

# ***YOU GROW OUT OF WINTER:***

## ***POETRY IN LONG TERM CARE***



***CHRIS HAGENS, ANDREA COSENTINO***  
***and***  
***ELLEN B. RYAN***

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Printed at: McMaster University,  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

*Writing Down Our Years Series, No. 6*

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***CHRIS HAGENS, ANDREA COSENTINO***  
***and***  
***ELLEN B. RYAN***

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***MCMASTER UNIVERSITY***  
***HAMILTON, ONTARIO L8S 4M4***  
***2006***

**BOOK TITLE: You Grow out of Winter: Poetry in Long-term Care**

**AUTHORS: Chris Hagens, Andrea Cosentino, Ellen B. Ryan**

**COVER DESIGN: Ann Anas**

First Printing: September, 2006

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**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

**Hagens, Chris, 1948-**

**You grow out of winter : poetry in long-term care /Chris Hagens, Andrea Cosentino & Ellen B. Ryan.**

**Includes bibliographical references.**

**ISBN 978-1-894088-68-8**

**1. Poetry--Authorship--Study and teaching. 2. Older people's writings, Canadian (English). 3. Aging--Poetry. 4. Nursing homes--Poetry. 5. Canadian poetry (English)--21st century. I. Cosentino, Andrea, 1981- II. Ryan Ellen B., 1947- III. McMaster University. Centre for Gerontological Studies IV. Title.**

**PN1101.H22 2006**

**808.107'15**

**C2006-905140-2**

**Writing Down Our Years Series, No. 6**

**Ellen B. Ryan, Series Editor**

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Chris Hagens.

*Long Term Care*, 5, 9-10, 1995.

#### **II: Poetry in Long Term Care.**

Andrea Cosentino, Ellen B. Ryan & Paula Papky.

*Long Term Care*, 15, 24-27, 2005.

#### **III: Reminiscing, Poetry Writing, and Remembering Boxes: Personhood-Centered Communication with Cognitively Impaired Older Adults.**

Chris Hagens, Amanda Beaman & Ellen B. Ryan.

*Activities, Adaptation and Aging*, 27, 97-112, 2003.

### **B – Alphabetical Listing of Facilitated Poems**



# ***ACKNOWLEDGMENTS***

***From Chris Hagens:***

**I would like to gratefully acknowledge:**

**The many residents of Shalom Village Nursing Home** who have shared themselves, their stories and their wisdom over the years. In these poems a part of them lives on. They will always be “somebody.”

**Pat Morden**, who as my original Director of Care, and also as C.E.O of Shalom Village, has always given her whole-hearted encouragement and support for this program.

**Amanda Beaman**, who worked tirelessly with me in running Reminisce and Write programs, leading to the creation of our Remembering Boxes. Amanda also spent many hours researching and writing on this subject.

**Dr. Ellen B. Ryan** and **Ann Anas** for all the work they have done in bringing these poems to publication.



***From Andrea Cosentino:***

**I would like to thank:**

**Every resident** at The Meadows Long Term Care Centre in Ancaster, Extendicare Hamilton, and West Oak Village Long Term Care Centre in Oakville who attended the group poetry sessions. Your words, memories, ideas, and stories continue to touch everyone who reads your poems.

**Velma Burd**, who was both a participant and volunteer with my poetry work at The Meadows. Her support, dedication, contribution, inspiration, and encouragement have provided countless opportunities for new learning and growth. Thanks also to **Lily**, my undergraduate thesis ‘poetry participant’ for her wisdom, words, and time together. Both of these ladies are true poets.

**Jodi Racz and her Programs Department** at The Meadows Long Term Care Centre, and **Paula Papky**, **Naomi Wingfield**, and **Rosemary Duffy**, three exceptional volunteers, for their support and assistance in the very beginning.

**Dr. Ellen B. Ryan** and **Ann Anas** for their continued guidance, support, and efforts in sharing the possibilities of poetry and older adults.



# **FOREWORD**

**Boyd Davis and Dena Shenk**  
**University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

It was no accident that Homer spoke poetry. Stories tumble out of people into poems, as poems. Sometimes scraps of poetry are our best way of connecting and reconnecting all our own parts, or of helping other people find and hold onto pieces of themselves.

When we discuss the importance of the spoken word with caregivers and health care workers in our STORIES workshops, we often start with poetry by North Carolina poet Barbara Presnell (and when we're very lucky, she joins us). Presnell writes documentary poetry, which crafts the voice of the speakers as if you were listening to them. In this excerpt, Presnell recreates the voice of Charlene, a textile mill worker in the Carolina Piedmont, awaiting lay-off:

*Walk out your house any day  
and a tree could fall on you, you might  
get hit by flying gravel from a semi's tires  
right between the eyes and drop dead on the spot.  
Or catch the stray bullet of a drive-by.  
I'm not even talking about diseases  
and inflictions of the heart, old age, the big C<sup>1</sup>.*

After listening to her poems, caregivers tell us they hear new things in their own and co-workers' stories about learning to work with older people. We work with them to find words, phrases, whole lines that suddenly seem to be poetry in their own stories. And when they hear a selection of facilitated poems by persons with dementia, they become even more excited, because now they can see that they can help others relocate and reconstruct a voice for themselves. And that's what the poems in this volume are: testament to the reconstructed voice.

Chris Hagens has been collecting poems with residents for over fifteen years. Hagens' introduction outlines a series of activities

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<sup>1</sup> © 2004, Barbara Presnell from Sherry's Prayer: *NC Textiles 1967-2004*.  
<http://www.nchumanities.org/publications/crossroads/xrd1204.pdf>

that can be developed at home or in care centers of various types. Andrea Cosentino helps us face a particular challenge: all too often, we don't think the person with dementia can have something special to say or to share. Cosentino walks us through collecting poems with Lily, and shares her delight as well as her techniques with us. Ellen Ryan, Sarah Clark and Pat Spadafora link the power of reminiscence with facilitated poetry. They remind us that, “It is the process that is important and how the storyteller remembers his/her life — even if the details are not accurate from a family member’s point of view” (2005, p. 23). After all, we’d never interrupt Homer, or Garrison Keillor.

### **Another way to move into training and learning**

Direct care workers, particularly the increasing number of second-language workers, deserve tailored training to expand their range of skills, training which lets them use their culturally-preferred ways of learning and storytelling. Our STORIES curriculum emphasizes team-building for staff and communicative collaboration with residents and family, based on narrative techniques and culturally-appropriate communications.

### **Components of the STORIES Curriculum**

- |          |                       |  |
|----------|-----------------------|--|
| <b>S</b> | Story-starters        | Who cared for you? What gave them the strength?<br>What helps you? What inspires you?<br>What gives you strength to care for others? |
| <b>T</b> | Try-outs              | Try role play, simulations and media with poetry and story for you and the people you care for.                                      |
| <b>O</b> | Open up               | Time to demonstrate new teaming and partnering skills that you watch, hear, and rehearse.  |
| <b>R</b> | Review<br>and reflect | Review issues of aging, dementia and agitation;<br>reflect on how music, poetry and story help.                                      |
| <b>I</b> | Initiate              | Start collaborative song-, story- and conversation-partnerships with the people you care for.  |
| <b>E</b> | Energize              | Try your own intervention, and think about how to teach it and evaluate it.  |
| <b>S</b> | Share                 | Share your wisdom, your story, your new skills with another.   |

We work with the direct care workers to learn how to use these techniques and approaches with the people they care for, work and live with, and to improve their skills and enjoyment of their work.

### **Facilitated poetry and “small stories”**

What is so important about facilitated poetry is that it lets us pull up what the psychologist, Michael Bamberg, calls “small stories.” Like scraps in a scrap-bag, these are:

- “Short narrative accounts
- Embedded in every-day interactions
- Unnoticed as ‘stories’ by the participants
- Unnoticed as ‘narratives’ by researchers
- But highly relevant for identity formation processes” (Bamberg and Moissinac, 2004).

### **Identity, Aging and Dementia**

In our work with older adults, particularly those with dementia, it becomes our job to help them hold onto their stories and sense of themselves. Who are they, what have they done in their lives, what roles have they played and do they continue to play, what brings them pleasure and what causes them pain? The mental powers that fail as a result of dementia are generally those related to thought and memory, whereas feelings and sociability need not be as seriously affected. With help and support, a confused person can remain in a state of well-being to a far greater extent than has otherwise been expected, and maintain their identity and sense of self (Kitwood 1990, 1993, 1997; Sabat 2002).

As we interact with older adults, we have the challenge and the opportunity to help them to organize and sustain their various “selves”. As Vittoria suggests, caregivers should “assume there are surviving selves in the Alzheimer’s residents and endeavor to preserve, protect, support and engage those selves as the essential part of their work” (1998: 93). We, as the “non-impaired” speakers, need to help our conversation partners retain and communicate their sense of identity as we help them to share and remember their memories, life experiences, personal values and views. What better way to do that than through facilitated poetry?

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**Boyd Davis** is Bonnie E. Cone Professor of Teaching and Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She studies language across the lifespan. She has developed materials and training for caregivers of people with dementia to help them enhance communication.



**Dena Shenk** is Director of the Gerontology Program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where she is a Professor of Anthropology. Her primary research interests are diversity within the older population based on gender, culture and environment with an emphasis on individual expectations and experiences of aging. She is committed to working to improve care for people with dementia by working with them along with staff and family and is excited by the potential of poetry and story in working with people with dementia.



**“I WAS SOMEBODY”:  
PERSONHOOD AND POETRY WRITING  
IN THE NURSING HOME**

***Chris Hagens***

“Home – you don’t want to leave it. You feel as if you belong. Everybody loves you. They talk to you, and listen to what you want to talk about.”

These words are taken from the poem “*A Home to Remember*”, and are exact quotes from a group of residents at Shalom Village Nursing Home in Hamilton, Ontario.

Residents newly admitted to a nursing home tend to communicate only with family, friends and staff. Fellow residents are seen as “other”. “I am not one of those old, sick people.” Since staff and family cannot be available for conversation at all times of the day to every resident, the consequences for them can be loneliness, isolation and a tendency to withdraw from life. I wanted to develop a creative, self-expressive group program, which would encourage active participation from all residents. In a small group gathering on a weekly basis we hoped that residents would share their stories, find their commonalities and shared humanity, and start to relate to one other, both within the group situation and later when they spent time together.

Inspired by Kenneth Koch’s book “*I Never Told Anybody: Poetry Writing in a Nursing Home*”, a Reminisce and Write program was developed using a combination of his poetry writing ideas with reminiscence. As residents shared their stories and memories, their words were repeated back to them and written down on a flip chart. These words and phrases were then re-arranged into a prose type poem. The poems we created from this process were an amazing by-product, and, as they were not the goal of the program, quite unexpected. Our very first group was composed of severely cognitively impaired residents, and the topic was “The Beach”. When residents had returned to their rooms, I sought out the Director of Care with great excitement. We read the poem “*Seaside Children*” together, and were astounded to discover that our group was capable of verbalizing these wonderful expressions and turns of phrase.

Occasionally with this group we would simply gather in one of their rooms. Residents would mirror my attentive listening and delighted responses. People we thought unable to converse or speak more than one or two words became engaged in conversation which continued after the meeting had ended. One individual who spent her days dusting the railings and humming to herself was able to participate fully in the discussions. Topics such as “Red” were felt to be emotionally non-threatening, and therefore a good place to start. In our basket of red objects there was a red silk rose. This woman picked up the rose and said, “Red roses remind me of someone I love. When you feel it, you feel it, when someone you love passes away. My husband always gave me red roses at Christmas” (*On Seeing Red*). The room was filled with such a sense of compassion, as we shared this moment of memory with her.

Reminiscences can be awakened by hearing a poem or an experience vividly related by the facilitator. Sensory stimulation with objects to touch, see or taste and listening to recorded environmental or musical sound are effective cues to restoring memories. It is easy for the facilitator to group residents in a circle around an easel with large sheets of paper. Words spoken by residents as they say them can then be written in large print. Reading back regularly reinforces the topic, especially necessary with cognitively impaired residents. This also makes it easier for persons with hearing or visual impairments to participate fully. As I read again the poem “*October Memories*” I can hear the ecstasy in J’s voice as she exclaims, “I can just see the pumpkins, those beautiful pumpkins...Oh, my!” This resident had been blind since she was a young child.

The most important aspect of creating poems is to capture the resident’s exact words. Digging for details helps to trigger the quirky turns of phrase, invented words and colourful memories that reveal the passions and essence of the person. Topics for discussion can also be arranged in a ‘Life Review’ format, both with individuals and in groups. It is very important to get to know as much as possible about your residents before you start a group: reading files, talking to residents, family and friends, looking at and discussing photo albums and the material possessions they have chosen to bring with them. While the majority of the poems collected here were created in groups where I was the sole facilitator, it is beneficial to have two leaders whenever possible.



[For detailed information on how to run such a program, see the Appendices.]

After one or two sessions, groups of residents did indeed start to relate to one another in a more intimate way. Soon there were two groups in place, one consisting of cognitively impaired persons, and one with cognitively able residents. A sense of family soon developed in the small groups. Sharing stories reduced the sense of “otherness”, and encouraged friendships and social support.

The group of more able residents chose to discuss their experiences of coming to live in a nursing home for their topic the following week. The poem we created from this discussion is “*No Place to Run*.” After reading the poem together, one resident turned to another one and said, “I had no idea you felt that way too! Next time you feel bad, come to my room and we’ll talk.”

Since starting in 1989 I have amassed a collection of well over a hundred poems. Some poems were written by groups of varying cognitive abilities, and some were individual creations. One poem (“*Out of the Mouths*”) is a compilation of conversations with many different residents over a period of time. This poem was used effectively in staff education as a way of helping staff to understand the feelings and needs of residents on admittance and while living in a nursing home. Poems have been displayed in large print on walls for staff, residents and visitors to enjoy, published in newsletters and arranged in photo albums with pictures. Album collections of our illustrated poems have been used repeatedly over the years as reminiscing tools and as a way of setting the topic for a new discussion.

A resident with cognitive decline can participate fully in such a group, while residents’ own words read back at a group session in later years will allow future members to “see” and “hear” who they really are. As their words are read aloud to the group, the resident will sit up straight with a beaming smile and say, “Yes, I said that!” Such groups can help a resident adjust to their new environment by discovering others with similar interests and backgrounds. “This is where I feel ... hopeful of friendships and working together.” On a Wednesday morning group members would be eagerly waiting to be taken to the sunroom where the group was held each week. In “*A Home to Remember*” one person talked about her pleasure: “whenever you go to a special place, being all together in a group, each one shares their thoughts.”

Often other group members are very surprised to learn such details of that person's life and passions. The poems allow the group to see this individual in a whole new way. A similar change in attitude towards a resident can also be seen in staff after they have read the poems, whether immediately after we have written them, or several years later when that person is much deteriorated cognitively and physically.

In addition to using the poems in this way, we have also used the same group poetry-writing format in developing Remembering Boxes. These boxes are used as a communication tool for staff and visitors. They combine articles meaningful to the resident with a one-page poem using words gleaned from extensive one-on-one interviews with each person, along with copies of captioned photographs selected to show the people, pets, life interests and passions which have made them who they are today. A one-page poem is immediately accessible and quickly read, while an invitation to read or listen to a taped life story can be intimidating to a staff person short on time. One resident, whose poem is "*It Can Be Iffy*", used to sit in her chair with the framed poem and photograph, reading the words aloud to herself and saying "Yes! That's right!" Reading her own words in the poem was comforting and affirming to her. It also made us aware that she still enjoyed reading, and we quickly found some other reading material to add to the poem. Many years have passed and this resident is now generally unresponsive. When I recently sat with her and read her poem aloud, she turned her head towards me and seemed to be listening intently. Other residents and staff were amazed to hear her poem, and said "Wow! I can't believe that's A". I noticed a new expression of respect and interest in their faces as they said this. These poems can be a powerful tool in assisting meaningful communication in the nursing home. A separate section of this book is devoted to these very personal poems (see "Remembering Box Poems").

Collecting items and stories for the boxes is an effective way for families to assist in the difficult transition to a nursing home. Residents, family and staff can get to know one another more quickly and fully in this process. Family members are usually delighted to help by bringing old photographs to copy and caption, and by sharing family stories. Their input plays a crucial part in the success of this project. I interviewed the wife of a resident who was no longer able to speak at all. Although he had a career as a statistician, his real passion was music.

She told me he was “Leader of the Band”, and that he had played saxophone in his own band for many years. The poem that came out of this interview, along with a photograph of him leaning nonchalantly on his car and holding the saxophone, brought this man to life for us at Shalom Village. Although unable to speak, he was later thrilled to tears that he could make his voice heard once again as “Leader of the Band” in our drum circles. As a result of our knowing him through his poem, “*Leader of the Band*” we were able to meet his needs for communication and belonging in an effective way. More information on Remembering Boxes can be found in the Appendices.

Poems, as well as Remembering Boxes, have been much-appreciated keepsakes when a resident dies. Family members tell me how important these poems are to them. Even from a group poem, family member’s words can be quickly recognized: “It’s her!” I have also found that reading their poems back to our residents towards the end of their life can be a wonderfully comforting experience. Hearing their own unique words, style of speech and life stories seems to help re-affirm their personhood, to reassure them that they are truly known and loved for who they are. Even residents who are normally unresponsive have turned towards a voice reading their own words and re-telling some of their stories, reacting with sound and sometimes opening their eyes. One resident, now in the end stages of Alzheimer’s disease, and normally uncommunicative, joins me in laughing loudly when I discuss the story of her very first (and last!) fishing expedition where she caught such an enormous fish she had her picture in the local newspaper!

Individual poems with a photograph of our resident “being themselves” are incorporated into the front of resident files so that all staff and personnel relating to our residents will see and know each one as an individual, adding a more dynamic approach to the usual medical and social histories. As spoken by one person in the poem “*I Was Somebody*”: “I was somebody once. People here don’t know what I have accomplished. I can’t keep saying ‘I, I, I’ even though I had a very interesting, wonderful life.”

Poetry writing in long term care can be a way of helping residents to maintain a life-long interest in writing. A few of our participants were published writers. As one person put it in “*Just Four Lines*”: “I can’t write any more. I have to tell you what I think.” Included in this book are three poems by Ken Olds, a current resident of Shalom Village Nursing Home who started writing in his seventies, and continues to

express his feelings in this way in spite of dealing with A.L.S. After coming to terms with the many losses he has suffered over the last few years, Ken has decided to spend his time in giving gratitude, compassion and love to the residents and staff. His thought-provoking and sometimes fun-filled writing has been shared with us on many occasions since he made his home here.

The poems are arranged in topics which can be used as ideas for discussion, and read as jumping-off points for creating new poems. The index lists the poems in alphabetical order along with an indication of the cognitive abilities of the participants. Some of the most amazing expressions have come from groups of more severely impaired individuals, e.g. "I'm a walking freckle"; "You get my drift? I don't have to snow again?"

Group poetry writing helps in creating a community in the nursing home by bringing people together to share themselves with others in a way that leads to a sense of belonging. Humour is important in enjoying life and coping with difficulties. Uproarious laughter is frequently to be heard in our circles, while residents really enjoy taking on the role of the entertainer. Poems such as "*Bold and Beautiful*" and "*Eaton's Catalogue*" are examples of this. Sharing our wisdom and advice, our ideas, passions and opinions, our listening skills and genuine interest in those who live with us "*At Home*" is a gift we are all able to give. Life as a resident in long term care is often seen as being "given to" most of the time. Actively participating in discussion, sharing anecdotes of our lives, revealing a little of who we are and what is important to us, listening to and giving support to others are satisfying ways of giving back.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POSSIBILITY**

***Andrea Cosentino***

Poetry has been a form of art, expression, and sharing for thousands of years. Poetry has the ability to communicate the difficult and the simple, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and can be created and enjoyed throughout the life course, and across differing physical and mental abilities.

