

UConn

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
LIFE STORY INNOVATIONS
AND PRACTICE

HEALING WORDS: THE ROLE OF NARRATIVE IN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Keynote Speaker:
Dr. Felicitano Villar,
University of Barcelona,
Spain

Virtual Conference
MARCH 5-6

Funded by: John Allan Kunz
Fund for Reminiscence and Life Review



Acknowledgements

Many individuals have volunteered and worked hard to achieve the goal of planning and implementing this conference. My sincere thanks to all of you!

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All abstracts submitted for the conference went through a blind review by Cheryl Brohard, Alison Kris, Galen Tinder, Gerben Westerhof

Moderators

Cheryl Brohard, Theresa Chrisman, Millicent Malcolm, Whitney Myers, Tom Pierce, Jessica Robbins-Panko, Christine Tocchi, and Gerben Westerhof

A special thank you to our conference presenters who represent an array of life story research and practice and are well-known for their expertise and rigor in their work.

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Dear conference participants:

As Director of the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the University of Connecticut and to our third virtual international conference.

We are delighted to welcome colleagues joining us from the Netherlands, Canada, Spain, and Jordan, as well as new participants from across the United States—including Hawaii. Your presence reflects the growing global reach of our shared work. We are especially honored to have Dr. Feliciano Villar from the University of Barcelona, Spain, as our keynote speaker.

The National Reminiscence and Life Review Society held its first conference in 1995 in Superior, Wisconsin, under the direction of John A. Kunz. These biennial gatherings became hallmark events of the International Institute for Reminiscence and Life Review—spaces where innovative life story practices were developed, collaborations and friendships were formed, and the latest advances in the field were shared. Today, the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice is proud to carry forward the traditions established by the Institute and to continue fostering scholarship, practice, and community in this vital area of work.

This year's theme, Healing Words: The Role of Narrative in Health and Well-being, is reflected throughout our workshops, paper sessions, and poster presentations. Narrative sharing offers a powerful pathway for promoting health and well-being. By fostering self-understanding, sustaining, and reframing identity, strengthening social connections, and constructing meaning from lived experiences, storytelling serves as a profound mechanism for healing. These narratives may be expressed through oral storytelling, digital media, written accounts, or collaborative group formats.

This conference would not be possible without Dean Dickson's support. She has wholeheartedly supported the work of the Center and our members. Thank you to Ashley O'Connell, our publicity director, and to Sienna Scarlatos for their outstanding work promoting the conference across social media platforms and professional organizations, and for developing the digital conference brochure. A special thank you as well to UConn Conference Services for their expertise and assistance in planning and managing the technical aspects of this event. It is always a pleasure to collaborate with you.

To all of you, thank you for being part of this important and growing community. We are honored by your participation and look forward to the rich discussion and shared learning over the next two days.

I wish you an engaging, inspiring, and rewarding conference experience.

Juliette Shellman
Director, The International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice



Fairfield University

Dear Colleagues, Members, and Friends,

It is a privilege to welcome you to this virtual, international gathering devoted to advancing life story research and practice. As President of the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice, I am continually inspired by the diversity of scholarship, methods and global perspectives that define our community.

This year's theme, Healing Words: The Role of Narrative in Health and Well-Being, captures the essence of our shared work. Across disciplines and cultures, we are witnessing a growing recognition that narrative is not simply expressive; it is therapeutic, relational, and transformative. Stories help individuals make meaning of illness, preserve identity across the lifespan, strengthen intergenerational connections, and foster resilience in the face of adversity. Stories enrich caregiving relationships not only for patients but for caregivers as well.

Over the past three decades, what began as a focused interest in reminiscence and life review has evolved into a rigorous interdisciplinary science of narrative. In clinical settings, including long-term care environments, life story approaches have demonstrated that even when memory is fragile and fleeting, identity and personhood can remain deeply rooted in story. Research continues to show that narrative interventions can enhance dignity, connection, and measurable indicators of well-being, reminding us that healing and quality of life are often relational as much as they are biomedical.

