aspects are foundational to the study, individual interviews will not be combined.

If audio or videotaping is done how will the tapes be stored and how/when will the tapes be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Interview tapes and the written stories will be destroyed three years following the publication of the dissertation.

Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study? If yes, please describe why it is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures that have been arranged.

No.

#### **E. POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

*This does not include any form of compensation for participation.*

What, if any, direct benefit is to be gained by the subject? If no direct benefit is expected, but indirect benefit may be expected (knowledge may be gained that could help others), please explain.

The purpose of this research is to explore the experience of life-story writing as a means of expressing wisdom. The benefits are both individual and social. For the individual, there are issues of quality of life pertaining to cognitive health, independence, ego integrity, and personal meaning. Socially, this study could support the scholarship on life review, specifically, and aging in general.

#### **COMPENSATION**

Explain compensation provisions if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study.

No compensation is made for participation.

If class credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit.

No class credit is given.

#### **G. COLLABORATORS**

1. If you anticipate that additional investigators (other than those named on **Cover Page**) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their institution, department and phone number.

I do not anticipate any additional investigators.

2. Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed.

No.

**H. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. If a questionnaire, survey or interview instrument is to be used, attach a copy to this proposal.
2. Attach a copy of the informed consent form to this proposal.
3. Please provide any additional materials that may aid the IRB in making its decision.