Regardless, many concur with what George Getzel found over twenty years ago, that “at first glance, poetry groups and old people are an unlikely combination with poor prospects.”

Many believe that writing poetry either as a group or individually by older adults in long term care is inappropriate and useless, particularly for those with dementia or physical impairments which hinder the act of writing. Rather than view the infinite possibilities that the actual act of poetry writing and the completed poems can foster, it is assumed that the woman who rarely speaks, or the man who has severe short term memory loss could never, and would never, participate in such an activity. It is beyond their interest, beyond their capability, and would only serve to discourage and diminish their self-esteem. While these individuals (who may be staff, family, friends, and residents themselves) generally have the best intentions, what they assume at first glance would result in “poor prospects” could not be farther from the truth.

My journey into poetry with older adults in long term care began in 2002 as a project for a gerontology course with McMaster University. Over an eleven week period, with the help of volunteers from the community, residents of The Meadows Long Term Care Centre met for approximately one hour, once a week. During these sessions, they recalled and shared past and current experiences, feelings, and ideas using music, objects, poems, and each other. The ideas and words spoken by the participants at each session were later arranged by the group’s facilitator (which initially included myself and Paula Papky), into poems reflecting the theme of the session. Themes ranged from where we were from and places we had been, to colours, holidays, families, and pets. Completed poems were then brought to the next meeting, and read back by the facilitator. The delight, pride, and “I said that!/You said that!”,

moments abounded during this re-reading, and everyone kept their copy nicely folded in their laps to later show family, friends, and various staff members what they had created.

At the end of the eleven weeks, all of the poems were compiled into a bound collection for everyone to enjoy. Copies were given to each individual resident participant, The Meadows in general, and to others in the wider gerontology community. Through the distribution of the bound poems, it was possible to demonstrate in a tangible way the real potential and possibility the unlikely combination poetry and older adults could bring.

Following the success of the group poetry sessions, the idea was expanded for my undergraduate thesis, to create and use the poetry of an older adult with moderate dementia living in long term care. With the help of one of the group poetry participants, we followed the same format as that of the group poetry sessions, and assisted Lily, a resident, with the writing and organization of her own collection of poems, "Choice Words". While poetry can be read for the simple enjoyment and pleasure it brings to readers, the primary purpose of creating poems with Lily was to use the completed poems as a means of initiating meaningful communication between herself (a resident with dementia) and various staff members. In long term care facilities, the opportunity for meaningful communication and interaction is often lacking, with 'time' as the common attribution for this unfortunate situation. Recognizing the limited time staff members have to learn about each resident and the intense interest with which staff read the previous group poems, we felt that poetry with a sole author could increase the opportunity for meaningful communication and interactions between Lily and staff that much more. Knowing that it was Lily's poem (Lily's memories, ideas, and thoughts) increased staff members' knowledge of and respect for her, improving the quality of interactions with her. Staff members learned about the possibility of creating poetry with an older adult with dementia and using it as a means of effective communication.

After my experience of facilitating group poetry with various residents and individual poetry with a resident with dementia at The Meadows, I was able to use and combine those experiences and introduce the idea of group poetry with residents with dementia when I was later employed with Extendicare Hamilton as a

Recreation Aide, and again at West Oak Village Long Term Care Centre as the Programs Manager. Although the “unlikely combination with poor prospects” response did occur initially at both facilities, once staff members were able to read the completed poems, and especially witness the poetry being created, their original feelings of skepticism disappeared. Rather than initiate the same conversation over and over again, they were able to introduce new topics and highlight new memories through those they read in the completed poems. They saw the residents in a new light, with new memories to extract and new conversations and interactions to share. They saw the potential for increased and more meaningful interactions not only for the residents who had participated in the group poetry sessions, but for residents in general. Time and time again, staff members would comment that they thought (for example) that Mrs. A would *never* do poetry as she never talks to anyone, or that Mrs. P could not do poetry because she can’t sit still, and Mr. E could not participate because he can’t remember what happened ten minutes ago. Yet, as one staff member summed up her poetry experiences with residents, “I guess you just never know!”

Whether poems were written by a group of residents with little cognitive impairment, a group with mild to moderate impairment, or an individual with moderate dementia, participants at each facility shared similar outcomes. Not only did the participants help generate and write poetry, they also made new friendships, and gained a better understanding and respect for those with whom they lived and interacted everyday. The poetry sessions gave participants something “different” (as several residents stated) to look forward to, and the opportunity to discuss and create new conversations both during the sessions and beyond. Between sessions, some of the more cognitively able residents met in each others’ rooms to discuss the past week’s poems, the topics for the following week, and even to write their own individual poems. In other words, the poetry sessions did more than provide a ‘creative program’ on the monthly activity calendar. Participation in poetry activities provided residents with the possibility and potential to learn, create, interact, and share. In the eyes of everyone who watched the sessions and/or read the poems, the residents had the opportunity to *be* so much more.

We are all poets, whether we know it or not. Everyone has memories, feelings, thoughts, and emotions all waiting to be heard and shared. Whether one is eighteen or one hundred and eight, has a perfect memory or is in the stages of dementia, every person has a story, poems waiting to be written.

While poetry and older adults may at first appear to be an “unlikely combination with poor prospects”, the potential of older adults, especially older adults in long term care facilities, to write, create, and share poetry is a possibility worth believing in. You just never know what you, they, and the community at large might gain from the endeavour.





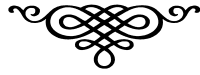


# ***THE POEMS***





**HOME**





## Home

Home is  
everything  
taking care of someone  
getting better  
in Hull  
the big things  
a lovely place

Home has everything in its place  
I love my home, it's so pleasant

Home is everything to me and them

Home is  
beautiful  
my family, my children  
where you live  
where the heart is  
full of noise  
a big dog, and a little kitty  
love

Home is  
a place to raise children,  
where love grows,  
a playful place, and  
shelter

.....➔



Home is  
staying together as a family  
love, working together, and  
togetherness

Home is  
a place to live, and  
sleeping under a roof

Home is  
a very special place  
a place to cook  
comfort  
everything and what you make it

Home is home sweet home

Home is  
a place to rest, and  
a place for laughter

Home is where memories are

Home is at its best, and always remembered.



## **A Home to Remember**

I like to visit houses in the wintertime.  
Everyone gathers round the fire.  
It makes me feel at home.  
I want to stay like that.  
Home – you don't want to leave it.  
Makes you feel you're glad to be alive...  
Joining with other people and things,  
I feel something is mine.  
No one can come and take it away –  
not the memory of it, anyway.

Older houses are built better, on a better foundation.  
More interesting – different shapes and colours.  
Outhouses – old houses had them –  
like a little shed.  
We took a lamp with us.  
Home – you don't want to leave it.  
You feel as if you belong.  
Everybody loves you.  
There's something kind about home.  
They talk to you, and listen to what you want to talk about.  
Perhaps you're thinking your furniture doesn't look good...  
Doesn't matter!  
What matters  
is someone who cares about you – they count.

.....➤

Smells remind us of home.  
Lavender is home – lavender polish.  
Smell it in the morning, and last thing at night.  
Cooking smells – onions and mushrooms.  
Mum used to slap loaves together,  
put them in the tin to rise and cover them.  
Oh, the smell of that bread!  
We ate it right away.  
“Give me the crust, Mum?”  
It was so good; you could eat it with nothing on it.  
The dough that was left, she made balm cakes,  
floured and flattened out into a round.  
Didn’t last too long.

Memories.  
Make you feel cosy and warm.  
Having memories is better,  
because you’ve got  
something to think about.  
Whenever you go to a special place  
being all together in a group  
each one shares their thoughts.  
Joining with other people and things  
writing a poem  
about living in the old days.  
Something speaks to me  
before I speak to others.  
Everyone could feel like this  
if they put their minds to it.  
How long is it  
since you felt like that?



## Group Thoughts of Home

We had good times together, seven boys and girls, Mum and Dad.  
Going home again – it was all nice.  
I don't think there'll be anything left now...  
I always lived in the city.  
It doesn't have the breadth and width of the country.  
The country gives you a different perspective.  
You know, I wanted to live on a farm –  
that was my heart's desire.  
My mother would tell me what she used to do...  
told me how they'd get the horses out,  
grab their tails and hang on!  
They worked hard – enjoyed themselves too.

My brother did paintings.  
My mother didn't hand them out to girls.  
She made all our clothes.  
I don't think she sat down  
until she went to bed at night.  
I was the baby of the family.  
She only had one child, and I was IT!  
I was the oldest, the youngest and the in-between.  
I only had one sister.  
She passed away last week.  
Father was killed at T.H.& B. – Mother died the day after.  
So, we were put in a home, my sister and I.  
Mother was put in a home when she was very sick.

Home is family – it's your background,  
Happiness that's born in you  
It's like a story coming...something in the air.  
Clocks ticking are very important. They're part of the background.  
You know they're going to continue ticking  
as long as you don't forget to wind them.  
If you've got old fashioned clocks that will work,  
you've got a home.



## Nursing Home Life

I've had a lot of things to adjust to  
in my life.  
When my husband didn't take me home  
I remember people saying  
"This is home."  
A woman saying  
"It isn't!"  
She was literally homesick.  
I used to be so busy with holidays.  
I'd make a nice dinner, invite family and friends.  
Hamentaschen. I used to make them with yeast.  
I miss not doing any cooking myself.  
I've had a lot of things to adjust to  
in my life.  
I never had to share a room with someone.  
People don't seem to see me...  
Hourly, I'm different.  
Depends who I'm with.  
I watch people's faces, look to see what they're thinking.  
Sometimes I feel upset  
with all the noise  
at meals.  
The really elderly ones look upset when it's noisy.  
We were a big family.  
I like it in a way...this is where  
I feel contented,  
hopeful  
of friendships and working together.  
I wouldn't like to feel  
adjusted.  
I wouldn't have room  
to grow.  
I've had a lot of things to adjust to  
in my life.



## No Place to Run

I waited a long time.  
I was in hospital for a year.  
I was looking forward to it for so long...  
When I got here, it was a big disappointment.  
Little space.  
I thought it would be single rooms.  
My side has no room.  
Put a chair there – next morning it's gone.

I was living with my mother.  
House and furniture were sold real fast.  
The money went to my two sisters.  
My mother always said, "They won't sell my house –  
over my dead body!"  
How true!  
My mother was psychic.

My son brought me here.  
When I came here, I was so lonesome.  
I cried and cried.  
I was scared to talk to anyone.  
Didn't know if they would answer.  
It's hard to make friends here – it's different –  
there's no place to run.  
I came from the other home.  
Change...it was springtime, so it wasn't bad.  
A big change – I just went along with it.  
Sometimes, I'm scared to talk to the nurses.  
When you sit in a wheelchair,  
most people think you're mentally handicapped.  
I'M NOT!

I cope by keeping my mind occupied.  
Just keep busy.  
Keep your mind off it.  
I've given up talking  
to anyone.  
Nobody answers.

You never know  
when  
your time will come.



## Out of the Mouths

I'm ninety-four, or is it five?  
You tell me dear!  
At this old age, I can't expect  
to remember such things.  
It's terrible being old – deaf and nearly blind.  
I ask myself,  
how can God let people hurt so much?  
I never dreamt it was possible to feel such pain!  
I pray every night  
that if he finds me worthy,  
the Lord will take me.  
It just keeps going downhill.  
Oh, to be young again!  
I'm so tired.

Take *my* picture!  
I'm pretty too, aren't I?  
I was beautiful – look at this picture –  
always kept my nails just so –  
kept half a lemon by the sink – it whitens them.  
I can't believe this is happening to me!  
I had a good life – a wonderful life!  
I had a beautiful home. My husband was a wonderful doctor.  
We traveled all over the world – and now, this!  
I want to go home!

It's a nursing home!  
No matter what, it's not home.  
My things...where did they put my things?  
I want to see them!  
It all happened so suddenly.  
Came straight here from the hospital  
Came straight here from the funeral.  
Didn't go home – couldn't choose which things to bring.  
There's no one to talk to.  
I like talking to you – you listen!  
I can see you're listening!

.....➤

◀.....

Hello! Hello! Hello! Hello!  
Mary, Mary, come here!

Come here, damn you!  
I'm hungry! Give me something to eat.  
What's on Chris? Hey Chris! Hello.  
Have you come to see me? Sit down. Let's sing a song.  
I love you! You're beautiful.  
You know, to me, you're God, and I know what I'm talking about!  
I'm singing to myself. Have you seen my brother? Mother?  
You've got it – that special gift.  
Hello Mum! Don't you look nice! What are we going to do?  
I want to go with *you*.  
You promised you'd bring me.  
Where are you going? Why? What's happening?  
You're leaving? Why?  
Oh.  
Lots of parties today. I'm tired.  
I want to go to my room and lie down.  
I can't leave now – friends are coming.  
Look at the buffet I laid out!  
Is it lunchtime? Is it suppertime? Is it breakfast time?  
I'm not getting up again.  
It's too difficult  
trying to sit down.  
I've always been a loner.  
When I die  
I'm going to be a star –  
the Evening Star.  
I like talking to you – you listen.  
I can see you're listening.





# **FAMILY AND FRIENDS**







## **The Family Feeling**

I feel terrible sometimes  
without them...  
my family.  
Seven girls, two boys.  
I'd love it  
if they were here with me now.  
My mother and father were wonderful people.  
He always had a twinkle in his eyes.  
She was beautiful...  
always the one  
considered the most beautiful  
and intelligent.

The girls always ruled the roost.  
We could get whatever we wanted.  
We were real good friends...  
helped each other out.  
We loved each other very much.  
I'm the last one.  
The lonesome feeling I have...  
I want to pick up the phone  
and talk to someone  
who knew me  
in my youth.



## Family – A Treasure!

Owen Sound – that's where I grew up  
Out in the country, on a farm.  
My parents ran the farm – that's how they started out,  
animals and crops.  
My father was a sailor – very shy.  
They met  
at a local dance for servicemen.  
Ma – she'd bounce across the room to get the man she liked!  
Ma asked my father to dance – that's how they met.  
"He was the best thing that ever happened to me."

I was born in Sussex, England.  
During the war  
we used to draw our stockings on with an eye pencil.  
Met my soldier husband at a dance, married him in England.  
Came to Canada soon after – a war bride –  
to Pier 21 in Halifax.  
I have a beautiful mother and father,  
but I don't have the pictures here.  
Pictures of family  
so precious to me.  
I show my grandchildren all the time; my little granddaughter  
such a darling!  
My mother, she died before forty.  
Everybody was crying with me.  
I met my husband through a friend – we met at his business.  
He was very handsome. I thought,  
when we have children they will be too.  
Every night when I go to bed  
I still talk to him, like he is in the next bed.  
Family means very much to me.  
This is a treasure!



## Childhood

I remember when I was three years old,  
I was jumping up and down on the bed singing  
“Johnny in the sugar bowl, ha, ha, ha!”  
I lived on Windsor Street.  
My mother and father had a little variety store.  
Childhood – it all depends where you grew up.  
Different upbringing.  
We were struggling in Romania.  
Everybody seemed to be a giant – we were so small.  
It had its advantages and disadvantages.  
I went for a walk on a Saturday holding my daddy’s hand.  
I used to love that!

We worked a smallholding in Romania.  
Milked the cows. You take a little stool,  
wash your hands, wash the cow and squeeze.  
We took food out to workers in the fields.  
Three girls and a boy. Boys were very important in Europe.  
We always spoiled my brother.  
Everyone said he had three mothers, not one!  
When I was born it was Hungary.  
When I was in school, it was Romania.  
Sent my brother far away to a German city to school.

I played with dolls when I was little.  
My sister had to work in the knitting factory.  
One day I wore her nice brown gingham dress...  
It had along waist and a plain skirt.  
“If any of you put my clothes on, you’re going to get it!” she said.  
She took the scissors and cut it to shreds.  
Childhood...I remember.



## Laundry Was Monday

Thursday night was bath night,  
Sunday night you soaked the washing,  
laundry was Monday.  
We used the same tub...a big tin washtub.  
Start in the morning and go the whole day.  
Had to heat the water in a bronze boiler.  
We had a backhouse.  
If you had a shed out back, you used that.  
How you used it!

Scrub board – I still have one hanging up in my kitchen.  
Sunlight wash soap.  
Sunday night you soaked the washing.  
First put the clothes in water to soak, get the dirt off.  
Remember the wringers?  
We had to turn the handle.  
My sister caught her fingers in the mangle –  
scared the life out of us.  
Used the flatiron next day, or at night if you had time.  
Those were the days – we had to do it, and that was it!  
Just get down to work.  
Everything stopped for that.  
Just picture, if you washed something,  
used to be so damp in the house from all the clothing hanging up.  
Sock stretchers – needed them for my boys.  
I'd wash a couple of pairs at a time.  
Glove stretchers for cotton gloves.  
I wore them in the summer, with a crocheted tam.  
Hang them up on the stretchers on the line –  
they'd iron themselves that way!  
Later I had a Caulfield washer.  
Thought it was pretty smart too!  
Laundry was Monday.  
I liked washing.



## People Do the Nicest Things

My mother did the nicest thing for me.  
She let me be born.  
As I got older  
I used to sit and look at her, say  
“Gee, Mum, I’m glad you let me be born!”

I had a grandmother.  
She raised my brother and me  
so we could be together.  
She was so good to us!

My brother wanted a doll.  
My mother got an old black stocking,  
sewed on two legs,  
stuffed the body,  
put the head on.  
It had two buttons for eyes,  
her lipstick for a mouth.  
My brother took it everywhere with him.  
Wouldn’t even go to the backhouse without it!  
Everybody thought it was cute.  
One day my mother said  
“It’s time to get rid of it.  
Give it to someone.”  
He gave it to me!  
She always taught us to share.  
I felt elevated!  
People do the nicest things.



## Remembering Mother

Have you all got your mother's memory?  
Do you remember what it was like to be a little girl?  
I seem to remember more in the distance  
than things near.  
I like the truth of it.  
My mother was ill for four years before she died.  
I was sixteen.  
I couldn't explain it to anybody.  
I just felt it.  
But somehow, you find yourself alive.  
You go on.

Childbirth at home...it's better to get the men out of the house...  
they get so nervous!  
My mother was very beautiful...a wonderful person.

Did you used to go shopping  
with your mother  
when you were little?  
I suppose I had my turn...  
I hope they didn't miss me...  
We were a large family – nine children –  
seven girls, two boys.  
We went shopping by streetcar.  
We all went together.  
We hung on to each other!  
We got a kick out of every place we went.  
It was lovely.  
I was one of the older ones.  
I felt grown-up.

.....➤

I had one brother, very delicate, very talented in music.  
He won a prize in England  
for being able to hear a piece of music once  
and write it out.  
He didn't make a single mistake.

My mother was an artist – watercolours.  
I have one large picture of Lands End.  
I loved the sea.

On the beach with my little bucket and spade,  
my brother used to make castles with moats round them.  
We had to stop, go back to the hotel for lunch.  
It always came at the wrong time.  
I got so cross when we had to stop.  
We used to spend hours in the kitchen.  
We didn't go out as much as we do today.  
I had my own little cakes – rock cakes.  
I used to like making icing...  
Everything you enjoy  
has to stop.

Have you all got your mother's memory?  
Do you remember what it was like  
to be a little girl?  
It was lovely!  
I remember  
just as though it was  
yesterday.



## Mothers

I never thought I'd have a child.  
I have three children.  
I have a boy and a girl.  
They're crazy about each other.  
Raymond told me the other day  
"I thought I'd be so jealous of her.  
Now I can't see her enough!"  
My daughter's in college.  
She wanted to go where the boys were.  
I thought, "I don't know how she'll ever pass!"  
But it's her life.  
Marion was a doll to me.  
My children would giggle with each other  
when we'd sing.