The work showcased at this conference reflects both the heart and the science of our field. It honors our legacy while advancing innovative methodologies, interventions, and cross-cultural scholarship. I am particularly encouraged by the presence of emerging scholars whose research ensures that narrative inquiry will continue to grow in depth, rigor, and global impact.

As we engage over the coming days, I invite you to consider how healing words can shape the future of health care, education, and community life. How might we continue to strengthen the evidence base? How can we amplify diverse voices across cultures? How can narrative remain central to person-centered and relationship-centered care in an increasingly complex world?

Thank you for your dedication to this meaningful work. It is an honor to serve this organization at such an exciting moment in its evolution.

With gratitude and anticipation,

Alison Kris, PhD, RN

President

International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice

**THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR LIFE STORY
INNOVATIONS AND PRACTICE
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

**HEALING WORDS: THE ROLE OF
NARRATIVE IN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

Schedule: March 5

New York	Amsterdam	Tokyo	Ankara	Melbourne
11:15 AM	5:15 PM	*1:15 AM	7:00 PM	*3:15 AM

- 11:15AM – 12:15PM **Advisory board meeting in WebEx**
Chair: Dr. Alison Kris
- 12:30PM – 1:30PM **Preconference Workshop 1 in Webex**
**More Than Words: A Practical Exploration of
Image and Sound in Life Review Digital
Storytelling**
Moderator: Dr. Christine Tocchi
- 1:45PM – 2:45PM **Preconference Workshop 2 in Webex**
**Cultivating Empathy Through Medical Narrative
Writing and Rhetorical Analysis**
Moderator: Dr. Jessica Robbins-Panko
- 3:00PM – 5:00PM **Networking, Poster Presentation, Awards
Presentation and Raffle in Remo virtual platform**
- 3:00PM – 3:45PM Paper Presentation and Discussion
**Life Story Practice, Education, and Research
Collaborative: Program Needs and Development**
Dr. Millicent Malcolm & Dr. Juliette Shellman,
University of Connecticut
- 3:45 PM – 4:00PM Presentation of Awards
- 4:00PM – 4:45PM Student Awardee Presentation
- 4:45PM – 5:00PM Wrap-up and ICLIP Conference Giveaways Drawing

Schedule: March 6

New York	Amsterdam	Tokyo	Ankara	Melbourne
10:00 AM	4:00 PM	Midnight	6:00 PM	*2:00 AM

- 10:00AM – 10:15AM **Welcome Messages**
Dr. Juliette Shellman, Director ICLIP, UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing
Dr. Victoria Vaughan-Dickson, Dean, UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing
Dr. Alison Kris, President, ICLIP Advisory Board
- 10:15AM – 11:15AM **Keynote Presentation**
Narrative Care for People Living with Dementia: Difficulties and Strategies
Dr. Feliciano Villar, University of Barcelona, Spain
Moderator: Dr. Gerben Westerhof
- 11:15AM – 12:00PM **Interactive Session with Dr. Villar**
Moderator: Dr. Gerben Westerhof
- 12:00PM – 12:15PM SHORT BREAK
- 12:15PM – 1:35PM **Concurrent Paper Presentations, Session 1**
Stories That Heal: Narrative Meaning-Making in Trauma, Grief, and Survival – Zoom Room 1
Moderator: Dr. Thomas Pierce

The Power of Story: Reminiscence, Identity, and Well-Being in Social and Political Contexts – Zoom Room 2
Moderator: Dr. Theresa Chrisman
- 1:35PM – 1:45PM SHORT BREAK
- 1:45PM – 2:15PM **Lunch and Business Meeting and Election of Officers (WebEx)**

Schedule: March 6

2:20PM – 3:20PM

Paper Presentations, Session 2

Digital Storytelling and Reminiscence Technologies in Dementia Care

Moderator: Dr. Millicent Malcolm

3:20PM – 3:30 PM

SHORT BREAK

3:30PM – 4:50PM

Concurrent Paper Presentations, Session 3

Exploring Digital Technologies for Reminiscence, Life Storying, and Well-Being, Zoom Room 1

