


Everybody has a story to tell

by Morgan Lord, UF Journalism Student



Have you ever seen an old friend and immediately picked up where you left off?

Shared an experience with a brother or sister of when you were both younger?

Or come across an old picture, or heard a song that brought you back to a moment in your life?

You probably said yes to at least one of those questions. Each of them demonstrates the importance of memory in our everyday lives. At the Institute on Aging, a new researcher is taking a scientific approach to understanding the importance of everyday memory.

Susan Bluck, Ph. D is a researcher and educator at the Institute on Aging at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on how and why individuals remember the events of their own lives, share stories about their lives and talk about the past with others.

"Sharing life experiences with others, and writing one's memoirs or short stories about one's life are all seen as positive ways to maintain one's vitality and richen relationships in later life," Bluck said. "What really intrigues me is why humans, compared to other animals, remember so much about their own personal past, and why we have this need to share our past with others."

Many older adults have discovered creative ways to cata-

log their past: keeping family journals, scrapbooks, writing books, short-stories, poems and simply thinking and talking about the past with friends and relatives.

"My husband and I wrote a children's book for our two great grandchildren, all about our lives. We had a great time sitting down and remembering our little moments. We went from laughter to tears of joy," Estelle Green, 78, said.

Often when we share a common story with another person, we also recapture for a moment how we both felt. Memory seems to have this capacity to help us remember things that happened, and to almost transport us back in time...to revisit old feelings and events.

Throughout our lifetime, we have stored away both small and momentous events that we consider important. Now is the time to write down and share the memories we carry in our heads.

Even things that seem trivial, like recipes that have never been written down, can be important in maintaining tradition in a family.

Right now at the University of Florida, research is being conducted at the Life Story Laboratory by Dr. Susan Bluck and her research team.

"Memory is such a fascinating topic and I am delighted to have been invited to be a member of the faculty of the

University of Florida's Institute on Aging. After working in Canada and Germany, Florida really offers a golden opportunity as a place to set up my Life Story Lab," Bluck said.

The goal of the lab is to conduct scientific research on individual's memories of past events, in order to determine the role that autobiographical memories play in people's sense of self and continuity over time, in people's relationships and social well-being, and the extent to which people use memories of their past successes and failures to set current goals and plan for the future.

"Setting up the Life Story Lab over the past year in the Psychology Department at UF really gives our research team the opportunity to reach out to seniors in the community, to hear

people's stories, and to learn more about memory while also learning personally from older adults life experiences," Bluck said.

Volunteers of all ages can participate and share their stories with Dr. Bluck at the Life Story Laboratory.

"Understanding how memories of the past enrich people's everyday lives really interests me. In some ways it seems like magic that people can remember so much, even when they have been around for 70 or 80 years, about moments, or days, or events that occurred long ago. Of course it's not magic. And that's why I've set up the Life Story Lab: to try to understand more about why people remember so much about their past, and the benefits of remembering and sharing with others." Δ

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