I took care of my mother  
when she was old.  
My mother's name was Leila.  
Mother was a great little doll to me.  
She loved kids...  
auburn hair, about my height...  
the prettiest woman, very stylish.  
I have one picture – in her Sunday best –  
the loveliest picture.  
I had to coax it from Ruth.

Mother  
means family.  
I didn't cook with my mother –  
she wouldn't let me near the kitchen!  
My mother.  
I never could forget her.  
I miss her.





## Home Remedies

If you don't want a cold  
go out well dressed, wrapped up.  
When you come in, take it off.  
My mother used to make her own medicine.  
A poultice boiled on the fire,  
put in a paper,  
put on your chest, tied with a cloth.  
She used rad water, from the radiator.  
Made strabenka, an ointment.  
Used to put it on with a feather.  
Used to cry.  
It burned!

My mother made a drink for wintertime  
with rose petals.  
It smelt and tasted wonderful.  
They boiled the stem of the poppy.  
Gave it to children to make them sleep.  
Sloan's liniment for colds.  
Sulphur and molasses, thick and sticky.  
Doctors came to the house.  
We paid them two dollars.  
Dr. Ross was a good doctor.  
He sent a collector  
for whatever you could pay...  
fifty cents or a quarter.  
During the war  
all kinds of sicknesses  
used to come up.  
My mother  
used to make  
her own medicine.



## Our Kitchen

Everybody  
get out of my kitchen!  
My kids used to come around  
when I was baking.  
I'd have to take off little bits of dough  
to give to them.  
Kitchen tools...  
my favourite was a Sunbeam Mixmaster.  
I made a lot of bread  
glazed with egg, dotted with poppy seeds,  
twisted bread.  
My mother, God rest her soul, her fingers used to fly  
braiding the bread.  
In my kitchen  
Thursday cooking for Friday...  
fresh brisket put in a slow oven...the juice would make the gravy.  
gefilte fish...  
always bought fresh fish, scaled it ourselves.  
We'd salt it about half an hour  
wash the salt off, and chop it.  
Cover with water; cook a couple of hours...  
The cat would always know!  
Our kitchen...  
three girls in a tub  
one by one.  
In Churchill, we had to buy the water...  
one tub of water did everything!  
We'd boil it in a big oval kettle.  
When I'm polishing the floor  
everybody  
get out of my kitchen!



## Shopping Trips

It's something you take for granted – something you have to do.  
I used to go uptown  
shopping with my mother.  
We didn't go far –  
we didn't have much money.  
Mostly Thursdays we went.  
I looked forward to going shopping.

We went shopping in a horse and buggy.  
We'd go to the barn where you stable the horse.  
It would look at you –  
“This is my territory. Beat it!”

When I grew up, I couldn't see anything.  
My mother and two aunts had to shop for me.  
I led a lonely life – no sisters and brothers.  
I used to go shopping with Aunty.  
She bought me little treats –  
filled my mouth with food!  
She was a wonderful woman.  
I loved her.  
She's dead now.

I've had many things I wanted to buy, but couldn't.  
I'd come home with a dressed-up dress.  
Mamma would say, “Where did you get that?  
Do you like it? That's the point.  
You're the wrong girl for it.  
You don't wear dressy clothes.  
Tailored are better.”  
I'd take it back.

I used to go uptown shopping with my mother.  
We didn't go far – we didn't have much money.  
Mostly Thursdays we went.  
I looked forward  
to going shopping.



## Eaton's Catalogue

Eaton's catalogue  
Once a year  
Delivered to the house.  
Everybody grabbed for it!

I turned to the ladies' dresses first.  
I had a flowered voile,  
gathered  
at the waist,  
full skirt, all colours.  
Made me feel like cock o' the north!  
Untrimmed hats  
to decorate as you please.  
I bought flowers  
trimmed them to match different outfits.

Before the year was up,  
a new one came...  
so we hung  
the old one  
in the outdoor toilet.  
Closest my rear end ever came  
to a fur coat!  
If you're ever lonely,  
get the catalogue,  
and enjoy  
every bit of it!



## **The Student Prince**

I remember  
the boy from Kitchener...  
Tall and handsome,  
he had a scar,  
wore a school cap...  
He walked me home from the dance.  
We called him  
“The Student Prince.”  
Mrs. Hamilton  
was always behind the curtain  
watching.  
Never missed a thing.

He was an educated person,  
I was a maid.  
I wasn't good enough  
for him.  
We wrote to each other.  
Oh, he could dance!  
Waltzes, foxtrots –  
a lover  
with a lollipop!  
Dancing  
is so romantic.  
Those were the days.



## **Totally Lustless Love**

Love is wonderful.  
When lust is gone, love carries on.  
Totally lustless love.  
Young people don't realize this.  
Somewhere along the way  
you develop caring for another person,  
a deep feeling, commitment no matter what.  
Love spreads out and touches others.  
If it's meant for you, it will last forever.

Is romance a love song  
or a lust song?  
Women give sex to get love,  
men give love to get sex.  
Love is separate from sex.  
Love grows as the family grows,  
from the heart.

You don't see the real person until you live with them.  
I got married because it was the thing to do.  
My father was against it, my mother was for it.  
Positive memories,  
an emotional, happy time.  
Love is wonderful.  
When lust is gone, love carries on.  
Totally  
Lustless  
Love.



## Be a Friend

Table tea with my friend.  
My mother sat at the head of the table.  
Afternoon tea  
sometimes by the fire, or with a tea trolley.  
A little tiny scone, butter and jam...  
strawberry.  
Cookies, soft  
with chocolate chips or nuts.

Now is the best time  
to have a friend to tea,  
because we love each other,  
have fun together.  
It's lovely to have a friend, do what you like.  
Some of my friends have passed on,  
but I still feel close friends.  
I feel sometimes  
they're just around the corner,  
taking a little walk.

For real friendship  
be a friend!  
It's nice to be able to count on someone.  
Trust...  
You can rely on friends.  
Visit, write, call.  
Excitement when a friend is coming.  
Prepare something for them...  
tea, homemade cake,  
or buy something special.  
It's really nice to see them.  
Husbands are good friends – they put up with a lot.  
Most of my friends have gone,  
but I still feel close friends.  
It's lovely to have a friend, even only one person.  
For real friendship,  
be a friend!



## Friends

Life would be very lonesome  
if you didn't have friends.  
Friends – children we went to school with –  
I went to two different schools,  
made lots of friends.  
Only time I see them is when I go up to town,  
see them walking down the street.  
When I was young, these friends were children.  
Now they're my friends – we can trust each other.  
Trust is the main part.

My mother was a big tall woman.  
She was a friend to everybody.  
She'd get them all together –  
start on a Saturday, end on Sunday.  
I knew a girl –  
let her mother and father put her “up on a stool”.  
I told her “You won't have any friends”.  
It came out true. A lot of friends left.

Most girls at fourteen had to go out and work.  
I'd rather make friends with a country girl.  
I still have friends I've had all my life.  
We always had a nice time.  
When you're with a friend,  
you don't feel small.  
You feel THIS BIG!  
It's you I think of when I think of friends.  
Trust is the main part.  
Life would be very lonesome if you didn't have friends.





## **A Friend You'd Tell Your Secrets To**

I remember my friend,  
a friend you'd tell your secrets to.  
We went walking,  
saw a young couple holding hands.  
We giggled and giggled,  
just like sisters!  
In our teens  
My friend and I played baseball.  
I played right field, she played centre field.  
We had a uniform...  
Dark pants, white top with insignia.  
We were real tomboys in those days.  
All the twelve years we were together,  
never a cross word.  
You know,  
no matter who came in the house,  
always had a kettle of boiling water  
on the stove,  
pastry always ready.  
My mother used to bake it all.  
Bread you could throw in the air  
it was so light.  
Always a cup of tea, and a pastry.  
Just like open house.  
Every night we had a gang up.  
Used to play, dance...  
had about twenty-five records.  
It was good clean fun.  
Those were wonderful days.



## **My Memory Box**

Photographs, itineraries, tickets, hats  
Pictures.

I save all my pictures.

I store them up.

I look at them.

They make me feel good.

Pictures of travels,  
Pictures as children  
with family, friends.

I look at them.

They make me feel good.

I took lessons  
on making hats  
with fabric,

with Madame Coubert.

I always made a lot of clothes.

Sewing, smocking  
threads, silks and thimbles.

We had a seamstress named Miss Oyster.

My brother called her "Oy!"

I save all my pictures.

I look at them.

They make me feel good.



**WHO WE ARE  
AND  
WHERE WE'RE FROM**





## **I Was Somebody**

I was somebody once!  
People here don't know what I have accomplished.  
I can't keep saying "I, I, I",  
even though I had a very interesting, wonderful life.  
It would make them feel differently.  
I miss my husband terribly.  
Women live longer; men treat us so well!  
Men have to work harder.  
I think we sort of grew up together.  
He seems to have been around  
from an early age.

Our parents were friends.  
We got to know each other that way.  
I can't make new friends here...it's very difficult.  
It's hard to talk to people.  
I wonder what they'll think of me.  
When you're young, you have the ability to pick and choose.  
Here, you say no more than  
"Hello! How are you? It's a nice day!"  
You don't have the interest.  
At this old age, I feel I've had everything.  
Now I'm content  
to let the rest of it go by.  
There's nothing I'm going to grab for.  
Once,  
in the past  
I was somebody.



## **Where We're From (I)**

We're From  
Elora, Ontario  
12 miles from Guelph,  
where we worked hard on that farm.

We're From  
an apartment in Berlin  
where we had windows,  
and came over by boat.

We're From  
Hull, Quebec  
right outside of Ottawa.

We're From  
one brother, one sister,  
and no siblings at all.

We're From  
Yorkshire, England  
that's the city and county of Kingston-upon-Hull,  
and it was mostly on the river.

We're From  
Hamilton, for quite awhile now  
but actually from Out West,  
in Manitoba.

We're From  
Poland  
from the city,  
it's been a long time since I left there.

We're From  
a medium size farm  
where we grew crops through and through  
and oh yeah, lots of wheat.



## **Oh, the Places We've Been!**

Oh, the Places We've Been:

Alaska, Barbados, Mexico, the Ukraine  
California, Miami, the Bahamas, Hawaii.

Oh the Places We've Been,

by coach, ship, plane, and gondola.

Oh, the Places We've Been:

England, Ireland, Scotland, France,  
Florida, Wiarton, Sicily, Belgium.

Oh, the Places We've Been,

by trains, horse-sleds, ferries, and cars

Oh, the Places We've Been:

Australia, the Prairies, Newfoundland, New Zealand,  
Vancouver, Palermo, Venice, Saskatoon.

Oh, the Places We've Been,

by paddle boat, tram, motorcycle, and bike.

Oh, the Places We've Been:

Windsor, Stoney Creek, Scandinavia, Germany,  
New Mexico, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York.

Oh, the Places We've Been,

by foot, trolley car, camel rides, and subways.

Oh, the Places We've Been:

Regina, Alberta, Argentina, Europe,  
Switzerland, Monaco, Canada, Calgary.

Oh, the Places We've Been?

...all over!



## **Downtown Hamilton**

I remember streetcars instead of buses,  
and Cambridge Clothes, The Market on York Street, Kresges,  
Robert's Meat Market, and Woolworth's, Robinson's, and Eaton's.

I worked at Robinson's and made 25 cents an hour.  
I was supervisor at Cambridge Clothes for 23 years.  
I worked at Kresges.  
Me too! I made the hotdogs...I ate a lot of hotdogs!

And what about The Market on York Street...  
Only local growers then  
Ah, fresh fruit from the market  
And trucks with big wheels of cheese...oh give me a taste!  
Did you know that if you went at night you could get it cheaper,  
that's what my dad did.  
A vase of gladiolas for 25 cents.

The fish smell, it was very strong, and they all came  
wrapped up like a parcel  
Sweet fish, the surprise that we knew about  
And remember, the trout is cooked, when his eyes are pearls.

And what about Robert's Meat Market...  
Where chickens in the summertime were sometimes left out too long  
And Kresges and Woolworth's on the same corner...

And what about the lunch counter...  
Do you remember the lunch counter?  
Best clam chowder, 5 cents a bowl, and 2 butter tarts for a nickel  
Oh, but the shellfish in England...

And Eaton's, and Robinson's, and The Right House...  
Do you remember Cadman from The Right House? the milliner?  
Or the elevator lady from Eaton's with her white gloves?  
Or what about Robinson's, and the man at the bottom of the escalator?  
Or when the mannequins would walk through the store  
showing the dresses?

I remember streetcars instead of buses,  
And Cambridge Clothes, The Market on York Street, Kresges,  
Robert's Meat Market, and Woolworth's, Robinson's, and Eaton's.





## **Young Hamilton, Old Hamilton**

Old Hamilton.  
We came in 1917,  
had a hairdressing store.  
Mom did so well  
she bought herself a mink coat.  
Lived on Balmoral,  
children all went to Delta and Memorial Public School.  
Always liked young Hamilton...  
liked the kids  
telling stories about their lives.

Old Hamilton, young Hamilton.  
Hamilton Market,  
Tuckett Tobacco,  
Dundurn Castle.  
Dundurn was spacious,  
Modern furniture.  
Went on school trips there.  
Studied modern furniture and design.  
We were there when Royalty called!  
King George and Queen Elizabeth –  
Really beautiful, she was –  
Healthy rosy cheeks and nice skin,  
wearing a red suit.  
Young Hamilton, Old Hamilton.  
We came in 1917.



## **I'm From**

I'm From

Finland, a small city, a small farm born and raised  
Fireplaces keeping us warm from the Finland cold  
A weeklong boat trip with my husband born in Hungary  
and I in Finland  
Now in Canada, Sudbury, suburb home, nursing for babies  
at the General Hospital  
To Oakville living, raising a family and living happy  
To here, sad to leave happiness but happy to still smile and love.

I'm From

Canada, Ontario, North Burlington, a farming community  
Living on a farm raising a husband, a family, and horses  
9 Morgan horses, 6 boxer dogs and a couple cats roaming  
A home, "wife" was my job; cooking, cleaning,  
and keeping the family together  
To here with friends, family and a roof over my head.

I'm From

Canada, Quebec Montreal, in Verdun City I was born and raised  
Playing near the south shore with all the children  
French speaking children learned English,  
not I having to learn French  
The mother-in-law would speak French.  
All I needed to know was "bonjour!"  
A musical family, dad on the piano, both brothers on the sax  
and violin, and I watching the music come alive.

.....➤

◀.....

I'm From

Canada, Ontario, Sudbury a suburb community  
A three-bedroom house full of family and love  
A worried mother, to become a worried mother  
Baking apple and lemon pies and other yummy treats.

I'm From

London, England – Devonshire Rd. to be exact  
Born and raised for 12 years, then hopped on a boat and  
sailed to Canada  
A family of caring people who all enjoy a good laugh or joke.

I'm From

Scotland – now Canadian but my blood will always be Scottish  
Grew up listening and dancing to Gaelic music and bagpipes  
Wearing kilts in my family's tartan/plaid.



## Where We're From (II)

We're from  
photos spilling from  
drawers, boxes, cupboards and albums,  
or hanging on walls all the way up the stairs.

We're from  
one-room school houses  
where the boys were always noisier than the girls  
and the teacher said, "You're gonna get a lickin'"

We're from  
Regina, Moose Jaw, and Vonda Saskatchewan  
from Wainfleet, Hamilton, Ancaster, Galt  
from Tillsonburg, Windsor, Winnipeg, and Owen Sound.

We're from  
India, Germany, Latvia, Scotland, England,  
and New Jersey, south of the border.

We're from  
linden, birch, and monkey-puzzle trees  
from snow apples, russets, Ben Davis, Tollman sweet,  
from McIntosh, crispin, wealthy, and spy  
red delicious, golden delicious, granny smith, crab apples,  
from one bad apple spoils the barrel  
from take the long apple peel and throw it over your shoulder –  
whatever letter it makes is your true love's name.

We're from  
milk, and whole wheat, and Indian sweets  
from packets of Kalay and crisps and homemade bread  
strawberries and whipping cream, and heaven manna,  
from mangoes, rhubarb, watermelon, peaches,  
to quince jelly and Saskatoon berries  
and back then, radishes spelled spring.



## **Music, Music, Music**

“Beautiful Dreamer”...  
I like the way it’s sung – sounds like a waltz.  
Nice, easy dancing.  
It’s a necessary evil when you’re dancing  
to have a good solid beat!  
Drums...I used to play  
in the band.  
If you want to be a good dancer,  
you need to learn a variety of dances.  
Jazz – it’s good for a fast step,  
A two-step.  
Did a lot of waltzes and two steps.  
The drum beat...  
Timing is very important!  
Scott Joplin – “The Entertainer”...  
makes me feel like wiggling!  
I like to make people laugh – I’ve got a big laugh.  
Good music follows a theme.  
I’m a music lover – went to New York...to the Met...  
Really quite a big hall.  
I saw Cats...  
“Memory” –  
Makes me feel kind of sad.  
I lived out in the country.  
The old community hall floor was no good,  
so we raised money – cards and dances –  
we rebuilt the whole thing!  
“Save the Last Dance for Me”...  
I used to sing along to that one.  
A good solid beat...  
A necessary evil  
when you’re dancing!



## Let's Go!

Let's go in my Mustang, my Dodge, my '88 Buick.  
Let's go in my Pontiac, my Studebaker, my Cortina, or Model-T.

Let's cruise on the Love Boat, or drive in my motor home.  
Let's see the Leaning Tower of Pizza, or orange groves in Florida.

Let's smell the lilac trees and cow dung,  
or the air that smelled like Diesel oil.

Let's take the ferry from Toronto to Centre Island,  
or the subway in New York City.

Let's take a rented car, a double decker bus, the rumble seat,  
or my convertible.

Let's ride the bus to Chicago, or the bus to New York.

Let's take a sled with horses, or a dog-cart with 2 wheels.  
Let's take a horse and its buggy, or a cutter in the winter time.

Let's go sailing in a sailboat, or hiking in the smell of Florida.

Enjoy your trip everybody!  
I'll see you next week,  
And next time, we won't travel so far.



### **Where We're From (III)**

**W**e come from Finland, Ontario, England and Quebec  
**H**ome is on the Farm in the Country and in the Towns and Cities  
**E**veryone was busy but always ready to help  
**R**eally, family was the most important thing  
**E**verybody seemed to know everybody.

**W**e loved our little farmhouse  
**E**xcited when daddy came through the door.

**A**ll is so beautiful, peaceful and comfortable  
**R**unning home to the smell of homemade pies and treats  
**E**veryone always seemed to be laughing and singing.

**F**ishing, baseball, swimming  
**R**iding bikes and horses, skiing and skating  
**O**pen fields, wilderness, watching stars,  
**M**ountains, rivers and lakes.

**This is Where We Are From**







# FIRSTS





## Just Four Lines

At seventeen  
I read the whole detailed edition of John Keats.  
Keats had a passionate purity about him.  
Our mistress said  
“I want you to write about “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”.  
Write a verse to compare with that.  
Just four lines!”  
I wrote lots of little four line poems  
for our church magazine.  
That was the first person to ask me  
for some writing.

In my thirties  
I had my special room in the attic.  
“Mother’s room.”  
I could see the countryside from the long window.  
I set aside two hours every day.  
No one would come and say, “It’s time for tea.”  
I felt...thank you God!

Later, there was Green Hollow...“The hand of God.”  
I had a little house built  
down the hill.  
I did my writing down there.  
Little verses...they flooded out of me...  
couldn’t stop.