Moderator: Whitney Myers, Sacred Stories

Legacy, Life Stories, and Wellbeing: Innovative Approaches to Narrative-Based Care, Zoom Room 2

Moderator: Dr. Cheryl Brohard

4:55PM – 5:15PM

Closing Session

Final remarks and Evaluation: Dr. Alison Kris & President-elect

New York	Amsterdam	Tokyo	Ankara	Melbourne
5:30 PM	11:30 PM	7:30 AM	1:30 AM	*9:30 AM

ICLIP Awards

The James and Betty Birren Award for Excellence in Practice

Dr. Jonathan Adler, Olin College of Engineering

Nominator: John Countryman



It is a privilege to recognize Jonathan Adler for his outstanding scholarly contributions and their profound alignment with the mission of The Birren Center and The International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice. Dr. Adler is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Story Lab at Olin College of Engineering, Senior Lecturer at Harvard Medical School, Editor of *Personal and Social Psychology Review*, and Chief Academic Officer of the Health Story Collaborative. His research centers on

narrative identity—the internal, evolving story each person constructs to create unity, coherence, and purpose in life. Importantly, his work extends beyond theory into clinical, medical, and artistic applications, where it is used to foster psychological well-being. This focus directly advances the goals of The Birren Center and ICLIP by demonstrating how storytelling serves as a powerful mechanism for growth, healing, and meaning making across the lifespan. Dr. Adler’s scholarship strongly reflects the award’s guiding principle that “age is a story,” echoing James E. Birren’s foundational insight that life stories are enacted in interpersonal contexts and are dynamically shaped by the broader cultural narratives available to us. These dynamics unfold vividly within every Guided Autobiography group, where participants discover that reflecting on and sharing one’s life story fosters deeper self-knowledge. Through the act of telling one’s story—and listening to the stories of others—individuals refine and expand their narrative identity, an area of Dr. Adler’s distinctive expertise. His work provides empirical and theoretical grounding for what Guided Autobiography has long demonstrated in practice: that storytelling in community strengthens identity, insight, and connection.

For these reasons, Jonathan Adler’s scholarship and leadership exemplify the spirit and criteria of this award.

Awards

Florence Gray-Soltys Graduate Student Award for Exemplary Research or Practice in the Field of Reminiscence and Life Review

Melanie Lalani, PhDc University of Toronto

Nominator: Galen Tinder



This award recognizes exemplary research or practice by a graduate student that advances the mission of ICLIP—to establish programs of research, implement educational initiatives, develop innovative applications in practice, and disseminate best practices in life story work. Melanie’s doctoral research explores relationships between people living with dementia (PLwD) in long-term care and adolescents. She has developed an innovative theoretical framework to challenge prevailing assumptions about dementia and childhood. Her work questions deficit-based models that often obscure the relational strengths of both PLwD

and young people, instead highlighting their capacities for meaningful, caring connection. In her 2025 Routledge book chapter, “To Be Seen and Heard: Relational Caring Meets Lived Childhoods in Relationships Between Young Children and People Living with Dementia in Long-term Care Homes,” Melanie demonstrates how dominant discourses can undervalue the voices and contributions of both groups. Her research reframes these relationships as sites of reciprocity, story-sharing, and mutual recognition. Central to Melanie’s research is the use of reminiscence through digital storytelling. She employs what she calls “narrative artifacts”—such as photographs, jewelry, plants, animals, and artwork—to evoke memory, foster sensory receptivity, and access deeply embedded stories that might otherwise remain out of reach. These methods culminate in brief, powerful digital stories designed to engage broad audiences and shift attitudes about dementia, aging, and youth.

Melanie Lalani’s work exemplifies innovation and compassionate practice. By advancing intergenerational connection through reminiscence and life review, she significantly furthers the mission of The Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice. We are honored to recognize her with the Florence Gray-Soltys Graduate Student Award.

