

Imagining Forgetfulness...

A Participation into the Intuitive Reality

by Desi Owens, MS, MSW, LCSW and Nader Shabahangi, Ph.D.

AgeSong is creating an adaptation of the classic PhotoVoice approach originally developed and implemented by Caroline Wang, Mary Ann Burris, and colleagues. PhotoVoice projects provide a forum to actively engage individuals within communities who have often been marginalized, overlooked, and unheard. This AgeSong-based project will focus on individuals who have been labeled as having dementia in an effort to establish meaningful two-way communication, prompting us to listen, and teaching us about the emotional worlds and representations of our elders.

Each resident participant will be paired with a trained staff person and/or intern who will provide assistance and join in the process as the resident's "photo partner." Elders will be given digital cameras to photograph elements in their everyday world and will be asked to take pictures of whatever they consider important or meaningful to them. Participants will have the opportunity to tell their story both through the photographs that they take, and through any verbal comments that they wish to share about their motivations for taking a picture, and/or any reactions that they may have to their images.

This project seeks to bring us closer to the person behind the cognitive impairment label(s) by giving us the opportunity to directly observe elders' experience of "dementia." Through this project we hope to gain a better understanding – from our elders – about the "panorama of forgetfulness," a foundation from which our attitudes and ways of caring have the potential of being significantly transformed.

For more detailed information about this project including all methods involved, and/or to learn more about criteria for participation, please contact Diana Chambers at 510-444-4684 or dchambers@agesong.com.

This pilot project has been developed with the help of Desi Owens, AgeSong Project Consultant, and Campus Planner at the UC Berkeley Center on Aging, in collaboration with Nader Shabahangi, AgeSong Founder, and the many senior residents of the AgeSong communities.



432 Ivy Street
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Pacific Institute

AgeSong is proud of its partnership with Pacific Institute, an organization dedicated to gerontology and elder wellness.

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LIC# 385600373, 385600372, 015601384



Beyond Dementia Toward Forgetfulness Care

WARNING

by Jenny Joseph

WHEN I AM AN OLD WOMAN I SHALL WEAR PURPLE

With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.

And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves

And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.

I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired

And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells

And run my stick along the public railings

And make up for the sobriety of my youth.

I shall go out in my slippers in the rain

And pick the flowers in other people's gardens

And learn to spit

*You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go
Or only bread and pickle for a week
And hoard pens and pencils and beermats
and things in boxes*

*But now we must have clothes that keep us dry
And pay our rent and not swear in the street
And set a good example for the children.
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.*

*But maybe I ought to practice a little now?
So people who know me
are not too shocked and surprised
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.*

Creating Therapeutic Environments

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Taken from the book
When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple
Edited by Sandra Martz

Successful Aging?

by AgeSong staff

Successful Aging? Social scientists have been trying to define it for years. Have you achieved successful aging if you are 80 and have the productivity of a 35-year-old, or the athletic prowess of a 50-year-old, or by having the body of a 40-year-old? At what point have we actually started "aging" anyway?

“We learn the value of human connection, about being part of community and sharing moments.”

Those of us who embrace aging as a process that celebrates life, measure successful aging by how an individual defines purpose and finds joy in the moment and in daily interactions - no matter how big or small. The idea that purpose and joy can transcend pain, fragility, loss and even cognitive abilities goes back to tribal times. However, our fast-paced society often de-values the ability to look deep within and access other realities to find wisdom, traditions and spiritual expression. This problem is accentuated by the deplorable manner in which the media depicts the elderly and society's anti-aging viewpoint.

We are committed to changing this superficial and demeaning view of aging. We find that in our daily interactions with residents, even those with limited ability to communicate in traditional ways, we can learn. We learn the value of human connection, of being part of a community and of sharing moments. We learn that there is still purpose and joy in lives that endure the physical and mental challenges that often are associated with aging. And we learn that residents want to teach us and share with us, through traditional and non-traditional ways, the gifts and wisdom that often only life experiences can bring.

Successful aging cannot be measured by tangible benchmarks. Rather, we are challenged to be conscious of the gifts elders possess and try to share with us. We are also challenged to accept the gifts that our own aging process brings forth.

Creating Therapeutic Environments

Finding the Intuitive Mind

by AgeSong staff

Caregivers and family members have shared countless stories of amazement when a resident who has stopped communicating in traditional verbal ways suddenly astonishes us with a lucid expression of some sort. For instance, a resident who begins singing her favorite songs when she hears the tune in the distance, a seemingly nonresponsive resident who smiles and squeezes your hand when clay is placed into it, or a resident who suddenly begins tapping her finger to an old church hymn.

“...everything has its own possibility, its own meaning and yet is a mystery.”

Expressive arts research shows that the arts, music, nature and spiritual connections can all have neurological and psychological possibilities as these experiences connect the person with forgetfulness to the deepest parts of one's being: the intuitive self and spiritual spaces

that go far deeper than verbal language. In Patricia LeFevre's article in the *Catholic Reporter*, Dr. Nan Lu, founding director of the Traditional Chinese Medicine World Foundation, compares the connection between Alzheimer's disease and the Consensus Reality Mind to that of night and day. Lu says, "Alzheimer's is like the darkness that is always behind the light; it's not separate from it." He continues, "The rational mind is gone, but the intuitive mind is still active. These persons can be our teachers. They can teach us that everything has its own possibility, its own meaning, and yet is a mystery." Dr. Lu advises caregivers to take persons with forgetfulness outside, expose them to the sights, smells, sounds and the feel of nature. Similarly, he urges giving persons with forgetfulness the chance to hear music, to dance, to paint, to hear poetry, to express the intuitive mind. He concludes that most of the great composers and artists created their great works using their intuitive mind to communicate.