I haven’t been writing since I came here...  
except in the sunroom, of course.  
I can’t write any more.  
I have to tell you what I think.  
Still, I’m getting used to this place.  
It’s teaching me a lot.  
First of all, that God is everywhere; helps me every day,  
guides me in all I do.  
I’m very grateful for what I’ve had.  
No one can take it away from me.



## **We Went from Ballroom Dancing to the Jitterbug**

Who taught you?

Well, my partner, whoever it was, at the time,  
or the school, and sometimes each other.

We were all learning at the same time, the boys and the girls.

We learned from each other.

And where did you learn?

My front hallway, the school, anywhere!

'I'm going to dance with the guy what brung me'  
and his Zoot Suitors with big long chains to the ground  
and Porkpie Hats,  
in my special shoes for dancing,  
and my nice, long dresses,  
and my nice, pretty skirts.

Dance cards?

Only at college, and fancy, high class, formal dances.

Dance cards? Well that was before my time.

That was back in my parents' time, not mine.

You looked like a princess when you went out,  
and wear the same dress twice...well we tried not to!

My, it was expensive...

Yes, but it was fun to get all dressed up...it's real nice.

We could still dance, only we have no sweethearts.

You know we have no men...no men to dance with  
for the 'Excuse Me' dances or to the Tennessee Waltzes.

We remember the good memories better than the bad...

So dance as much as you can now,  
and enjoy your life as much as possible,  
so you always have your memories.



## **Bold and Beautiful**

The first time I wore lipstick –  
about fourteen years old –  
it was my aunt's stuff.  
I never forgot that...  
I helped myself to it.  
Did you ever hear of titty pink?

I took my older sister's lipstick.  
Thought I'd look pretty  
if I put it on...  
Didn't make any difference!  
When my sister found out,  
she tore it to shreds.

I used to be able to sit on my hair.  
Braided it at night.  
Had my hair in curls – ringlets –  
made with strips of rags.  
Sat on a stool at the dressing table –  
used to use Nivea Crème to clean my face.  
Never used soap – used vanishing cream.  
Puberty I used to squeeze my pimples.  
Beaten egg rubbed in your scalp and rinsed out –  
helped with dry scalp.

.....➔

My mother had to bring up seven kids.  
Can you imagine her washing our hair  
every Thursday night  
In the washtub – who had a bathtub in those days?  
What a backbreaking experience for her!  
Cleanliness is next to godliness!  
I had to wash Mrs. Hamilton's hair  
in the basement –  
No long hair in the kitchen!  
I was combing out her hair when  
“Oh, my hair!” she yelled.  
Here I was standing on her hair!

I used to shape my eyebrows  
before I knew anything about tweezers.  
I used a razor!  
Used to leave the house last...  
so no one would see!  
Too much make-up  
meant you were a hussy.  
My older sister came home from the big city  
all dressed up.  
Hair parted in the centre,  
brushed one part at a time.  
She had a little fancy cane, hat and everything.  
The whole neighbourhood  
talked about her.



## **I Was a Readaholic**

I've always been a loner.  
When I was about sixteen,  
I stayed out too late,  
came rushing home... alone...  
fell and hurt my finger.  
My sister came and found me,  
dripping blood in the sink,  
so I wouldn't make a mess.  
Whenever I see the scar, I think  
"Oh dear!"  
I had to have my wedding ring specially made  
to go over the bump.

I've always been a loner.  
I had a little nook up in the attic,  
with dormer windows  
looking out  
over the back yard.  
Something would pull me up there.  
It was quiet,  
a special place.  
Poey to everybody!  
I loved books  
would sit and read  
adventure stories.

I remember learning to read.  
I was at school.  
I was bound and determined  
I was going to read.  
All of a sudden,  
I got it!  
From then on, I read and read.  
My brother used to bring me all kinds of books.  
I was a readaholic!  
I still listen to my book tapes  
whenever I can.



## **They Paid Me off in Food**

I got the first job I applied for...  
I could spell!  
I was about eighteen, a secretary at Stradwicks.  
They had my records from school.  
The first day  
I was terrified.

The school I went to,  
the headmistress had me go clean the teacher's homes.  
Some took advantage...  
had me scrubbing the woodwork.  
I used to go home with a loaf of bread.  
They paid me off in food!  
Later I was a cook  
for the Roberts family...  
Roberts Brothers Butchers up on number Twenty Highway.  
I used to cook twenty-four eggs in the morning,  
and fill the lunchboxes for the kids.  
In the Hungry Thirties  
I'd take the little pat of butter off my plate,  
put it in my purse  
to take home to my family.

I got into journalism.  
Fell in love,  
married a journalist.  
One day my husband came home,  
said he had to write an article.  
I said  
"Oh, I could have done that standing on my head!"  
So I started writing an article.  
Three hundred words.  
It was accepted!  
I think there was a small fee.  
Did it for eighteen months, once a week.  
I was absolutely thrilled!





## Our First Jobs

It was in the Arcade,  
my first job,  
before it became Eaton's.  
I was sixteen, a saleslady!  
Sold everything – shoes to clothing to underwear.  
Gave my paycheck to my mother.  
She doled out what I needed.

As soon as I came from the old country,  
I worked in Men's Clothes in Montreal, on Ontario Street.  
I couldn't talk English, only Yiddish and Russian.  
I used to sweep the floor.  
Second season I got a raise – two dollars!  
When the family came over  
I asked for another raise.  
He said, "You can go home!"  
So I became a busboy in a hotel – the Mount Royal.  
Hearing the language all around me,  
I absorbed the expressions, pronunciation.  
I read the children's books,  
then more important material.  
After the war someone brought a copy  
of Dr. Zhivago, in Russian.  
It made the rounds of our circle of friends.  
I kept on reading with the dictionary beside me.  
Halfway through the book,  
I became fluent in Russian again.  
If you don't use it, you lose it!

My first job was in my parent's store.  
Later it was my store.  
I liked the people coming in, telling jokes.  
Had it twenty-nine, thirty years.  
A long time to have it!



## **I Was Born Too Soon**

I remember  
I had a coat like that  
when I was little.  
It was dark brown.  
Long skirts – my mother used to wear them.  
My mother had a beautiful figure.  
Now they're wearing long skirts,  
long coats  
again.

I never liked hats.  
Just like earrings – went to a wedding,  
ended up in my pocket.  
I still wear  
flannelette nightgowns...  
It's too warm here to wear them.  
When you had something,  
you wore it and wore it.  
We wore them out!

I used to mend men's socks...  
the darning, you could hardly see it.  
That's the first seventy-five cents I made in Canada,  
Mending men's socks...wool, dark grey.  
I thought I was rich.  
Now, they get a hole,  
throw them away.  
A safety pin,  
that was a disgrace!  
I was born too soon.  
Life would have been easier  
twenty years later.



## **My First Car**

It was a camel coloured Rover,  
the first car I ever drove.

I loved driving!  
My husband taught me how to drive.

I learned in England,  
before I came to Canada.  
I'll never forget my actual test.  
He said, "Take a left."  
I knew I would hit somebody.

We had an old fashioned Ford,  
Running boards, indicators,  
hand signals,  
and double de-clutching.  
Roundabouts!  
Scary!

I remember  
Drives on a Sunday afternoon  
with my brother.  
Afternoon tea  
or a picnic.  
Sit in the clover, it smells lovely.  
Riding in the rumble seat,  
Bumpy, cold and windy.  
Three could fit in.  
Blow the klaxon horn –  
Hee-haw, hee-haw!  
Just like a donkey.  
I loved driving.



## **I Loved Driving**

A blue Plymouth, big fenders  
black rubber bulb horn  
went beep-beep!  
It was my first car.  
I bought it second-hand from a mechanic.  
Been in Canada five years  
when I bought that car.  
Felt like a big shot!

My first car  
was a Ford 1926  
Black, of course, a sedan.  
Caretaker of the school  
taught me and my sister to drive.  
I was plenty scared!  
Drove to the baseball game – the Hamilton Ladies Team –  
*Strictly* ladies!

Loved the Buick best.  
We always had a Buick – soft ride, no bumps.  
Only the rich could afford Buicks.  
When we opened the Beth Jacob Synagogue  
my father-in-law gave me the keys to his car.  
I drove off, returned, parked in the same spot,  
but it was not his car!  
No one ever found out.

Not too many people could afford a car...  
so a touring car collected all the people.  
It would pick us all up,  
go to the beach – station 21 in Burlington.  
Went swimming, played ball –  
those were the days!  
I loved driving.  
I didn't have to depend on anyone else  
to take me  
where I wanted to go.



## **I Made My Own Patterns**

Clothes I make myself don't cost me much money.  
I used to sew for the dolls. Then one day I thought,  
maybe I could make something for myself.  
I copied dresses from magazine pictures.

I made my own patterns.

When I came to the United States, I was going to be a pharmacist.

My uncle, a professor at Columbia University, said

“Better to learn sewing; one of a kind dresses.

So I went to a very nice salon for rich people,  
Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, to learn there for a month.

I made custom dresses.

The first customer I had was a stockbroker.

She was the nicest person.

I had so many customers for it!

Our apartment – they told us we had to move...  
so many customers, their big cars lining the street.

Bought a house.

I made a very nice salon in the basement.

I made all the clothes for my daughter.

I always made her dresses.

I made her wedding dress.

She gave it to many people to borrow,  
they liked it so much.

I made it from the most expensive fabric,

So it would not wrinkle.

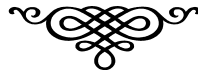
One-of-a-kind dresses –

I made my own patterns.





# **SEASONS AND HOLIDAYS**







## Seasons in the Garden

Early in the spring everything's bright.  
Spring gardens are pretty...  
you see things coming up and flowering.  
Makes me feel everything's starting over again.  
Yellow, blue, red, green – primary colours.  
Daffodils, lobelia, tulips...  
Cut forsythia – force it inside.

Summer garden –  
tea on a tray, kitchen chairs to sit on.  
My favourite place  
was the rockery round the back.  
Got the rocks from a friend.  
I just showed them what to do.  
Sunflowers too – birds peck the seeds off.  
Golden orioles, blue jays, red cardinals;  
We got millions of them.

Fall garden  
Change of colours...  
Reds, golds, greens a little darker than springtime.  
I love it then.

In the wintertime  
I like it with the snow falling down.  
I look out the window,  
Have a hot cup of tea.  
Inside, looking out.  
I like snow...  
Roll up snowballs; throw them at people.  
Build a snowman in the garden.  
Eyes of coal, carrot nose,  
Tall black hat with wide brim, like Frosty the Snowman.  
Inside, looking out.  
Makes me feel  
everything's starting over  
again.



## **Spring Gives You Hope**

You grow out of winter.  
Spring gives you hope, makes you hopeful for better things.  
Best month of the year is May!  
It starts to get a little bit warmer, that is what we need!  
Long ago, when I was young, used to walk in the grass  
in my bare feet.  
Grass feels firm...sort of nippy!  
Dandelions – bright yellow, no smell.  
We don't like them in the grass –  
they take over and spoil it.  
Daffodils smell...not too bad!  
When we got our first apartment, my husband said  
"As long as we have a dime, let's have flowers."

Listen to the bird over here!  
It is my bird.  
Puddles...used to walk in every one of them  
on the sidewalk in Chicago.  
Splash!  
I surprised many people!

Maple syrup – delicious!  
How could it be otherwise?  
Tastes like maple sugar – hard, but thin.  
Had it every Sunday on waffles.  
Spring-time for walks to the park, walks to the zoo.  
Lincoln Park Zoo, in Chicago.  
Enjoy it!  
That's what life is for!



## Spring

Yellow makes me think of spring.  
I like yellow – it's a soft colour.  
I like yellow flowers  
Yellow buttercups.  
Do you like butter? !  
I think of a yellow dandelion –  
Pretty, but a nuisance.

A crocus is often the first flower of spring.  
Colourful flowers  
Daffodils, tulips  
Make you feel like a bride.  
The flowers are very delicate.  
They give you a happy feeling of spring.  
When my husband was in Holland  
he sent me some tulip bulbs.  
I was tickled skinny!  
The neighbour's ducks made a feast of them –  
Oh, I was hurt.

I plant new flowers,  
all my flowers,  
in spring.  
Oh, I look forward to spring.  
It makes me feel  
alive!



## **It's Valentine's Day**

It's Valentine's Day...  
And Canada is a lovers' country  
With hearts, chocolate, roses,  
red roses, white, and pink.

It's Valentine's Day  
And I gave my mother a chocolate heart  
With white icing and red, tiny hearts  
Love grandma.

It's Valentine's Day  
And my teacher at school bought valentines and gave them to the class  
Where we're being teased from boys, and teasing each other  
With red, tiny cinnamon hearts.

It's Valentine's Day  
And I gave the boys cinnamon hearts  
kisses, hugs, cards, sweets, and dancing.

It's Valentine's Day  
And a good time to get engaged,  
Cupid shot the arrow through my heart  
My Funny Valentine...  
Let Me Call You Sweetheart!

It's Valentine's Day  
And I cooked my husband his favourite meal  
With red jello shaped like little hearts  
And fancy black underwear.

.....➤

It's Valentine's Day  
So take me out now!  
Dinner and dancing at The Brant Inn.

It's Valentine's Day  
So homemade cards with bows, ribbons, and lace  
and cards that folded into one another like an envelope  
Are something a little extra special.

It's Valentine's Day  
So cut valentines out of the book  
And send them to girl friends and boy friends  
To:  
From:

It's Valentine's Day  
So count how many valentines you got from the boys  
And when you get one from your favourite boy...  
romantic, happy, special, loving.

It's Valentine's Day  
So go out for dinner  
And smell the perfume, cards, candy, chocolate,  
and tiny red candy canes that tasted like cinnamon.

We're lovers here in Canada.



## **My Flower, My Valentine**

A long time ago,  
twenty years or more  
red roses for my birthday from my friend.  
He used to call me  
“my flower”.  
Surprised and happy,  
I stripped off the leaves and put them in my diary.  
They lasted a long time.

Rich red roses when we were married.  
Violets and roses  
Little pink and yellow rosebuds  
smelling like lemon cream pie  
with a shine on the top.  
I put them in a special vase  
all to themselves.  
Used slightly warm water,  
put an aspirin in to make them last.

One beautiful valentine card  
to Charles and to me.  
He puts it away in his file,  
and when it is February fourteenth  
he puts it in an envelope, lays it on the breakfast table.  
I have a valentine with a heart on it.  
I take it out and look at it  
Often.



## Seaside Children

Gosh! My children so tall!  
Just beginning to realize.

We went to the seaside –  
My father took us  
in the car.  
I always had a lot of sun –  
I'm a walking freckle.

Oh, I really liked the water.  
Once we learned to swim,  
parents were happy.  
Fish...You can catch them pretty quick.  
BIG  
Shiny  
Eyes.  
Pop eyes!

We could have chased a horse  
to eat its rider!  
Seemed so excited.  
Shiny  
Glistening  
Eyes.



## Younger Days on the Beach

I remember walking in the sand.  
It was so hot,  
you had to run to keep cool.  
I'd find a cool spot, rest in the sand,  
tuckered out.  
The Bahamas are different – the sand is cool.  
Seaside days – a time of fun.  
We lived down at the beach.  
Station 26 – we had a cottage.  
We had it furnished –  
just old fashioned furniture.  
Whoever gave their junk away!  
Seaside days...making money...  
We used to rent the cottage and sleep outside!

I like to be in water...don't want to be last in.  
Last one in is a rotten egg!  
Couldn't afford a bathing suit – went in naked.  
The waves were fun.  
We used to see who could jump the highest.  
We'd go down in the evening, get all dolled up,  
to watch and jump the waves.  
If your dress fell, hard luck!

They always gave a Pier Dance.  
We used to hitchhike in our long dresses,  
and dance all night.  
I went to everything – didn't miss nothin'!  
We had a band, with a squeezebox and a clarinet.  
We danced them all.  
If there was a guy loose, we grabbed him.  
Wondergrove...that's where I met my husband.  
Dancing in the open  
under the stars  
hugged tight to keep warm.  
Every time I go by there,  
it reminds me.





## A Day at the Beach

Sand...

Soft, natural, sandy, granular –  
heavier than I expected, not as coarse as some.  
If you're trying to ride a bicycle  
in the sand  
it makes a path – the bicycle wants to wobble!  
If it's wet sand, it's rather tough –  
loose, no traction!

Went in my father's black Ford,  
sitting in the back seat.  
Went over a bump, hit the ceiling!  
Below the hotel there was a path...  
you could keep on going...  
Walk in the water  
till it got up to your stomach.  
Then you could lean over and lie on top of the water.  
You feel just great!

Water...

made your feet feel clean, fresh.  
Mainly you enjoy just being outside.  
You don't have to spend a lot of money –  
A good thing, since it was during the Depression.  
My sister and I took swimming lessons –  
totally wasted!  
The teacher wore a bathing suit, but never went in the water!  
Went there for the whole season – neither of us learned to swim!  
I know those woolen bathing suits! Had a navy blue one.  
Skinny-dipping...when you're really young  
it doesn't matter, when you're old, it doesn't matter...  
It's the bit in between!!  
There was an old pond for swimming – pretty good!  
Not too clean! Cattle round the edges.

Sand...Soft, natural, granular...Water...pretty good!  
Mainly you just enjoy being outside...  
You just feel great!



## Picnics

Dundurn Park or the back yard...Picnics!  
Sandwiches...jam, peanut butter and banana,  
lemonade and pop, put in a basket.  
A colourful blanket spread on the grass.  
Picnics...  
Or take the boat from James St. North to Wabassa Park.  
On Sundays  
we went on a picnic.  
Father used to take us in the car.  
Piled everybody in the back of the truck  
to High Park, Lasalle Park,  
Dundurn Park on the bay...that was a favourite.  
Played ball, baseball;  
Races – the three-legged race.  
You had to be a sport to do that!  
Who went to camp in those days?  
Who could afford it in the 1920's?  
I remember those days.  
Families used to get together.  
A slippery slope, sandy beach with pebbles,  
an area for swimming, a lifeguard up a ladder.  
I was eleven or twelve...the know-it-all stage.  
Had our picture taken...swimsuit with a T-shirt top,  
pants cut off at the knee.  
Thought we were very smart.  
Picnics...a real banquet.  
Mother used to bake up a storm.  
Get up at five o'clock in the morning, bake fancy pastry.  
Took watermelon – a big one for fifty cents-  
juice would run all over the table.  
Was it delicious!  
Real red juicy watermelon with big black seeds.  
You can't forget the taste.  
After picnics, wet, tired, dragged out,  
elated you'd accomplished something.  
We used to love it.  
Takes me back!



## **Fresh Air – Good for Whooping Cough**

When anyone had whooping cough  
took the streetcar down to the bay  
went on the Macassa  
on a picnic to Lasalle Park.  
The doctor said fresh air was good  
for whooping cough.  
Picnics...  
Always close to town  
Always close to the water.  
Went to the dunes in Indiana.  
Baking, barbeque and bread.  
Picked blueberries, raspberries growing nearby...  
At least we had something to eat!  
My grandmother had a big raspberry bush in her backyard.  
Made raspberry pie – especially for me!  
The backyard was up the mountain, on Hillcrest.  
Everybody took different bags...mother used to give us paper bags  
with food in them.  
I took chicken legs...cooked at home  
by the cook.  
Watermelon...tastes good.  
The only thing...  
we had to bring the paper bags home.  
You mustn't leave a mess for other people.  
My brother got a fishing rod for Easter,  
so he'd fish in the stream that went down from the mountain.  
The kids would come and borrow his fishing rod.  
The price he charged?  
They had to invite him to their birthday parties!  
Fresh air is good for whooping cough...  
had whooping cough every year!



## Fall

Have you ever walked  
through woods  
in Fall?  
Just breathe the air!  
Birds twittering,  
leaves telling you a message,  
as if they were holding hands  
falling from the trees.  
Fall in Russia.  
The view beside the church...  
Chestnut trees – green  
turning rosy red.  
Bright red, dark red...  
late this year.  
Showing their beautiful colours  
like a fancy dress parade.  
Enjoy them!  
Winter will be coming.