Awards

John A Kunz Award for Distinguished Service to the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice

Dr. Theresa Chrisman, Life Story Work Organization
Nominator: Cheryl Brohard



It is with great enthusiasm that we recognize Dr. Chrisman for her outstanding contributions to the field of gerontology and her dedicated service to ICLIP.

Dr. Chrisman is the Founder of Life Story Work and a distinguished gerontologist specializing in reminiscence and life review. She is deeply committed to transforming nursing homes into

resident-centered, equitable, and quality-focused environments, while upholding the highest standards of care. Her innovative expertise in developing life story books—integrating personal narratives with digital media—has advanced meaningful engagement practices and strengthened person-centered approaches across care settings. For more than five years, Dr. Chrisman has been an active and valued member of ICLIP. She has served as an elected officer on the ICLIP Advisory Board and has fulfilled the role of Secretary for the past three years with professionalism, integrity, and dedication. Her contributions extend significantly to conference planning and execution. As a member of the Conference Committee, she has played an instrumental role in the successful planning and implementation of virtual conferences. In addition, she has consistently shared her scholarship as a presenter, advancing the field of reminiscence, and has served as a moderator, ensuring the smooth and professional operation of conference sessions. She served as a guest editor of the 2026 issue of *The International Journal of Reminiscence and Life Review* highlighting the 2024 conference presentations.

Awards

The Robert Butler and Myrna Lewis Exemplar Research Award

Dr. Jefferson Singer, Professor Emeritus,
Connecticut College

Nominator: Thomas Pierce



It is with great distinction that we recognize Dr. Jefferson A. Singer as a recipient of The Robert Butler and Myrna Lewis Exemplar Research Award.

Dr. Singer is Professor Emeritus at Connecticut College, where he served as Faulk Foundation Professor of Psychology and as Dean of the College from 2015 to 2021. Over the

course of his distinguished career, he has made enduring contributions to the fields of personality psychology, autobiographical memory, and clinical psychology. An internationally respected scholar, Dr. Singer is the author of six books and more than 100 articles, chapters, and book reviews. His work has helped define and advance the study of self-defining memories, narrative identity, and autobiographical memory. Since 2020 alone, he has published 11 scholarly works in these areas, adding to dozens of influential publications dating back to 1989. In addition, he has authored three seminal books that have shaped both research and clinical practice in narrative and memory studies.

Dr. Singer's scholarship exemplifies the spirit of this award, named in honor of Robert N. Butler and Myrna Lewis, whose pioneering work underscored the importance of life review, meaning-making, and the psychological dimensions of aging. Like Dr. Butler, Dr. Singer has illuminated the ways in which individuals construct identity through memory and story, demonstrating how self-defining memories serve as building blocks of personality and psychological well-being across the lifespan. Dr. Singer has advanced our understanding of how autobiographical memory shapes identity and resilience. His scholarship—fully embodies the purpose and prestige of The Robert Butler and Myrna Lewis Exemplar Research Award.

Keynote Speaker

Narrative Care for People Living with Dementia: Difficulties and Strategies

The aim of the talk will be discussing the feasibility of narrative interventions (defined as 'narrative care') to sustain identity among people with dementia. Firstly, we will discuss how factors such as the nature of the disease, the cultural metanarratives of dementia and common ways of relating to people with dementia may undermine their identity and contribute to their stigmatization. Secondly, we will discuss potential narrative-based interventions aimed at supporting narrative identity, including reminiscence and life-review formal programs, conversational and relational strategies, constructing narrative environments and artifacts, and interventions valuing non-verbal and embodied narratives.



Dr. Feliciano Villar

Feliciano Villar is a full professor at the Department of Cognition, Development and Educational Psychology at the University of Barcelona. His research interest includes two areas. The first one seeks to explore and promote the contribution of older people to their communities and families, using the concept of generativity in later life. A second area of research has to do with the provision of a person-centred care in long-term care institutions, exploring how that care may promote resident's participation and quality of life, as well as guarantee their rights. Using the concept of narrative care, he has studied what kind of communicative interactions sustain resident's narrative agency and personhood. He also has conducted research regarding the management of sexuality in long-term care settings.

