

NEXT CHAPTER: LEADING A MEMOIR WRITING GROUP

Excerpt from Myrle Bowe's breakout session presentation, Village-to-Village national conference, San Diego CA, October 2018

In 2012 I visited a new "Village" to ask about help for a woman who was in her 70's and on oxygen 24/7, becoming frail and falling. I had seen an article in a local paper about the Village movement, established to help older adults age well and stay in their homes if they chose. A friendly, professional young woman provided information, and then kept me supplied with coffee while she was trying to recruit me for a volunteer. "Doing what?" I asked. "Oh, drive people to the doctor, maybe fix lunch, do a little housework or leaf raking (not with my allergies!)..."

My reply was, "I do volunteer work, usually committees, events, Board memberships, whatever." She leaned back in her chair and said, "How would you like to teach a memoir group???" I thought it over, and based on a lifetime of writing for whatever I was doing, and experience teaching investments, financial planning or the occasional college course in marketing or economics---agreed to it.

We developed a concise mission statement: "Storytelling, Connection, and Building a Group of Potential Volunteers", inviting non-member participants as well as Village members.

Over that summer I searched for material on how to write memoirs, the basics of how to write, and small group dynamics. I developed a program that included a four-week series, with a one-page calendar, guidelines, and an occasional published memoir writer as a guest. In September 2012 we began, soon changed to a five-week format, and in 2019 we are still meeting . Some of the original members are still with us, and we are friends beyond the weekly meeting. In addition to that original group, I have led memoir-writing workshops for other sponsors, including retirement living sites, senior centers, OSHER Lifelong Learning, libraries,

Delaware Cancer Support Community, churches and other community organizations.

Memoir writing has a way of keeping us lively, involved, and part of a community. I was honored, two years into the program, to receive the Jewish Family Services Volunteer of the Year "Mensch" Award from our sponsoring organization.

I realize with gratitude how much the program and connections (and all the work!) have done for me. I have a stack of notes, letters, memoirs and emails about how these programs have benefitted members and changed their lives. These are results I never anticipated--and all for the fun of being involved.

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