On a very quiet day  
Go and stand under the trees.  
Stand there very quietly,  
Sometimes sad...  
too quiet  
no more energy...  
It's good in a way...  
Using the leaves for words  
we remember these things.  
It's good to remember.  
They go deep into the ground.  
They've done the best they could  
and are grateful to God.  
After all  
He made them all!



## October Memories

October – most beautiful month of the year.  
I can just see the pumpkins,  
those beautiful pumpkins...  
Oh my!  
Couldn't believe it, it was so beautiful.

I was born October 17.  
Halloween  
Big bags of peanuts, shells all over the floor.  
That was the worst part of it.  
Burns me up!  
You get my drift?  
I don't have to snow again?

Teasels  
Those weeds with spikes on top.  
In a bouquet  
they're absolutely gorgeous.  
Take a cluster  
put a string around them.  
My mother picked them in the meadow.  
Makes you feel  
all kind of prickly.  
Feel the juice coming out.

Autumn  
gold looking shine  
a bright yellow.  
We are blessed  
with colour.



## Thankfulness

I thank the Lord for every day.  
Birds singing  
cheering you when you feel gloomy,  
changing leaves...they're beautiful...  
friends, people I meet,  
another day of good health.

Childhood – the best of times.  
A special cake, made specially for me...  
A round sponge cake  
Jam inside, pink icing outside,  
Cherries or strawberries round the edge.  
Little things made me feel good...  
like Enid...she was always happy.

A long red pencil – twelve inches –  
inside a black crocodile pencil case.  
A black notebook with rounded ends  
and a space for the pencil.  
That was the beginning of the feeling  
“I’ve got to write things down!”  
I still have it now.

Music makes me feel good...  
classical music, especially the waltzes.  
I feel like dancing across the floor!  
I went around the world by boat and air with my husband.  
We enjoyed the idea that people are happy  
no matter how small we think it is.  
We looked on and we realized  
people are so different.  
Different ways, which please God  
appeal to them.  
Their faces shine  
with the rapture we see in them.  
Looking back, I can see  
God was very good to me.



## Winter

Winter...

Try an outside toilet.  
You didn't sit for long!  
Two holes, wooden seat.  
You had to watch out for splinters!

Winter...

I did everything!  
Had three brothers – there was always a snow fight  
They won!  
My mother bundled us up  
Hot clothes, wool leggings  
We could hardly walk.  
Sleigh rides  
You feel the strength of the horse –  
They have big shoulders.  
Dog sledding  
Two husky dogs and away we went!  
Skiing downhill  
Felt scared – you prayed!  
Winter  
Left home at eight a.m.  
Walked two miles to school  
I did everything!



## Fun in the Snow

You're missing a lot  
if you've never had a sleigh ride.  
I didn't want to get off!  
Sliding along  
You don't think of the cold,  
you get so excited.  
Sometimes I'd get dressed in my father's pants,  
go out in the deep snow.  
It'd be so deep,  
as high as the fence.  
It'd make a crust, and we'd skim  
over the top.  
When I was young, I really loved it.  
I slid down that hill on a piece of metal.  
I wore leggings, a cap that tied under my chin.

Playing in the snow, making snowballs.  
A bunch of us would get together,  
Roll the small ball, make it bigger.  
Sometimes they put a stone in the snow  
to start it off.  
I had to make my own sleigh –  
wooden boards and runners.  
A little wooden sleigh about eight inches high.  
You never thought, did you,  
of the tumble,  
getting  
wet.  
I did all that ruckus  
then...  
I don't need it  
now.  
When you're a kid,  
you never give it a thought!





## Winter Memories

I remember  
being turned out of the back door,  
wearing something leathery with a fleecy lining,  
a beret, with a scarf on top.  
We couldn't wear pants then,  
had to wear leggings...  
we could hardly walk!

I still remember that white snow.  
I loved it all the way through!  
I missed it when we came here.  
As a child you're in a sleigh all the time.  
You couldn't walk in the deep snow.  
My brother had a big toboggan  
made out of a tin tray.  
We used to go up the mountains  
and slide down in the sleigh.  
As soon as you got to the top,  
you had to go down,  
lying on your stomach,  
down and down and land at the bottom,  
dirty snow there,  
where we'd trampled it with our feet.

We used to throw snowballs at each other.  
We had a whole group of kids made snowmen.  
We'd put up a bunch of snow,  
make a body; make a head, a face,  
pieces of coal for eyes...  
we always kept it in the coal shed...  
Charlie Chaplin's nose...use a carrot!  
There was lots of water when the snow melted.  
Cars would drive by and drench you.  
To this day  
I look back and remember how much fun we had as kids.  
I still remember all that white snow.  
I loved it all the way through.



## Winter Wonderland

On a crisp and clear  
January morning  
we go for a drive...

It's sunny and lightly cloudy,  
and there's a wind coming up.  
We can see it blowing the snow across the road.

The kids are tossing a football,  
throwing snowballs,  
and tobogganing down the hills.  
The collie dogs are chasing us down  
the slope of the hill  
towards the deer in the distance.

The evergreen trees,  
and the trees bare of all their leaves  
are covered in a light snow,  
with bits of ice on the small twigs.

We eat oatmeal cookies with raisins,  
drink our thermos of hot coffee and cocoa,  
and save our box of milk chocolates for later.

We're having a party, and we thoroughly enjoy it.



**POETRY  
AND  
THE SENSES**





## On Writing Poetry

Kierkegaard said  
“Try to write one thing to one person.”  
That’s what I like doing.  
I like going to find something;  
to be on the search for something.  
I want to be on the go.  
I usually get ideas  
in the middle of the night,  
or when I’m in the middle  
of making pastry.  
I feel excited to start with.  
I don’t always know when it’s finished.  
It takes hold of you.  
Usually I start writing  
when I’m most frustrated.  
When I finish,  
there’s a great relief.  
Then I go over and over it.

My husband’s a darling man!  
Understands me,  
understands my writing.  
Keeps on encouraging me to do it.  
I’ve got to find out  
the truth,  
for me.  
I think that love comes before truth,  
It has to be learned.  
St. John of the Cross said  
“Whatever happens, love remains.”

Poetry should never be written  
by people who moralize.  
Create something beautiful,  
say something, and say it  
with as much purity and imagination  
as possible.



## **This Very Moment**

This very moment...  
we are in expectation. Waiting.  
I see Ilse's red polka-dot shirt,  
that reminds me of a shirt I had at age 18.

This very moment...  
I see a circle of creativity, and  
a pink caterpillar sweater.  
I see a sky as grey as slate,  
as grey as porridge,  
as grey as a Persian cat I once had.

This very moment...  
I hear voices: wake up!  
I hear the pen squeak on the paper.  
I hear birds in the hall.  
I hear soft laughter.

This very moment...  
(although my nose may not work that well)  
I smell Applesauce simmering on the stove, and  
red valentine hearts, and  
I remember the contests of who could hold  
the most hearts in their mouth.

This very moment...  
I smell cinnamon and Christmas cookies, and  
Vanilla pudding with cinnamon, and  
I remember my mother's kitchen,  
I remember my own kitchen,  
I remember my daughter's kitchen.

This very moment...  
I see the sky blue with a white streak through it.  
I see summer's leaving,  
leaves falling,  
and as we are getting grey, the trees are getting yellow.



## On Seeing Red

Red  
Wash it separately.  
They called me carrots...  
I always wished  
my hair was a different colour.  
Kids made fun of us...about 1914 it was...  
used to make me  
all knuckles and teeth.  
Made me see red!  
I gave her the hardest kiss she ever had.  
The colouring does everything.  
Makes you smile a smile,  
makes you feel good.

Red roses remind me  
of someone I love.  
Flowers remind me of death and sickness.  
When you feel it, you feel it,  
when someone you love passes away.  
My husband  
always gave me  
red roses at Christmas.  
I think  
we did everything  
together.  
Always had flowers in the house.  
I like  
every red I see.



## **Red is for Hussies**

They see you coming  
in red.  
I used to wear a lot of red...  
Not any more.  
Red  
is a warm feeling...  
Valentine's red  
Brings back memories  
long long ago.  
My mother...  
"You're not going to wear that!  
Red is for hussies!"  
Red is danger,  
warning.  
They see you coming in red.

Red roses  
Red carnations  
Red hearts  
Red blood.  
Red is danger,  
Red is stop!  
Lips are red, Valentine's red...  
Red underwear...  
Only for hussies.  
I like to see  
a woman in red.  
Makes your blood come up.  
They see you coming  
in red.





## The Colour Red

So much depends upon red;  
a hand-woven scarf  
a red rose and Emperor tulips  
a favourite lipstick;  
Wine With Everything

So much depends upon red;  
a good Bordeaux  
a little red wagon  
a red sunset  
a little red schoolhouse  
on fire,  
put out by  
a little red fire truck.

So much depends upon red;  
burning bush, maple leaves, sumac,  
cardinals and red robin breast.  
So much depends upon red;  
blushing cheeks  
my love is like a red, red rose  
like red sails in the sunset  
like the red, red robin  
comes a bob, bob, bobbin' along.



## **The Colour White**

The colour white is  
being outside in a beautiful Winter Wonderland  
on a White Christmas morning.

The colour white is  
lilies, roses, and leis.

The colour white  
is the beauty of winter,  
and the tops of mountains  
covered in cold, crisp snow.

The colour white is  
the groom's scared face  
when he sees the wedding dress,  
long gloves, and slippers covered in lace.

The colour white is  
big, friendly white rabbits,  
peaceful doves, and magical white horses.

The colour white is  
elegant and warm ermine fur.

The colour white is  
a church steeple  
surrounded by fluffy white clouds.



## Feeling Colours

Red.  
I wear it now.  
Makes me feel good.  
“You’re not going to wear red”  
my mother said.  
Got a red wool dress for twenty-three dollars.  
I splurged!  
Now I wear my red cape.  
People say I look like Little Red Riding Hood.

Yellow.  
Yellow ribbons,  
tied to the trees  
when the war was over.  
Yellow is light.

Pink.  
I was always put in pink.  
They thought it looked pretty on me.  
I hated it!  
Wanted blue so bad.

Blue.  
Blue is my favourite colour.  
Reminds me of the sky.  
Flowers  
Violets, cornflowers  
Calming, healing  
Blue.  
Orchid, mauve purple.  
I used to wear a lot of it.  
It’s different.

Green.  
I used to like green.  
If I were green,  
I’d be envious.  
But...Red.  
Red jacket, navy pleated skirt,  
made me feel good. See me!  
I love red!



## Water

Water  
Clear, wet  
calm, colourless, heavy.  
Take your shoes off...  
paddle in the water  
Clean  
between your toes.  
Cool off...  
under the tap  
in the tub  
in the sprinkler...  
Shocking  
when it hits you...  
Cold  
real cold  
water.

Lake Ontario  
Waves  
White foam  
near the shore.  
Feels like you're rolling.  
Watch out!  
Rocks and stones  
Scratch  
Cut your toes.  
Lake Ontario...  
You could freeze there  
on the hottest day.  
Wet, heavy  
clean, clear, colourless  
water.



## Being Trees

Elm  
Chinese elm  
First leaf to come  
first leaf to go – bright  
Bright yellow...yellow red  
Red sumacs at Princess Point  
Brought branches of sumac home.  
Our boat trip on the Grand River -  
hardly realized you were moving  
moving quietly – it moved so quietly.  
Lots and lots of trees in the centre of the city.  
Leaves – put them all in a pile, kick them along.  
I love the sound – rustling, crunching. Beechnuts –  
little brown three-cornered beechnuts – gather them  
take them to the mill, press oil out of them, a light oil.  
Light coloured beechnut oil. Use it in a salad.  
Early fall I really love! Not too cool, not too hot. Just right.  
You know what a linden Baum looks like? It has white  
and yellow blossoms. Make linden tea – settles your  
stomach. Horse chestnuts, conkers. Weeping willows.  
Long long roots searching for water. If I were a tree, I'd be  
an expensive walnut. I'd be an evergreen, gives you  
pleasure when you look at it. If I were  
a tree. If I were  
a tree. If I  
were a  
tree.



## **Bea Bea**

You look nice,  
You look beautiful,  
You really do.

She was funny,  
the girl that works here.

Let's go out,  
let's go out and talk.

My, you look,  
you look so pretty,  
you look so nice.

Oh look, see,  
she's cute

I'm tired,  
I'm so cold...

You're pretty,  
and you're nice too.



## **The Cat and the Dog**

The cat and the dog were walking down the street  
when they saw one another,  
but they were afraid to meet.

They looked at each other,  
and sniffed around,  
but neither one made a sound.

They called one another, but that wouldn't do.  
They ran so fast,  
they ran out of their shoes!

They chased one another around the corner.  
When they finally stopped,  
they could hide it no longer.

The cat and the dog, why they were in love,  
and no one could deny,  
the pair fit like a glove.



## Pinecones and Pets

When I was about eight  
we used to go on hikes – a crowd of us – all girls,  
picking pinecones.  
Mama wasn't far behind.  
We'd go home loaded with them.  
Always used them at Christmas – decorated the room with them.  
When Phyllis was ten or so,  
we'd go together.  
If she saw a squirrel or anything with life in it,  
it was goodbye to everyone else!  
She loved animals.  
Even today, she wouldn't pass a cat without petting it,  
giving it pet talk.  
I had a lovely Pomeranian named Rose.  
Nice long hair – beige – with big brown eyes.  
My dad brought her home in his pocket.  
"I'm not bringing it out unless you behave yourselves."  
Oooh...when he pulled it out – the dear little thing.  
Just like a ball!  
I must have had five or six Pomeranians in my life.  
When I was about thirty,  
I got another Pomeranian for Phyllis and for me.  
We'd take her for walks.  
It's a few years ago now.  
The dog would pick up pinecones,  
Drop them at my feet!  
All my life it's been  
"Pick up a pinecone when you see one,  
and always choose a Pomeranian!"  
Once you get them as a friend,  
they're a friend  
forever.



## **Pets We Used to Have**

Boots.  
Little white boots.  
Always had a cat.  
Tabby cats, multi-coloured cats  
very joyful.  
Called them all Teddy!  
Used to whistle to them.  
Used to meet me on the sidewalk...  
Felt lovely.  
Used to get up on the storm door  
and peek...  
“Let me in!”

Always had a dog...  
Collies  
most of my life.  
My wife –  
she used to hug and kiss ‘em.

Had a yellow canary.  
Sang in the mornings really early  
when my father took the cover off.  
If ever my father  
came in the house  
with a hat on,  
Dickie started all this chatter.  
One day  
he was making an awful ruckus  
in the kitchen.  
Change purse was gone  
from the middle drawer.  
Someone must have come in  
wearing a hat!





## Touch and Feel

Tangerines...  
Make me think of taking my clothes off.  
You can peel them so easily.  
I like the smell, a healthy fresh smell.  
Reminds me of a ball – a cricket ball.  
I had a brother.  
I used to go around  
with the boys.  
Rolling it around my hands...  
I like it.  
It's exciting!

Shell...like a turtle's,  
because it's hard.  
I don't like that one; it's too dark.  
Makes me think of the seashore, the beach.  
Llandudno, North Wales.  
Get some shells, as big as that.  
Put one in your mouth, go like that –  
blow it like a horn.  
Seashore shell.

Round fur hat.  
It's so soft, beautifully soft.  
It reminds me of something rather elegant...  
Sundays in a small town  
where everybody went to church.  
We Jewish people stood and watched them,  
admired their clothing.  
We knew it was a special occasion.  
Looking, and wondering  
what went on inside.  
For a special occasion  
the touch of fur  
like a new puppy  
soft, and smooth and lovely.

.....➔

◀.....

Pine cone – feels like a ring.  
Reminds you of the Fall of the year.  
Dig and save them, and put them on the Christmas tree.  
Wire the stem and hang them.  
It's very brittle, much sharper.  
If I were to put my hands on it  
it would blow to bits.  
Find them  
in the Fall  
on the ground.

It's so light!  
A dried flower,  
strawflower.  
Bright yellow.  
All along the fireplace  
my mother  
put dried roses, pot pourri.

I like dried leaves – so thin and crisp.  
One of those backpacks  
full of them.  
A separate little smell of their own.  
Beautiful, and inexpensive.  
I'm glad it's something beautiful  
that hasn't cost me the earth.  
Go and tread through the leaves.  
The glory of God  
is in a leaf.



# REMEMBERING BOX POEMS





## I Did It

I think they'd think  
I was a shy little thing that sat around.  
I was determined!  
The one thing I wanted to do was travel.  
It took a long time before I got to that,  
but I did it.  
I went where I wanted to go.  
I think that the really first beginning...  
there was a little red book of children's stories.  
I used to turn the pages.  
My mother had read it to me so many times  
that I could just say it – and pretend I was reading it, you see.  
The more I read, the more places I heard about.  
I began to think I'd like to see some of them.  
So...I finally did.  
I was determined I was going to see them – and – I did!  
I started in England.  
I thought  
anyone with any kind of English background  
should go there first – and – I did!  
Then I wanted to go to France and Spain.  
I studied French and Spanish at the University of Illinois,  
So I took a trip there.  
Years later, towards the end of my tripping, I wanted to go to Egypt  
I had always wanted to go to Egypt.  
So I decided I'd go on a smaller ship – take my sister Sue.  
Oh, we had a wonderful time!  
Sue and I were the only ones who climbed to the top  
inside the pyramid...  
That's quite an experience...it's like going up a ladder...  
Coming down it's rather frightening, but we did it!  
I was determined.  
I went where I wanted to go.  
The one thing I wanted to do was travel.  
I did it!



## It Works Out Pretty Good

I'll tell ya...  
It takes a lot of friends  
to form a circle...that works out great!  
I haven't seen very many circles go bad.  
When they form the friendship, it's more value  
than money.  
It makes the world a little better.  
I'll tell ya...young people today...  
if they haven't got friends  
they have a hard time to get things organized you know.  
That's the reason I started the sporting thing out there.  
I didn't know how to do it,  
So I had a meeting called.  
I had guys that I played ball with years before that.  
I told them I wanted two young men to form a club.  
I said, "You'll have these young teams to look after.  
It will take a lot of work"...but...  
It worked out great.  
'Cause they got a league going.  
I think the league is still in motion.  
What I've found, raising kids,  
If you've got two or three you've got to play fair with all of them.  
If you didn't, they didn't know how to trust you.  
I'll tell ya...  
My grandfather was a very good man – a judge.  
I accepted him as a go-seer.  
A Christian man, he had an open mind for others,  
other people, religious or not.  
I have some of my grandfather's ideas left  
in the few brains I got!  
As people get a little older, they learn a little more too.  
It works out pretty good!  
If I was doing something I wanted,  
I worked pretty hard to do it.  
I think being a good Christian is a big factor.  
That's why I try to help everybody with troubles.  
That's what life is all about!



## **My Work, My Passion!**

My work  
was very important to me.  
My work has been my passion.  
Forty years working  
at the  
Rainbow Bridal Room.  
I sold wedding dresses.  
I had a bride in tears  
because she had the gown on she wanted;  
the mother didn't want to spend the money!  
Well, I had to work around the mother at that point,  
which was hard.  
Bridesmaids – that was hard.  
Every one of them wanted something different.  
I enjoyed it.  
I was crazy!  
Like a little Cinderella!  
It was a very big responsibility, but I managed.  
I'd like to go in now, just a couple of days a week.  
I think it would give me a little bit of satisfaction  
to know that I could still sell.  
It was a nice feeling.  
Wilf and I had a very small wedding.  
We had it in Toronto, in a synagogue, in August 1941.  
Veil and headpiece – I kept it for years.  
I had a beautiful bouquet – my husband picked it for me.  
Went to Rochester, New York, for our honeymoon.  
I had a very pretty wedding gown made of lace.  
Of course I got it for a discount!  
Like a little Cinderella.