As a result of his activity, he has published more than 100 papers in international academic journals. At the present he is also the head of the master's degree in Psychogerontology at the University of Barcelona.

Workshop 1

More Than Words: A Practical Exploration of Image and Sound in Life Review Digital Storytelling

Dr. Michael Lang, Founder, Common Language Digital Storytelling



Crafting and sharing life stories in digital formats is increasingly accessible in our digital age. This means that people can now use words, images, and sounds in new and unique ways to share the important moments of their lives with others. Digital Storytelling is an established life story methodology where a trained facilitator supports participants to create a short film, called a Digital Story, in which they can utilize all of the multimedia

options available to them. Building from his experiences supporting the creation of over 1,000 Digital Stories about health and wellness topics, Dr. Mike Lang will share the practical tips and tools that he uses on a daily basis to help people visually and auditorily share their life stories. The session will provide examples of the concepts covered through three life review digital stories on the topics of Grief, ALS, and PTSD, as well as interactive activities to help solidify learning. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of how they can begin, or enhance, the use of digital media in their life story work.

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the basic principles and process of Digital Storytelling as a facilitated life-story methodology, including key narrative, ethical, and aesthetic considerations.
2. Identify practical techniques for shaping personal narratives using image, voice, and sound, drawing on examples from Digital Stories focused on grief, ALS, and PTSD.
3. Practice visual and auditory storytelling strategies through guided exercises that can be incorporated into many forms of creative and reflective storytelling contexts.

Workshop 2

Cultivating Empathy Through Medical Narrative Writing and Rhetorical Analysis



Dr. Genie Giaimo
Associate Professor
Hofstra University



Eric Last, DO
Northwell Health
Associate Professor
Zucker School of Medicine
Hofstra University

This workshop will share key takeaways from a co-taught Medical Narratives course at Hofstra University. Part of an inaugural Provost interdisciplinary teaching initiative, this course was developed to appeal to students with career aspirations in healthcare as well as a way to teach in the broader medical humanities discipline through rhetorical and writing-based lenses. In this workshop, we will detail the structure and content of our course, provide resources to those who are interested in teaching a similar course, and, also, engage in medical narrative writing activities from both a patient/caretaker perspective and a healthcare worker perspective. Through creative, pedagogical, and rhetorical approaches to medical narrative writing, we hope to energize other educators and practitioners to both teach and personally engage in medical narrative writing. We also hope to contribute to conversations about health and well-being through a narrative medicine-based lens. This workshop will be co-led by Drs. Last and Giaimo. Dr. Last is a primary care internist affiliated with Northwell Health and the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell and Dr. Giaimo is an Associate Professor of Writing Studies and Rhetoric at Hofstra University

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Engage in medical narrative writing activities, learning about the genre and with the option to share out with the group.
2. View undergraduate student medical narrative creations (art, poetry, essays, etc.) and earn more about the pedagogy of integrating medical narratives into the undergraduate classroom.

Paper Presentation Session 1

Stories That Heal: Narrative Meaning-Making in Trauma, Grief, and Survival

The Narrative Healing of Adversity

Galen Tinder, MDiv, DMin

Narrative research shows that written and spoken narration affects narrators in positive ways. Effects include reductions in anxiety and depression, improved focus on important goals, an increase in both agency and communion, and a fuller sense of an authentic self, guided by humane values. These benefits cause most narrators to describe spoken narrative as psychologically and emotionally healing. I have facilitated more than 30 Structured Life Reviews during the last several years. In this presentation I describe how and why these reviews are healing and how they can be used to address painful life experiences in a variety of settings.

Galen Tinder earned a Doctor of Ministry degree and is certified in Narrative Practice, Structured Life Review and Guided Autobiography. He is an independent practitioner and writer.