## It Can Be Iffy!

I like to be the life of the party,  
however,  
it can be iffy!  
It feels good when people laugh – just say something that’s funny.  
I like to make my family laugh – I tell them off!  
That was great, when the children were getting at the age  
you could talk to them; I liked that too.  
Used to like going for rides in the car, dancing in the afternoon.  
We had a good time.  
I enjoy getting out with people –  
I like telling stories. It’s important.  
Roy – he had a good job at Westinghouse.  
Used to talk and laugh a lot.  
Our family was the kind that used to like to chatter, and laugh.  
A lot of them used to think I was silly, but I didn’t care,  
didn’t cost me anything more.  
If you only have a few bucks in your pocket, then use it up!  
What’s the difference! Just use it up!  
Exactly what I say – one day at a time!  
Just the way I lived, and the way I felt.  
Nothing like speaking out! Why not?  
I’ve got a tongue that keeps yacking, and I keep laughing.  
That’s one thing about me – I’m positive!  
I say what I want, do what I want, go where I want,  
so the days always move along.  
I’ve had a good life – I didn’t give up very much.  
Always had a good time, a good laugh, and a lot of friends.  
I am that kind of person –  
All you have to do is think and talk and walk around,  
and you learn a lot of things,  
from yourself, from other people.  
Listen to what they say and don’t say.  
I’ll survive. I’m a survivor.  
I was meant to be.





## A Lot of Things Happen Over the Years!

A lot of things happen over the years...  
When I lie in bed at night I remember how much I've done.  
I loved gymnastics...not for fun...for exercise.  
I watched to keep my health right.  
I loved the things we were doing – I liked the exercises –  
made me feel a little better than I did before, and also  
the people – girls my age, and we could talk.  
I was in one of the smaller groups.  
I never went on anything that was too high.  
Later when I was older I wasn't so scared.  
Even now there are some things I don't like  
and I don't go to them.  
Whether it's one country or another, it's always boy and girl!  
My boyfriend came from the Ukraine.  
He liked gyms just as well as I did.  
I knew what I wanted, and I think he knew  
that I wanted **him!**  
There was something...a younger woman that came,  
she had a little boy of her own, but still she was in my way...  
I was afraid she'd take him away from me.  
He was nice to her...It took a while!  
Willie liked the same things as I did.  
The only thing he didn't do, was when we walked  
from Toronto to Hamilton in one evening.  
I was singing on the road, I enjoyed it,  
But...I had just bought a pair of shoes...it was terrible!  
My feet hurt all the way there! It wasn't **so** bad...  
I took my shoes off and walked in my socks!  
Do you know, when I was just a little girl,  
my mother came home one day, and gave me a cat.  
That was my start! She took it and gave it to me,  
and that was that!  
I loved the cat...it was really **mine.**  
A lot of things happen over the years.



## **It's a Big Story...**

My husband was Canadian...it's a big story...  
he lived in the same place as me.  
I knew him when he was a young boy.  
When he was older, about eighteen, he came home –  
Visiting another girl.  
I was working in the post office in Hungary – he saw me –  
He had some money coming, came to pick it up.  
He was a nice looking boy – tall, nice hair –  
not tall, not short, just right!  
The schoolteacher said, "Taller is lazier".  
I don't think so!  
He was to marry a girl from Canada.  
Same time he was to be married he said  
"Can I go to your place tonight when you go home?"  
He offered to come with me – it was evening –  
maybe I was scared?  
I was not scared.  
I said yes!  
We had a nice talk  
He started coming and coming.  
Not too much time after we got married we came to Hamilton.  
I worked as a tailor in Canada, a Jewish shop,  
big clothes store on King Street – the name is still up there –  
I made a lining for fur coats, finished the coats, made the hook.  
Not everybody can do that!  
I cannot make a bad job –  
If I make a mistake sewing –  
I open it and do it again.  
I was very good in school – I finished Hungarian high school.  
I always wanted to go to school teaching,  
But my mother didn't want me to.  
Now I have my own family, I am very happy.



## I Thought I Had a Doll

When my daughter was born – she's the eldest –  
I thought I had a doll – a nice lively doll!  
I like our family – we have a nice time together.  
We'd play games.  
I like books about families.  
One of the things about reading books –  
usually you're learning about things  
you don't know anything about, and so then  
you feel bright  
because you know quite a lot!  
I've been all over Africa – all the different cities.  
In Africa I liked playing with the animals,  
but we'd only be allowed to play with the ones that don't bite,  
'cause the ones that bite you are apt to take too big a bite.  
and then there isn't any of you left!!!  
I'm passionate about animals. I think it's too bad they get eaten.  
I like them very much...they **do** things.  
They've got skills I haven't got,  
so I find it interesting to watch them.

I smoked a pipe because I gave up cigarettes...  
different pipes for different outfits!  
After lunch and after dinner, used it every day.  
Cut Plug tobacco from the tobacconists –  
Greece – that's where I got my best tobacco.

There was nothing else to do, if you didn't get married.  
I couldn't take a job like you've got, do things like that, no.  
They didn't have schools for it.  
I took dancing lessons – quickstep, foxtrot.  
When you dance with a partner, you try to follow.  
If you were half good looking,  
if you were at a party,  
you always had a partner.  
so it was up to you.  
It was fun!



## Leader of the Band

Charlie – he was  
Leader of the band  
known for his polka.  
Music was and is Charlie's greatest passion!  
Charlie started clarinet as a boy  
then he learned sax.  
Big Bands – he went to see them all!  
He used to travel with the musicians in his band.  
He wanted to be a professional musician.  
Father said no!  
Started as a secretary as a young boy  
worked his way up to statistician – computerized CN railways,  
traveled the world.

Charlie loves to party – a social man, bubbly.  
He loves a party, wouldn't miss too many!  
A thinking man  
a caring man  
he provided, I never had to worry.  
I always wanted dark eyes!  
Charlie's dark eyes,  
They see deep into you.  
When I met him  
he was playing in the band – a Red Cross fundraiser.  
I was too young for him then – five years younger.  
He was very good looking!  
“Oh boy, when I saw you two years later  
it wasn't the same girl!”  
We had a great life; his family is his world.  
Fifty years in St. Lambert,  
twenty years of winters in New Smyrna, Florida,  
Open minded, ready for anything, anywhere.  
“Tell the Chief that I love him!”



## Little by Little

You want something – you work for it!  
I could write a book about my struggling.  
I worked day and night.  
My grandmother had a farm.  
She did everything herself; baking, cooking, cleaning.  
Never let anybody else do it – they didn't do a good job.  
I think, maybe, she had strength.  
My mother was a schoolteacher.  
We had a restaurant; a gourmet restaurant.  
After school – high school was from 8 to 1p.m. –  
I was helping already serving.  
I made a hundred blintzes, put them in the freezer.  
They went soggy!  
In New York they called me from Bergdorf Goodman.  
I made custom dresses.  
Family – my children – I don't know what I'd do without them.  
I always say  
“Thank God my parents were there above me,  
always praying for me.”  
Our home; little by little we furnished it.  
Bought a carpet, a Persian rug.  
We didn't go on holiday many, many years.  
My husband said “you are always in the basement!”  
You work all week like two horses.  
I made a very nice salon in the basement.  
Little by little,  
I gave up sewing a little.  
Saved and saved  
For two weeks vacation in the Catskills.  
First was the bank, then was the money we could spend.  
I have beautiful memories.



## Photographs – It's Good Looking Back

It's good looking back  
at what things were like.  
Gosh! They go way back.  
We thought they were wonderful  
at the time...and they were!  
They've turned out to be good, anyway!  
I'll have to look at those again.

Buster, our dog...we thought it was great, of course.  
Dogs – they come around with you when you're going out.  
It was quite a long time ago, of course.  
Ken was very good to me...he was nice, handsome.  
Seemed to bring more out of me.  
Gardening –  
I planted flowers in the springtime.  
That makes a big difference!  
Go through the gate –  
have a party  
in the garden –  
kind of a nice thing to have.  
Now it's getting all the stuff ready.  
Cleaning up stuff takes a lot of time, doesn't it?  
My fur coat – mink I think –  
felt pretty good to get it!  
Warm, nice too- that makes a big difference!  
All these things were nice.  
That must have been quite a time!  
It's good  
looking  
back.



# **THE LILY POEMS**







## **The Pictures Remind Me Of**

*Sometimes I think I'm crazy,*

There are four generations in that frame.  
Four generations.  
From old to older,  
And younger to young.

*Talking to all these pictures.*

Look at his red curly hair.  
And look at the laugh on his face.  
He's cackling there.  
Look at the shape of his mouth.  
He's cackling.  
Har har har!  
It's happiness in that picture.  
Pure.  
Genuine.  
Happiness.

*I sit and look at the pictures of those dead and alive,*

See there?  
My grandmother was Irish,  
My mother's mom.  
I don't know the year though.  
You might be able to tell from her dress.

.....➤

◀.....

*And I remember the memories, you know.*

There's Violet in the frame,  
Surrounded by violets on the frame.  
Violet.  
Such a pretty name,  
And a pretty flower.  
Such a lovely sister.

*It's so nice to remember the memories.*

And there's my other sister.  
Why she's wearing those sunglasses in the picture,  
I'll never know.  
She's indoors there, and I don't remember why.

*I remember the good instead of the bad.*

And that's my husband Ellis.  
It's a rather odd name now,  
But I rather liked it then,  
And still do now.

*It's better that way.*



## **Shani's Brushing**

It's a beautiful cat,  
he's a beautiful cat.  
I've never seen an all white cat like that before.

What a cutie,  
his fur is like silk.  
Why bless his little heart.

They're almost human you know.  
And they know  
when you're talking about them too.

Oh look,  
he's going to see  
what she's got for him.

Now he's got a piece of his fur in his mouth,  
and he's trying to push it,  
or maybe he's trying to brush it out.

See, he's helping you.

And now look,  
he's going to sleep.  
He likes it.

.....➔

◀.....

He's got a good nature.  
Bless the little thing.

He's so cute.

I can't get over that cat helping her do the job.

Now look, he's licking the hand that fixed him.

Look at him,  
he's behaving so beautifully.  
He's a darling.

He loves that doesn't he?  
She loves it too,  
but the cat loves it more.  
He could get lost,  
and wouldn't know where to come back to.  
But then again,  
he has no reason to leave.

We're talking about a white cat today.  
His name is Shani.



## **The Wanderer**

She's a wanderer that one there  
But I don't blame her  
Bless her poor heart  
She should take advantage of that gift  
If I could walk and wander I would too  
I would wander away



## **The Colour Purple**

The Colour Purple  
Is a silk scarf  
A royalty colour  
And a black bird sitting in the sun

The Colour Purple  
Is a cute, simple, pretty dress  
With puffy sleeves  
And an A-line shape

The Colour Purple  
Is a show girl's lipstick,  
Making her lips appear darker

The Colour Purple  
Is a tulip  
A lilac  
Crocuses  
Irises  
And hyacinths

I love the colour purple in all its shapes and sizes  
It's my favourite colour it is  
The Colour Purple



## The Poet

I first started writing when I was 22,  
And now I'm 92,  
So that was a long, long time ago.

I used to write poetry,  
But now I forget how.  
It's been oh so long now.

I first wrote because I had a reaction to something.  
I felt I needed to write it down.  
It felt so good,  
That I just kept doing it.

I don't want to write now though.  
I'm embarrassed.  
It's been too long sweetheart,  
And I'm afraid I don't know how.

Now I just make up little comical ones, you know.  
I never used to do that though.

But still, it's nice to be able to write poems...

The truth is,  
you don't even need to title them.  
They don't need a title.  
You know what they're saying,  
and that's what matters.

I can't think of those that I lost...  
But then again,  
they're never *really* lost,  
because they're always somewhere inside you,  
inside your head,  
or inside your heart.



# **POEMS BY KEN OLDS**







## **The Garden Lunch**

I've been invited to a garden lunch.  
I hope they are a happy bunch.  
and don't just sit around,  
and stare at trees.

We may not have caviar or steak,  
for lunch I know.  
It will not matter what we have,  
It's just so very nice to go.

The folks who care enough for us  
to take the time to please.  
are never thanked enough, because  
they seem to do it with such ease.

To have a meal out in the garden  
should really be a treat.  
to feel the gentle breezes blow,  
and warm sun on your feet.

Thank you Father for blessing  
us who must be here.  
and please, a special blessing  
for those who do  
all the work  
it takes,  
Year  
after year  
after  
year.

Ken Olds



## Shall We Forget

The guns are silent in the sky  
Above the battlefields where they had died  
These men and women from our land  
Before the enemy did stand.  
They bore the terror, fear and pain  
While we in freedom could remain.  
There is no greater debt to know  
Than that to these brave souls we owe.  
Eleventh day eleventh hour  
No day should pass before our eyes  
No cloud should wander through the skies  
That we not remember why they died.  
So when you see the morning sun  
Or see a newborn life begun  
Remember those who paid the price  
For you and I the sacrifice.

Ken Olds



## **When There Is No Future There Is a Past**

You have just come from the specialist  
Your world is split in two  
You can't believe the words he spoke could possibly be true.  
You have a terminal disease, for it there is no cure  
Time it will take for you to waste away  
Only God would know for sure.

First depression comes, it knocks you flat.  
Your mind, your heart and body  
Feel they're being beaten by a bat.  
Your mind tells you you're sicker  
Than you are feeling now  
You never could believe someone  
Could really feel this low.

Medications ease the mind some  
If you are lucky, there's little pain.  
You wonder if perhaps you should  
Start to live again.  
Strength may slowly leave you  
You can no longer stand or walk,  
Brush your teeth or comb your hair now...  
For some it's hard to talk.  
The day has come when some rising sun  
Finds you in a wheelchair.

Your world is getting smaller, now you're in a nursing home  
Most of your days are spent in ways that leave you all alone.  
It's hard to keep your spirits up though many folks may call,  
You may be left along with others parked out in a hall.  
But don't despair; you don't have to stay there  
You can fly free as a bird.  
Though no future seems before you  
Certainly you have a past. ....>

◀.....

Our brain is the most ingenious machine  
The world will ever know  
When you use it to work as a time machine  
There is nowhere you can't go.

Lay back in your chair or the bed you are in  
Climb aboard the time machine  
and off you can go  
right back; turn the pages of life you have seen  
until you see yourself as a little child  
and the home where you dreamed.

When you keep going back to see old places  
You soon will start to see familiar old faces  
Relive those moments time and again  
and remember to get there you do not need a plane.  
Never feel lonely when no one is near  
Just remember God's with you when you're anywhere.  
Do you have special music you still love to hear?  
Just tune the machine to your best hearing ear.  
Remember, it takes time to use this escape from your chair,  
But once you know how, it's so great going there.

So if you're feeling low in spirit, sad of heart  
Think where you can go, get ready now, and start.  
Start pages turning; meet your parents and old friends  
When you use God's gift, you will walk, run, love,  
Laugh and be happy without end.

Ken Olds

*[Dedicated to all infirm who have lost their real future.]*





## About Ken Olds



Ken, seen here at age seventeen on his dearly loved 1928 Indian Scout motorbike, rode motorcycles all his life. “I had so much fun on that motorcycle. When I was a kid I picked up more girls on that motorcycle than you could believe! I’d overhaul it, work on it, and ride it in the basement, round and round the furnace.” Ken has been active in sports right up until he became ill with A.L.S. A few of his many passions are aircraft and flying, drawing and painting, and, of course, his family. The seventh son of nine children, Ken has very strong family ties.

Currently a regular participant in all musical events at Shalom Village, Ken tells us “Music has been my greatest passion, especially singing.” He spent many years singing with the well-known musical troupe *The Geritol Follies*. “Music – you can escape from the world when you are playing, humming, singing or just thinking about it. It’s good for your soul and your heart.”

Ken’s deep religious faith has been a source of strength for many years, giving him peace, assurance and a lack of fear. “God, family and love – it’s amazing what love does for people and it’s so easy to give. That’s what life is all about.”

Ken has been writing stories and poems since his early seventies. The title of a short story about a pilot in the forces during World War I seems to describe his positive attitude to life; “Keep Climbing and the Clouds Will Part.”





# ***APPENDIX A:***

## ***Additional Reading***





**Long Term Care Journal**, 1995, 5(2), 9-10.

**Reminisce and Write.**

**A Creative Writing Program for Long Term Care**

“I feel terrible sometimes  
without them...  
my family...  
I’m the last one.  
The lonesome feeling I have...  
I want to pick up the phone  
and talk to someone  
who knew me  
in my youth.”

These are the words of a ninety-four year old woman living in a nursing home. In this poem she eloquently expresses her need for family, for relationship with fellow human beings, to talk and to be heard, to reminisce and to share memories with those who care.

In a creative writing program, the members of small reminisce groups become a kind of “family”, accepting and affirming one another and developing an awareness that they are “not alone”. Because it is a writing program, reminiscence takes on another, more satisfying dimension. Residents feel validated when they see their words written down and re-read. They feel they have been truly heard.

The aim of a Reminisce and Write program is to meet resident needs for intellectual stimulation, socialization, sense of belonging, and ongoing creativity. Memories are recorded and written in the form of collaborative poems. These poems can then be shared with family, friends and staff, and often serve to illuminate aspects of individual personalities never quite seen or understood before.

## **Group Organization**

Find a quiet place where distractions are minimal- preferably where you can close the door. A group size of five to ten works well. Establishing a core group of up to five members ensures regular participation even when some members are sick or unable to attend, but the group does not have to be closed to function well. Including a few other residents who express interest in joining or seeing what is going on can actually enhance the exercise.

Ideally, the program should be offered at a regular time once a week. This gives residents a chance to anticipate the program, and encourages staff to become involved in preparations. Mornings work better than afternoons, since energy levels of both staff and residents tend to be higher. The program will take about an hour, not including portering.

The program is appropriate for all “verbal” residents (those who can speak and be understood). It is very important to know the social history of each group member and be familiar with any physical or emotional problems. Blindness, hearing impairment and cognitive deficits are not barriers to participation. The use of flip charts and an easel for writing is useful for those with hearing impairments and helps all members maintain their focus on the topic. Providing members with objects to touch and feel and making use of repetition makes it possible for blind and cognitively impaired residents to participate fully. Strengths – compassion and a sense of humour, for example – should be encouraged, while weaknesses such as difficulty finding the right word and long-windedness, should be minimized.

## **Program Design**

### **Choose a topic.**

Find a poem, preferably non-rhyming, on your topic.

Select appropriate visual aids – pictures, photographs, objects to touch, feel, smell or taste. Keep a file of topics handy and store poems, pictures and object ideas alphabetically or by subject for future use.

- **Give an example** of your own to stimulate memories and help to develop group confidence. Use vivid imagery, colours, textures and feelings. Humour, where appropriate, helps people to relax. Your example will trigger the memories of the group and experiences will snowball.

- **Dig for details.** Ask open-ended questions, such as “What does this remind you of?” and “Can you tell me more?” Guided imagery can be used successfully with this program. It aids in relaxation, and is a powerful memory stimulant.
- **Accept all feelings expressed.** Poetry therapy encourages self-expression and group acceptance. No feelings are bad feelings. As you model affirmation and acceptance, the group will follow your example.
- **Write down contributions relevant to topic** on a large easel pad. (You won’t be able to catch every word.) Concentrate on individual turns of phrase, expression of feelings, images and sensory details. Periodically re-read what has been written to refocus the group. If possible organize the individual reminiscences into poetic form towards the end of your program. Even if the poem requires some polishing, read back the finished product to the group and show your admiration for the work done. If you work on the poem on your own after the hour is up, be sure to read the final version at the end of the next meeting.

### **Transforming Prose to Poetry**

- ☐ Encourage individual turns of phrase, for example, “I’m a walking freckle!” and “Made me feel like Cock o’ the North.”
- ☐ Use repetition and/or listing of words or phrases.
- ☐ Avoid rhyming – build musicality and rhythm into the poem as you construct it. Comparisons, personification, alliteration and exaggeration help turn prose into poetry.

### **Topics**

It is better to begin with general topics. These can be interpreted on a more intimate, personal level if the residents choose to do so. Encourage group members to suggest their own topics. (Note: both general and “life review” topics work well in one-on-one programs with individual residents.)

## Packaging Your Poems

Help your group to choose a title for each poem and be sure to include the names of all contributors. Give every member a copy of the poem. Make a collection of poems to share in a book, photo album or on posters around the building. You might also consider publishing poems in your newsletter, but remember to get permission from each resident before displaying or publishing their work. Family, friends and staff can use the poems to reminisce, and may wish to keep them as mementos.

Many of the benefits of Reminisce and Write groups are easily identified. Others are not. In the experience of one nursing home, male residents are particularly grateful for the opportunity to express themselves freely in an accepting environment. Family members are equally enthusiastic. Remarking on her mother's book of collaborative poems, one delighted daughter put the experience in a nutshell:

"We read them together, mum and I. There were a few tears, but that's okay. I knew it was *my* mum said that part. It's *her*!"

## General Topics

- Colours
- Seasons
- Pets
- Vacations
- Seaside / Water
- Quietness
- Catalogue Shopping
- Wash Day
- Cooking / Baking
- Flowers / Gardens
- Music (all types)
- Changing Fashions
- The Depression
- Entertainment
- Transportation
- Touch and Feel
- Special Holidays
- Home

## **Life Review Format**

- Childhood / Toys and games
- Mothers / Fathers
- Family
- Schooldays
- Friends
- Courtship / Marriage
- Parenthood
- Letting Go (children leaving, losses)
- The Best Years
- Old Photographs
- Growing Older
- Hard Times / The Depression
- Then & Now (comparison of life on same topic at 2 different stages)
- Nursing Home Life (residents requested this)
- My Favourite Things

## **Suggested Reading**

Koch, Kenneth. *I Never Told Anybody. Teaching Poetry Writing In a Nursing Home*. New York, Vintage Books, 1978.



# Poetry in Long Term Care

## The Poet

**I first started writing when I was 22,  
And now I'm 92,  
So that was a long, long time ago.**

**I used to write poetry,  
But now I forget how.  
It's been oh so long now.**

**I first wrote because I had a reaction to something.  
I felt I needed to write it down.  
It felt so good that I just kept doing it.**

**excerpt, by a resident at The Meadows**

As anyone working with older adults knows, every person has a story. Every resident we work with has memories, experiences, ideas, thoughts and feelings that are as individual as they are.

But how do we capture these stories? How do we help residents with mild to moderate dementia form a “coherent” story? How do we help residents share memories in a way that validates their stories, encourages social interaction and calls attention to their abundance of wisdom and life experiences? And what if we could capture the heart of their story? What if we could capture their past, present and future stories in a written record for everyone to appreciate? Well we can — and it's not as hard as you might think.

Poetry has been a form of art and storytelling for thousands of years. Poems can communicate the simple and the difficult, the ordinary and the extraordinary, in both a short and sweet, and deep and profound way. Fostering poetry among older adults residing in long term care may seem a daunting task. Yet, Assisted Poetry as an activity can be surprisingly successful in the long term care environment. Assisted Poetry takes reminiscence beyond spoken recollections into a more tangible format that can be shared across time.

We have worked with group poetry and also facilitated poetry with a single person, sometimes with additional assistance from a fellow resident. Indeed, the author of the two individual poems in this article was successful despite

**by Andrea  
Cosentino,  
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Paula  
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## Recommended Materials

### *During a Session*

**paper (either flip chart or regular)**

**easel pad (for flip chart)**

**pens or markers**

**pictures and mementoes (visual)**

**a poem read aloud (song lyrics also work well)**

**a tape or CD player and music (audio)**

**potpourri, home fragrance oils, scented bath products (sensual)**

**favourite or theme foods (taste)**

**pass around any of these items (tactile)**

### *After a Session*

**computer with basic word processing program**

**coloured or decorative paper**

**printer or photocopier**

**protective sheets, frames or bulletin boards for displaying completed poems**

being unable to recognize her helpers or to recall any of the numerous poetry sessions until she was again deep in the midst of a creative interaction.

## Who Can Participate?

Poetry programs allow residents to participate according to their various abilities. In every session, poetry facilitators adapt the creative process and goals of the session according to the physical and cognitive needs and abilities of the participating residents.

## Who Benefits?

Residents experience:

- a positive outlet for personal expression and creativity
- individualized programming that makes use of mental abilities
- communicating and working with others
- sense of meaning and belonging
- pride in accomplishment
- the potential to form new friendships
- increased understanding, knowledge and respect from those who read their poems

Staff facilitators experience:

- a personal connection and understanding of those residents who participate
- the privilege of eliciting, organizing, and arranging the stories of adults who lived long, interesting lives

- the satisfaction of knowing that their facilitation has enabled the participating residents to expand their sense of personhood

Staff, family and friends who are not present in the actual sessions but read the completed poems experience:

- new knowledge and respect for the resident(s) who created the poems
- a better understanding and appreciation of older adults in long term care
- the opportunity to use information from the poems for better understanding and to enjoy more meaningful interactions

Members of the residents' council benefit from having a poetry program offered in the home by working with activity/recreation staff to advocate and promote the stories and abilities of their residents through the compilation of selected poems into a bound booklet. The council can also distribute and sell the booklets in the home and local community to generate funds for other council projects.

The home benefits from such a program as well. Through the distribution and reading of completed poems, more meaningful communication can take place between residents and others within the facility. Completed poems, and particularly a bound collection, provide something unique and tangible for managers, prospective residents/families, new staff and the wider community. The program can also be an encouragement for new volunteers, as this type of activity requires enthusiastic facilitators and assistants with specific creative interests and abilities.

## What a Group Session Might Look Like

The most important aspect of a successful poetry program is one or more committed facilitators who believe in the potential and importance of the program. An enthusiastic facilitator can help residents see the advantages and benefits of participating.

### **Before the Session**

- Prepare a potential theme and corresponding items.
- Arrange room so the participants are sitting in a semi-circle formation with residents facing the flip chart paper, or in a circular formation with the facilitator visible to everyone.
- Invite residents with similar cognitive abilities to the session.
- Aim for up to 12 residents with physical impairments and up to six residents with cognitive and/or dementia-related impairments.



## Common Objections from Residents & Potential Responses

| Objection                         | Response   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| A) "I (physically) can't write."  | A) Inform and reassure the resident that you will do all of the physical writing, while they provide the ideas.  |
| B) "I'm not good at poetry."      | B) Inform and reassure the resident that it is a collaborative process with yourself and other residents. Explain that the group creates the poem, and they can be an active or passive part of the process.     |
| C) "I can't read/see the poems."  | C) Inform and reassure the resident that seeing is not necessary for participating in the session, and that you will repeat and re-read all contributions from the group.  |
| D) "I can't read/hear the poems." | D) Inform and reassure the resident that hearing is not necessary for participating in the session, and that you will record/write on paper all contributions from the group.                                    |
| E) "I'm not interested."          | E) Inform the resident of how the program works, the benefits of participating, and who will be attending. Explain the different ways they could participate (active, passive), and how they could get involved. |

### During the Session

- Introduce the sessions' theme and help elicit participants' thoughts, ideas, memories and creativity by using the items that trigger at least two of the five senses.
- Record on paper and re-read back to the group all thoughts and ideas generated.
- Encourage residents to participate actively and share in the session, as everyone's ideas are valuable for development of the poems.
- Once a significant number of ideas have been generated, and depending on the ability and cooperation of the participants, organize the words into a poem with the participants' assistance.
- Thank residents for attending and inform them that they will receive the completed poem when it is typed.

### After the Session

- If you are unable to organize and arrange the group's words during the session, do this as soon after the session as possible.
- Type the completed poem in large print (try Arial 14) on the computer. Depending on the abilities of the group, the printed poem can be brought back to the group for editing and approval.
- Distribute the large print, completed poem to participants. Displaying it in their rooms — on the wall or in a frame — is especially nice.
- Distribute the large print, completed poem throughout the

home. Bulletin boards, staff rooms, nursing stations and monthly newsletters are just a few places to consider.

## The Colour Red

**So much depends upon red;  
a hand-woven scarf  
a red rose and Emperor tulips  
a favourite lipstick  
Wine With Everything**

**So much depends upon red;  
a good Bordeaux  
a little red wagon  
a red sunset  
a little red schoolhouse  
on fire,  
put out by  
a little red fire truck.**

**So much depends upon red;  
burning bush, maple leaves, sumach,  
cardinals and red robin breast.**

**So much depends upon red;  
blushing cheeks  
my love is like a red, red rose  
like red sails in the sunset  
like the red, red robin  
comes a bob, bob, bobbin' along.**

**Written by The Meadows Writing Group**

## Common Objections from Staff & Potential Responses

| Objection  | Response  |
|--|---|
| A) "I'm not good at poetry."                               | A) Your role is to help facilitate the stories of residents and arrange them into a poetry format. Being 'good' at poetry is therefore not required.  |
| B) "I don't know how to start and/or what to write about." | B) Have a theme and relevant items chosen before the session, and use them as an introduction to the topic. Potential themes include holidays, seasons, colours, weather, life events, family, places and leisure activities.   |
| C) "I don't know what to say."                             | C) Ask open ended and sense-specific questions. Try questions like: What does/did/would X remind you of? Make you think of? Look like? Smell like? Taste like? Feel like? Sound like? How does/did/would X make you feel? Look? Smell? Taste? Sound? Where did/do/would you see, taste, feel, hear, smell, touch X? When did/do/would you see, taste, feel, hear, smell, touch X? |
| D) "Our residents can't do poetry. It's too hard."         | D) Every resident has a story to tell, and poetry can be the most effective and efficient means of sharing it with others. Be sure to adapt the goals and process of the session according to the abilities of the residents.   |

### When and Where

A poetry session can take place at any time of the day, according to the ability of the residents. Behaviours that may help determine the best time for your participants include their ability to be focused and alert to derive the maximum benefits from the program at a particular time. Some residents will benefit from participating in the program during the late morning; others may benefit from an early evening session. You and your staff are the best evaluators of your residents' optimum times, so plan your sessions accordingly. One interesting option, especially with a volunteer facilitator, is a Saturday evening poetry café.

The location of the poetry sessions will depend on the ability and comfort of the residents. Group size and ability of the participants to ignore distractions can dictate where a session will take place. For example, holding a session in a high traffic area with windows and no doors may not work for residents with dementia. Yet, an open area may attract cognitively able residents who would not join otherwise.

### Conclusion

Individuals residing in long term care homes can benefit in multiple ways from the process and outcome of a poetry program. Completed poems call attention to the abundance of wisdom and life experiences available for sharing by individuals residing in long term care homes. Through the distribution of completed poems, staff, family, friends

and other residents are better able to understand, appreciate and communicate with the resident poet in a way that validates their stories — and ensures that they are heard. **LTC**

### Suggested Reading

- Hagens, C. (1995). Reminiscence and write: A creative writing program for the nursing home. *Long Term Care Journal*, 5(2), 9-10.
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## Reminiscing, Poetry Writing, and Remembering Boxes: Personhood-Centered Communication with Cognitively Impaired Older Adults

Chris Hagens  
Amanda Beaman  
Ellen Bouchard Ryan

**ABSTRACT.** This article describes a method of facilitated communication for extending the well-known benefits of reminiscence by recording the words of nursing home residents and creating a concrete memory resource. Reminiscence sessions were conducted with five cognitively impaired older adults, whose words and phrases were arranged into poetry, revealing the essence of each person. Information gained was used to construct personal Remembering Boxes filled with meaningful objects and writings. As communication tools, the poems and Remembering Boxes helped staff learn more about residents, proving useful when residents were sleepless or agitated. Remembering Boxes offered residents

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This research was supported by a grant to the third author from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Ann Anas in this project.

enhanced interactions with their families and staff and greater control of those interactions. These tools can affirm the personhood of the residents amid their confusion and cognitive decline. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

**KEYWORDS.** Aging, communication, personhood, reminiscence, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, life story, poetry, cognitive impairment, longterm care, written language

Communication between caregivers and residents in nursing homes can be dependency-inducing and mutually unsatisfying. Analyses of caregiver-care recipient interactions in nursing homes have found them to be impoverished, centered mainly on care tasks and generally controlled by the caregiver (Baltes & Wahl, 1996; Gibb & O'Brien, 1990; Grainger, 1995; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). The Communication Predicament of Aging Model interprets communication in nursing homes in terms of a negative feedback loop that results in excess social disability (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986). The cycle begins when caregivers modify their style of communication based on automatic expectations of the older nursing home resident as incompetent and dependent. Such stereotype-based communication decreases the likelihood of meaningful interactions and reinforces expected dependent behaviors. Repeated exposure to this pattern of behavior may cause the older person to withdraw from activities, experience a loss of control, and have lowered self-esteem (Baltes & Wahl, 1996; McWilliam, Brown, Carmichael, & Lehman, 1994; Rodin & Langer, 1980; Whitbourne & Wills, 1993).

Nursing home residents with cognitive impairment are especially susceptible to the communication predicament due to the low expectations elicited by confusion and disorientation and to their reliance on the facilitative skills of the caregiver. Indeed, narrow definitions of skill and competence may cause caregivers to discount an older person who is still capable of communicating. Despite gradual decline in verbal skills, persons with dementia remain sensitive to nonverbal cues; and caregivers who are unaware of this may bypass opportunities for meaningful communication (Bourgeois, 2002; Ostuni & Santo Pietro, 1991; Santo Pietro & Ostuni, 2002). Remaining verbal skills may also be over-

looked by caregivers who do not take the specific needs of the cognitively impaired person into consideration during interactions. For instance, Sabat (1991) found that if one accommodated for the increased time necessary when conversing with an AD sufferer, a mutually satisfying interaction was possible. However, interactions become restricted or may not even occur if one abides by traditional conversational rules, typically shaped by western society's 'hypercognitive' ideals (Post, 2000; Sabat, 1991). Continued exposure to such poor social environments may exacerbate the symptoms of the disease, reinforcing stereotypes of incompetence and dependence (Kitwood & Bredin, 1992; Sabat & Harre, 1992).

The Communication Enhancement Model of Aging provides a framework for care providers who wish to forestall the negative feedback loop and its adverse consequences (Ryan, Meredith, MacLean, & Orange, 1995). The model conceptualizes interventions in terms of their emphasis upon the older adult, the caregiver, or the environment, but the driving force of all interventions is that interactions with older adults become increasingly guided by the individual characteristics of each person. Such individualized communication empowers both the caregiver and nursing home residents to have satisfying encounters, increasing well-being and the likelihood of successful interactions in the future (Baltes & Wahl, 1996; Brane, Karlsson, Kihlgren, & Norberg, 1989; Langer & Chanowitz, 1988). Even for nursing home residents experiencing the communication, memory, and behavioral difficulties of dementia, such empowerment is possible (Bourgeois, 2002; Norberg, 2001; Ripich, Wykle, & Niles, 1995). Harrison (1993) challenges care providers to see a cognitively impaired individual in terms of their entire life (i.e., past roles, culture, values). It is argued that the self persists throughout the course of dementia and that caregivers who ignore the personhood of the older adult create excess social disability (Kitwood, 1990; Kitwood & Bredin, 1992). Attention to the histories of residents is personhood-affirming, since it cues past instances of competence, focuses on the remaining strengths of the resident, and empowers the caregiver to find solutions that are mutually beneficial (Beach & Kramer, 1999; Dawson, Wells, Kline, 1993; Harrison, 1993).

Butler (1963) is noted as the first to call attention successfully to the benefits for older adults of life review, or reminiscence (see Webster & Haight, 2002). Reminiscence therapy has been found to engage the remaining capabilities of cognitively impaired older adults in nursing homes, leading to a decrease in depression, increased cognitive functioning, attenuation of behavioral problems, and an increase in the resi-

dent's engagement during interactions (Bender, Bauckham, & Norris, 1999; Baines, Saxby, & Ehlert, 1987; Goldwasser, Auerbach & Harkins, 1987; Woods & McKiernan, 1995). The sharing of common experiences and histories can lead to mutual respect and support between residents (Baines et al., 1987; Goldwasser et al., 1987; Woods & McKiernan, 1995). Staff members' newly gained knowledge of the individual leads them to see the resident in a different light and improves their attitude toward impending interactions (Bender et al., 1999; Mills & Coleman, 1994; Woods & McKiernan, 1995). However, the positive effects may diminish once reminiscence groups no longer meet, and only the staff members directly involved experience the benefits (Baines et al., 1987; Goldwasser et al., 1987). Moreover, while generic stimuli are often used to cue memories during reminiscence sessions, there is evidence to suggest that objects without personal meaningfulness may increase agitation (Namazi & Haynes, 1994).

Researchers have developed interventions that are meant to extend the positive outcomes of reminiscence activities beyond the group session to the daily interactions in the nursing home. Personalized memory tools designed to be used by staff in their care interactions with residents in nursing homes have been tested to determine their effect on communication. Memory books containing both personal (e.g., wedding photos) and orientation information (e.g., daily schedules) were found, in conjunction with staff training, to improve and increase communication between the residents and staff (Allen-Burge, Burgio, Bourgeois, Sims, & Nunnikhoven, 2001). Communication was also increased among the residents, and between residents and visitors. In a later study, positive effects of resident memory books and staff training on their use generalized to interactions other than those revolving around care (Bourgeois, Dijkstra, Burgio, & Allen-Burge, 2001). Resident verbalization increased, even when the amount of time allowed for the interaction was decreased, suggesting that the memory books enhanced their ability to generate novel statements without help from staff members. Staff facilitated conversation more by repeating their questions, acknowledging they were listening, and uttering fewer requests. In addition, interactions with the memory books improved staff members' ability to gauge how the resident was feeling.

Hagens (1995) developed the Reminisce and Write program, which extended the benefits of reminiscence sessions beyond the group in that the words of nursing home residents were recorded and arranged into poetry to be shared with staff and family. Participants' utterances, and later their poems, were read back during group sessions, allowing them



to feel proud of their accomplishments. In reading group poetry, staff and family were able to pick out contributions of specific persons. By capturing individual turns of phrase, idiosyncratic expressions, and explicit details during the Reminisce and Write session, the essence of each participant emerged in a way that was still recognizable years later. Past contributions to a group poem became a present voice for severely deteriorated residents when read aloud.

Writing groups have been found to enhance the personhood and self-esteem of residents in nursing homes by fostering an emphasis on enduring capabilities. Schuster (1998) found that members of a writing group experienced transformed relationships with staff and family since their writing was appreciated by themselves and others as purposeful and valuable. The writings of the residents had the effect of elevating their perceived status since many of their works were used by family and staff for special occasions. Koch (1977) used facilitated poetry writing groups in a nursing home to capitalize on residents' abilities and thereby improve the social environment. Koch reasoned that residents could use their remaining strengths for poetry—the music of ordinary speech and their lifelong memories and feelings. The poetry that was written by the residents, and read back to the group with the help of a facilitator, reminded the residents and others of their ability to feel as well as communicate. Furthermore, the short nature of poetry allowed the residents to take on the task, complete it, and feel proud of it.