Healing Words in Adoption: Co-Constructing Narratives of Loss, Identity, and Belonging

Dr. Michelle Cole, University of Connecticut, Dr. Christina Gunther, Rush University, & Dr. Robin Danzak, Emerson College

Our study (Gunther et al., in press) used narrative inquiry to explore the less-celebrated experiences of adoptees and their families, emphasizing storytelling as a means of understanding complexities and healing. Personal stories are impactful; "storytelling is sense-making" (McAdams, 2006, p. 77). Individuals create their stories to make sense of their experiences. We, as researchers, used focus group data from 17 adult participants with different adoption backgrounds to co-construct three narratives centered on less-discussed aspects of adoption: the sense of loss, secrecy, and differences. By weaving participants' authentic voices into collective stories, we shed light on less-discussed experiences of adoption. Sharing stories that are often less talked about or silenced, our work highlights the power of narrative inquiry both as a method and a healing tool. Respecting the storytellers and their stories, retold experiences are shared with genuine voices, which can help foster empathy, encourage dialogue, and transform adoption experiences in ways that promote health, well-being, and understanding.

Michelle A. Cole DNP, MSN, RN, CPN Clinical Associate Professor and Director of Global Learning, Community Engagement and Outreach in the University of Connecticut School of Nursing. Michelle's life story interests include pediatric health, cultural perspectives, and development of the next generation of nurses to serve as global citizens.

Christina Gunther, EdD is an assistant professor in the PhD in Health Sciences Program at Rush University. Christina's life-story interests lie within the fields of cultural literacy, social determinants of health and social justice in the global arena. She is also interested in identity development in adoption.

Robin L. Danzak, PhD. Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders, Emerson College. Robin's life-story research interests include narrative inquiry, autoethnography, photovoice, and bilingual writing research.

Paper Presentation Session 1

Stories That Heal: Narrative Meaning-Making in Trauma, Grief, and Survival

Narratives of Miscarriage Grief: Stories by those Experiencing Fetal Loss

Dr. Jennifer Schindler-Ruwisch, Dr. Christine Denhup, & Kimberly Watson, Fairfield University

The benefits of narrative storytelling have been documented in a variety of public health contexts, including mental health and sexual health, to better understand individual and holistic factors impacting well-being (McCall et al., 2021). Further, in the context of reproductive health, women often utilize birth narratives to process aspects of their reproductive journey, particularly pieces that were unplanned (Simonelli et al., 2021). As part of a mixed-methods study, we enrolled an international online sample (n=1,709) of birthing people (over the age of 18) who had experienced a miscarriage in the past 10 years. These individuals shared their stories to highlight the many ways they process and struggle with miscarriage grief. While narrative storytelling can be powerful for mental health and reproductive health, it's been minimally utilized in this area of miscarriage grief. Given the prevalence of miscarriage globally, providing opportunity for those that have lost a pregnancy to share what was helpful and harmful in their grief can amplify the shared aspects of the narrative to improve health and support for all experiencing perinatal loss. Participants' insights illuminated ways to improve the healthcare of those experiencing miscarriage, the pros/cons of peer support and grief counseling, and how family/friends can aid in the grief journey. Additionally, valuing the unique lived experiences of individuals who have lost a pregnancy can help promote validation, healing, and support more universally.

Jennifer Schindler-Ruwisch, DrPH, CPH, is an Associate Professor of Public Health at Fairfield University's Marion Peckham Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies. She is a maternal health researcher with a focus on health equity and social justice.

Christine Denhup, PhD, APRN, CPNP-PC is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies, Fairfield University. She has experience as a pediatric nurse and pediatric oncology care provider with expertise in grief, bereavement, and palliative care.

Kimberly Watson is a member of the Class of 2027 at the Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies, Fairfield University. She is a public health student with aspirations to be a nurse.

Paper Presentation Session 1

Stories That Heal: Narrative Meaning-Making in Trauma, Grief, and Survival

We Lived Through It: Emotional Legacies of the HIV/AIDS Era Among Older LGBTQ+ Drag Community Members

Alexis Bernhardt, Dr. Laura Donorfrio, & Dr. Brian Chapman
University of Connecticut

This research explores the experiences of older LGBTQ+ drag performers who lived through the HIV/AIDS crisis as community members and cultural witnesses (not as identified HIV-positive survivors). Using Timeline Mapping within a qualitative, exploratory interview protocol (N=21), participants reflected on life events from childhood through older adulthood and described the profound emotional and cultural imprint of the epidemic. Although HIV/AIDS was not included in the protocol, it emerged organically across all interviews, emphasizing its lasting influence. Grounded theory analysis revealed six themes: (1) Emotional Legacy, including enduring trauma, survivor's guilt, and cumulative mental and emotional health strain; (2) Chosen Family, reflecting how drag communities served as protective and affirming networks after rejection by biological kin; (3) Loss and Grief, capturing ongoing mourning and ritualized remembrance; (4) Activism, showing how participants became advocates in the absence of institutional support; (5) Volunteerism and Fundraising, highlighting rapid and coordinated community responses; and (6) Medical Inequity and Treatment, revealing limited access to care and the use of underground survival strategies. These findings highlight historical memory, resilience, and community care through an intersectional lens. Future research should deepen understanding of long-term emotional, physical, and mental health impacts and translate lived-experience insights into trauma-informed models, interventions, and policy responses for future shared episodic health events.

Alexis B. Bernhardt is a Research Associate in the Department of Psychological Sciences & Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Laura K. M. Donorfrio is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences at the University of Connecticut.

Dr. Brian G. Chapman is currently an Assistant Professor in Residence and Human Development and Family Sciences Regional Campus Coordinator at the University of Connecticut.

Paper Presentation Session 1

The Power of Story: Reminiscence, Identity, and Well-Being in Social and Political Contexts

Rethink, Rewrite, and Resist: Personal Narratives of Health, Illness, and Loss Amidst Pressing Political Pressure

Dr. Christy Zink, George Washington University

While "The personal is political" has long been the cry of feminist thinkers and writers, the reverse is also true, that the political is personal, perhaps now more than in recent eras. The state of current politics in America essentially changes how many individual stories once told about health, illness, and loss require reshaping and retelling, with new forms and impacts. This interactive presentation brings together the frameworks of narrative medicine and the medical/health humanities along with the exemplar of abortion and pregnancy loss, from sociological research, professional counseling practice, and published creative nonfiction, to argue for the necessity not just of the value of patient narratives but also for tracking how those medical encounters get reconceived, in body and mind, amidst political pressures. The presenter is a university writing professor who teaches seminars in narrative medicine and has also testified before Congress on matters of reproductive rights. After an introduction to the scholarly conversation, the audience is invited, then, to write through a series of guided prompts on medical encounters of all kinds, whether their own or of those people they're closest to, and to craft those personal narratives amidst, and perhaps counter to, the public information on health and medical conditions published officially at the national level.

Dr. Christy Zink is an assistant professor of writing and director of the University Writing Center at George Washington University. Her research work focuses on the intersections of women's real-life experiences and medical research, with particular attention to reproductive justice and women's health in America.

Paper Presentation Session 1

The Power of Story: Reminiscence, Identity, and Well-Being in Social and Political Contexts

Beyond Frequency: Maladaptive Functions and Social Context Predict Well-Being More Than Reminiscence Itself