For the present study, we built upon the Reminisce and Write program (Hagens, 1995) by linking the use of reminiscence and poetry writing to the development of personalized memory aids for cognitively impaired residents in a nursing home. Our aim was to develop a multi-faceted communication tool to extend the benefits of reminiscence therapy to the entire social environment. Five cognitively impaired residents participated in both group and individual reminiscence sessions over a three-month period. The residents' words were arranged into poetry, and the information gained during the sessions was used later to elicit family involvement in the construction of personalized Remembering Boxes. The usefulness of the poems and boxes as communication tools was evaluated over a 14-month period through participant observations and through comments elicited from staff and family. Within the framework of the Communication Enhancement Model, it was anticipated that staff members using the poems and Remembering Boxes would take a more individualized, personhood-enhancing approach to residents during their interactions, leading to more mutually satisfying communication. It was also expected that the poems and Re-

membering Boxes would help reacquaint family members with their loved ones' pasts and individuality, reactivate their family pride, and elicit more meaningful pleasurable interactions.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

Potential participants were identified by the leader of the previous poetry group sessions (Hagens, 1995), and their charts were reviewed for documentation of dementia-type behaviors. The core group of participants comprised five residents: one man and four women. All had some evidence in their medical chart of cognitive impairment (i.e., Mini-Mental State Exam scores, confusion, short term memory loss, disorientation, and wandering). Participants ranged in age from 77 to 90 years, with three of the participants over the age of 88. The participants had been in the nursing home for two years or less. Oral consent was obtained from each participant and written consent from Substitute Decision Makers.

### ***Reminiscence and Poetry Sessions***

A total of seven group sessions were held at the same time and day of the week: three before individual interviews, and four after the interviews. The sessions typically lasted about an hour in a casual setting, similar to having coffee with friends. The first author led the sessions, and the second author recorded all the relevant statements in large print for the group. Multi-sensory props were used to help stimulate memories for the theme chosen for each session (e.g., flowers for the Spring session and sand for the Beach session). As in Koch (1977), the ideas written down were periodically read back throughout the session to help the group see what they were creating and to stimulate further ideas. After each of the sessions, the group leader arranged the residents' words into group poems to be shared later with participants.

One-on-one interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes, were held with each of the group participants. The purpose of the interview was to delve further into some of the meaningful memories that were raised by the individuals in the group. Since some participated in the group less than others did, information from staff and resident charts was also used to start the discussion. The residents were asked if they would like to



have a chat, and their conversations were taped for later transcription. The interviews were kept very informal to help the resident feel comfortable, with the general goal being to learn what has been important to the resident in their life. Special attention was paid to allowing extra time for responses from the residents. Individual poems were constructed from the information gathered in the interviews.

### ***Remembering Box Implementation***

The information from group and individual reminiscence sessions guided the construction of each Remembering Box. Families of the residents were contacted and asked to find objects for the box. In hindsight, it became clear that the knowledge already gained about the residents facilitated family involvement in the project. Specific, individualized requests demonstrated genuine interest in their family members' lives. All the boxes contained photographs, but otherwise each box varied according to what was meaningful in each resident's life. For example, one resident was known for her eccentricity, including smoking a pipe and owning hats and pipes to match her clothing. Thus, one of her pipes was included in her box, a fashionable hat box saved by the family. Photographs and other pictures were either placed in an album, or enlarged on a piece of sturdy paper, with the circumstances of the picture written underneath. Journals were also included in each box for users to record what they had discussed with the resident. Once the Remembering Boxes were constructed, they were tested with each resident in order to ensure that they had the potential to enhance communication, and that there were not any objects that would cause agitation or anxiety. The Remembering Box was placed in each resident's room along with an attractive framing of the individual poem, a large photograph of the resident, and information regarding the Remembering Box.

In-services were held to introduce the staff members to the purpose of the Remembering Box. We made suggestions regarding times when the box could be used but stressed that they would know, or perhaps learn, when the box would be most useful. Presentations were also made at a family council meeting and a board of directors meeting. A display board was erected in the main entrance to inform family and visitors about the project. The first two authors were participant observers of interactions with the Remembering Boxes over a 14-month period, elicited oral and written comments from staff and family about their experiences with them, and interviewed two residents about their experiences with the Remembering Boxes.

## **RESULTS**

During the project, there was time for staff and residents to become familiar with the Remembering Box project and for observations of how the Remembering Boxes and poems evolved as communication tools. The boxes and poems were used separately or in combination, since some residents responded differently to each. Both achieved the goal of reminding the resident, family or staff member of enduring capabilities, thereby improving communication. One staff member said that using the Remembering Box “is how we get to relate to them.” The boxes and poems were used during the night shift when residents could not sleep, when residents were sad or anxious, or when staff had “a few minutes, from interest.” The willingness of staff members to create spare time in their very busy work day for conversations using the Remembering Box or poems affirms their perceived potential. Furthermore, staff made requests that poems and boxes be created for other residents whom they felt could benefit. Volunteer visitors currently use the boxes and poems and have found them useful to help residents initiate conversations and express their emotions. Staff members learned the times when the box was most useful for each individual resident (e.g., at night, after supper, in mid-afternoon). Three major themes emerged through discussions with staff, family and residents and our observed interactions with the boxes.

### ***Learning the “Histories” of the Residents***

The Remembering Boxes and poems, in themselves, provided information about the residents not previously known by staff members, in a format that was interesting to them. Thus, one staff member remarked that the boxes, “gave new, valuable information that you never knew before.” Furthermore, the nature of the information was such that it seemed to pique the interest of the staff in learning more about other residents in the same way. “It gives you an experience of how their life was. You wish you could know about everyone like that.” The residents who owned the boxes became aware of the new interest that staff and visitors were showing in their “histories.” One resident remarked, “It’s amazing how many people have come in and asked me if they could see it.” While staff recognized that the new information was interesting and that it enhanced their conversations, they also found it practical in terms of learning the likes and dislikes of the residents. For example, the

boxes were used by the activities department in order to gain ideas, or to help the resident with ideas during a creative endeavor (e.g., painting).

The new information from the Remembering Box transformed the way that staff perceived the resident, “[you] get a feeling of them as more of a complete person (i.e., quirky habits).” The background information also clarified, or facilitated their understanding when they were interacting with residents. “I got to know more about her, talk to her, capture the moment she was remembering.” Family members appreciated the impact of the box on the staff’s understanding of residents. “They help others (i.e., non-family) understand who the patient was.”

Additionally, the format of the poems and boxes provided, in Koch’s terms, a quick way to learn about a resident. This was welcome in an environment where staff often feel that they do not have the time it takes to have conversations that do not revolve around the task at hand. Staff members were encouraged to pick one item from the box to talk about if they were pressed for time. Also, choosing a separate picture to discuss rather than one from a photo album avoided the problem of feeling obligated to stay until the entire album was viewed. The poem was particularly useful with a resident who exhibited advanced word-finding problems and severe short term memory impairment. One remaining strength was her ability to read, which was also an activity she had enjoyed throughout her life. She was able to recognize her own words from the poem as she read and responded to others who read her poem with “yes, I said that!” Her memory loss made her anxious and agitated, but staff members were able to use the poem to quickly affirm her sense of self, which attenuated her fear and confusion about who she was.

### ***Mutually Satisfying Interactions***

Staff and family indicated that the Remembering Boxes and the poems enhanced the interactions with and for the resident. Boxes and poems were often employed when the older person was agitated or anxious, in order to redirect their attention to a more pleasant thought or memory. The following story illustrates the impact of the boxes on negative mood states.

*Golda Ruben’s Story.* Staff and family found it very difficult to get one resident, with the pseudonym Golda Ruben, to stop crying, as she did most of the time. They had attempted distraction, hugs, cups of tea etc., but nothing had eased her sadness for more than a few minutes. Mrs. Ruben would revert to weeping and moaning, and was essentially inconsolable. Staff felt that it took a great deal of their time and energy,

and upon learning of the Remembering Box intervention during in-services, requested that one be created for Mrs. Ruben even though she was not originally part of the project. They asked if a photograph of her daughter, who had died as a young woman, could be found and included. Mrs. Ruben often mentioned her daughter during the episodes of inconsolability, but staff did not know anything about her. When contacted, her son explained that the photo of the young woman on Mrs. Ruben's wall was in fact his sister, a university professor who had died in her 30's of cancer. Since there were no labels or cues, no one knew who this person was. Her photograph was included in the Remembering Box along with information about her life, successful career and children, in hopes of facilitating a mood transformation from sadness to a more peaceful and relaxed state of mind.

The Remembering Box was found to engage both staff and Mrs. Ruben long enough to facilitate a mood improvement, which came about fairly quickly and lasted much longer compared to previous attempts to calm her. Since the sadness often seemed to be focused on her daughter's death, it was possible to start with her photo, and acknowledge her sadness, but then to move gently to her daughter's achievements, the grandchildren, and topics related to her own life and interests. The initiative that staff members took, and their willingness to take ownership in requesting a Remembering Box for Mrs. Ruben demonstrated their belief in the usefulness of the intervention.

Family also experienced enhanced interactions due to the Remembering Box. On one occasion, Mrs. Ruben was attending a Bible study group with other nursing home residents and her son, with her Remembering Box. As the items in her box were being reviewed, she was asked whether her poem could be read to the group. The group members listened with rapt attention. Her son joined in the questions and discussion with his mother as the group learned about the contents of the box. Conversation was stimulating, everyone was participating and looking enthusiastic, Mrs. Ruben was beaming and telling her stories, and her son was interacting with her. There were displays of happiness from the group members and Mrs. Ruben. At the end, her son remarked "Well, that was the best visit with Mom I've had in a long time!"

*Other Residents.* The boxes were useful to the other residents in reducing boredom, sadness, and anxiety, and in conjuring up memories that made the resident happy. Staff members remarked that when they used the box as a communication tool, "boredom and irritability ceased . . . Sadness turned to pleasure . . . [it was] emotionally good, [the] resident [was] expressing happiness."

Day-to-day interactions, or those when the resident was not particularly anxious or agitated, also seemed to improve when the Remembering Box was employed. Staff indicated that the boxes gave them a reason to start a conversation whereas they normally would not have felt comfortable asking questions about the older person's past. For example, one staff member who used the box regularly, said "it allowed them to open up without bugging them." The items in the box also helped the resident expand on their stories. "[She was] able to tell me more, and with more ease than [if I just] asked a question." Thus, overall the Remembering Boxes and poems generally improved the quality of interactions from the staff point of view and from our observations of residents.

### ***Resident Taking Control***

The Remembering Boxes and poems allowed residents to take control of their interactions with others. "She took control of the conversation . . . she was carrying the conversation . . . she was remembering a lot." The satisfaction that the residents gained from being able to contribute to conversations made them eager to interact with the boxes and poems. The residents were not only able to contribute more to conversations but actually initiated them. "I am sitting here reading the paper and she called [me], . . . 'honey come!, come and see (sic) just a while, look what my son brought me!'" Since the residents were experts about their pasts, they showed concern for how others heard what they were communicating. The residents wanted the story to be understood correctly. "If I'm there I like to explain it to people, I know about it!" The residents' renewed ability to be active participants made the staff feel proud of them, and they were able to feel proud themselves and of their stories. "I was very happy for her, she was able to tell me her love story." "[she] is very proud of it . . . [she] is able to tell me something as soon as I ask a question." One journal entry commented, "She is proud of the things she has done, and so am I. I will come back to talk to and learn from her." A resident remarked, "Friends come and I ask them to look in my box . . . it is nice for them to look at it, they enjoy it . . . I enjoy it if somebody else enjoys it."

## ***DISCUSSION***

The Remembering Boxes and poems facilitated staff knowledge about residents' histories, leading to more individualized communica-

tion. Families were pleased with the impact that the boxes and poems had on their interactions with their loved one, and in the increase in staff knowledge. The new knowledge of personal histories prompted staff to change their sometimes one dimensional perception of the older person as simply a resident who needs care, to an older person who embodies multiple dimensions due to varied life experiences (Kitwood, 1990; Kitwood & Bredin, 1992). Based on classic studies in social psychology, it may be argued that staff knowledge of residents' pasts (background, achievements, relationships) made them more aware of their own personal similarities to the resident, leading to an increased attraction and understanding of the older person (Allport, 1954; Newcomb, 1961). The outcomes of this program are consistent with previous research regarding reminiscence therapy, writing, and memory aids, which have all proved useful in increasing staff knowledge and have led to a changed perception of the resident as a more complete individual, thereby improving communication (Baines et al., 1987; Bender et al., 1999; Bourgeois et al., 2001; Koch, 1977; Schuster, 1998). As in the Bourgeois et al. (2001) study, the poems and boxes provided concrete memory aids that circulated the knowledge beyond the group and had an impact on the entire social environment of the nursing home.

The added dimension of poetry writing also elicited active participation on behalf of the residents, and hearing their words read back to them made them feel as though they were really being listened to by others. This practice also gave them cause to feel proud of contributing something to their social environment (see Langer & Rodin, 1976). The poetry component may contribute specially to improved communication because of its salience in the nursing home environment (Koch, 1977). Staff, visitors, and the residents themselves are often surprised at the idea of writing poetry in a nursing home, and even more so at the depth and creativity contained in the poems. The surprise makes the poems more likely to be read, remembered, and talked about with others. Also, the format of poetry, allowing for the combination of brief memories without explicit organization, works particularly well for group writings as well as for writings by people with cognitive impairment. Furthermore, poetry is instantly engaging for both the resident and the visitor or staff member, a valuable feature for a communication tool in a busy nursing home environment.

The Remembering Boxes and poems enhanced staff and family's interactions with residents, whether they were particularly agitated or anxious, or not. In line with findings regarding reminiscence therapy (Beach & Kramer, 1999; Mills & Coleman, 1994), the knowledge and understanding that staff gained through the use of the boxes and poems

allowed them to find more mutually beneficial solutions to behavior problems, leading to more satisfying interactions. Furthermore, the accessibility of the box and the poem improved interactions beyond those occurring only in the reminiscence session. Interestingly, the solutions were not necessarily focused on changing a negative mood to a positive state, but more simply, the staff's newfound knowledge allowed them to make better choices about how to respond to a negative mood. For instance, after learning of Mrs. Ruben's daughter, staff better understood the source of her sadness; and after listening, they were able to introduce topics that would decrease her anxiety. In some cases, it was beneficial to Mrs. Ruben for staff to simply acknowledge her sadness, without redirecting the conversation to less emotional topics. Thus, with increased information, staff became less concerned with changing the behaviors of the residents and more inclined to examine and alter their own behavior. This is also consistent with previous findings regarding meaningful memory aids which changed the focus of staff communication from requests to more facilitative communication (Bourgeois et al., 2001).

The improved understanding staff members displayed about residents' feelings and abilities is in line with research on the impact of personalized external memory aids (Bourgeois et al., 2001; Mills & Coleman, 1994). The increase in assertive behavior by residents in the current project is congruent with very recent work in this research program (Bourgeois et al., 2001). Our facilitated communication approach has extended the previous work by explicitly using writing as a medium to increase both the contributions of residents to their social environment and staff knowledge of residents and by eliciting the residents' active participation in the making of the poems and the Remembering Boxes. Resident involvement in the creation of the tools should make them that much more individualized and effective. The focus on strictly personal memory aids creates a culture in which the personhood of the resident is paramount. Thus, the poems and boxes act as a practical tool for staff, but the interactions that stem from them are also viewed by residents as valuable, a blend that is often hard to produce from nursing home interventions. Furthermore, the flexibility inherent in the Remembering Box generates a continually evolving tool; each time the box is used, new stories and ideas emerge that can be added, reducing the likelihood that staff and visitors will become bored with the box. Interventions such as this offer older adults some control in an environment where there is often little opportunity to do for oneself (Baltes & Wahl, 1996; Lubinski, 1995). Thus, the personalized memory aids are not only an effective device for staff, but also act as a tool for residents



to aid them in expressing themselves, bringing others' behaviors into alignment with their enduring capabilities and needs.

The current project, with a limited sample size, reveals the range of possible positive outcomes of this approach to facilitating communication in longterm care. The qualitative outcomes observed highlight important areas for future research. An intervention study comparing cognitively impaired older adults, with and without Remembering Boxes and poetry writing, on measures of their adjustment to life in a nursing home and on their communication experiences, would be valuable. It would also be useful to assess the separable impacts of the three components: group reminiscence, poems, and the Remembering Boxes. Furthermore, this project suggests potential benefits for older adults with cognitive impairment and their family caregivers in the community. Thus, when a diagnosis of dementia is first received, the older adult and family can capitalize on existing memory, and may find life story writing and creating a Remembering Box to be therapeutic activities. Then, in the event that the older adult moves into a nursing home, the meaningful items and writings in the Remembering Box may offer comfort to the resident in unfamiliar surroundings, while also acting as a communication tool for staff. In summary, this method of facilitated communication offers rich opportunities to implement the five personhood strategies outlined by Kitwood (1997): recognizing the individual as a person, validating emotions, taking into account personal preferences, collaborating, and facilitating accomplishments.

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RECEIVED: 03/03

REVISED: 05/03

ACCEPTED: 06/03

***APPENDIX B:***

***ALPHABETICAL***

***LISTING OF***

***FACILITATED POEMS***



| <b>Poem</b>                                 | <b>Code*</b> | <b>Page</b> |
|---|--------------|-------------|
| A Day at the Beach.....                     | GD.....      | 95          |
| A Friend You'd Tell Your Secrets To.....    | GM.....      | 55          |
| A Home to Remember.....                     | GD.....      | 29          |
| A Lot of Things Happen Over the Years!..... | ID.....      | 127         |
| Bea Bea.....                                | ID.....      | 116         |
| Be a Friend.....                            | GM.....      | 53          |
| Being Trees.....                            | GM.....      | 115         |
| Bold and Beautiful.....                     | GM.....      | 75          |
| Childhood.....                              | GM.....      | 41          |
| Downtown Hamilton.....                      | G.....       | 62          |
| Eaton's Catalogue.....                      | GD.....      | 50          |
| Fall.....                                   | GD.....      | 98          |
| Family – A Treasure!.....                   | GD.....      | 40          |
| Feeling Colours.....                        | GM.....      | 113         |
| Fresh Air – Good for Whooping Cough.....    | GD.....      | 97          |
| Friends.....                                | GD.....      | 54          |
| Fun in the Snow.....                        | GM.....      | 102         |
| Group Thoughts of Home.....                 | GD.....      | 31          |
| Home.....                                   | G.....       | 27          |
| Home Remedies.....                          | GM.....      | 47          |
| I Did It.....                               | ID.....      | 123         |
| I Loved Driving.....                        | GM.....      | 82          |
| I Made My Own Patterns.....                 | ID.....      | 83          |
| I Thought I Had a Doll.....                 | ID.....      | 129         |
| I Was a Readaholic.....                     | I.....       | 77          |
| I Was Born Too Soon.....                    | GM.....      | 80          |
| I Was Somebody.....                         | ID.....      | 59          |
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# **\*Codes**

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| I = Individual Poem           | GD = Group with Dementia                  |
| G = Group Poem                | GM = Group with Mixed Cognitive Abilities |
| ID = Individual with Dementia |   |

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Chris Hagens** has been actively involved in working with seniors since 1984. An experienced teacher, Chris combines a passion for designing individual and group programs to meet specific needs and interests, with similar opportunities in Long Term Care. After completing a degree in Gerontology and Religious Studies in 1989 Chris joined the Shalom Village Team in 1990 and has been involved in creating innovative programming ever since. Special interests include developing programs which encourage continual personal growth, self expression and creativity with the goal of enhancing the quality of life for seniors in Long Term Care.



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# **WRITING DOWN OUR YEARS SERIES**

**FROM  
MCMASTER CENTRE FOR GERONTOLOGICAL STUDIES**

**ELLEN B. RYAN, SERIES EDITOR**



**PUBLISHED BY:**

**McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies,  
Department of Health, Aging and Society  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario  
L8S 4M4**