Dr. Alison Kris & Dr. Linda Henkel, Fairfield University

Reminiscence and life story approaches are widely viewed as valuable interventions in long-term care, yet randomized controlled trials have not demonstrated strong or consistent effects on mood or well-being. Reminiscence may influence well-being through multiple pathways, including its frequency, functions, and social structure. This study examined whether these dimensions were associated with morale, depressive symptoms, and loneliness among nursing home residents. Forty-one residents completed the TALE, the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS), social interaction items (including group reminiscence), and validated psychological outcomes: the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale (PGCMS), Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), and UCLA Loneliness Scale. Reminiscence frequency showed minimal association with morale ($r = 0.07$, $p = .66$) and only small associations with GDS ($r = -0.11$, $p = .50$) and loneliness ($r = -0.26$, $p = .095$). Total RFS scores were significantly associated with lower morale ($r = -0.33$, $p = .034$) and showed a trend toward higher depressive symptoms ($r = 0.27$, $p = .087$). Notably, specific RFS functions such as bitterness revival were significantly related to poorer well-being, including lower morale ($r = -0.33$, $p = .036$) and higher depression ($r = 0.33$, $p = .036$), with a trend toward higher loneliness ($r = 0.25$, $p = .12$). Peer reminiscence discrepancy emerged as the clearest (though non-significant) potential predictor of well-being. Residents who desired more peer reminiscence than they received showed higher loneliness ($r = -0.255$, $p = .108$) and lower morale ($r = -0.275$, $p = .082$).

Dr. Alison Kris is a Professor of Nursing in the Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies at Fairfield University. She is currently the President of the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice. Her work focuses on the use of reminiscence in nursing homes.

Dr. Linda Henkel is a cognitive psychologist and Professor of Psychology in the Psychological & Brain Sciences Department, Fairfield University. She specializes in research on memory errors and distortions across the lifespan and has published groundbreaking research on how taking and viewing photos shapes people's memories of their experiences.

Paper Presentation Session 1

The Power of Story: Reminiscence, Identity, and Well-Being in Social and Political Contexts

Narrating Individual and Collective Lives: The Sociality of Reminiscence among Older Black Women in Detroit, MI

Dr. Jessica Robbins-Panko, Wayne State University

This paper presents findings from an ongoing multi-sited ethnographic study of varying reminiscence practices among diverse groups of older adults in the Detroit, Michigan metro area. Specifically, this paper presents data from simple group reminiscence sessions and individual follow-up interviews, led by the author, over three months in Fall 2025, with a group of older Black women who are longtime residents of Detroit. Held at a Detroit senior center where all women are members, sessions focused on a range of topics, including homes, education, work, food, clothing, and friendship. Preliminary findings show that the sociality of reminiscence can offer participants new understandings of their own pasts, create new forms of peer relations, and both generate and fulfill desires for intergenerational legacy. This paper situates these findings in the sociocultural and political-economic context of participants' contemporary lives and life histories, thus offering nuanced insights into how the social context of reminiscence can shape the content of what is remembered. This paper also offers methodological reflections on community-based reminiscence as a way to reduce social isolation and loneliness for older adults.

Jessica Robbins-Panko earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology at the University of Michigan. She is currently an Associate Professor at the Institute of Gerontology and the Department of Anthropology, Wayne State University. She has conducted ethnographic research on aging, memory, and kinship in political-economic perspective in Poland and Michigan. Her first book, *Aging Nationally in Contemporary Poland: Memory, Kinship, and Personhood* was published by Rutgers University Press in 2021. Her current research explores the intimate politics of memory in late life, focusing on practices of reminiscence among diverse groups of older adults in metro Detroit.

Paper Presentation Session 2

Digital Storytelling and Reminiscence Technologies in Dementia Care

Implementation and Outcomes of the LifeBio Memory App: An AI-Powered Reminiscence Therapy Intervention to Enhance Person-Centered Care for Older Adults with Dementia

Lisbeth Sanders, CEO, LifeBio.com; Silvia Orsulic Jeras, MA, Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging; Sara Powers, PhD, Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging

Objectives: This study examined outcomes from the LifeBio Memory App, an AI-enabled, voice-capture reminiscence therapy intervention designed to improve person-centered care and reduce depressive symptoms among older adults with dementia.

Methods: LifeBio, Inc. developed the LifeBio Memory App under a Direct-to-Phase II SBIR Grant from the National Institute on Aging. The HIPAA-compliant app allows individuals to verbally narrate personal stories using 200+ structured prompts, with recordings processed into Life Story Books, Snapshots, and Action Plans. One hundred residents (mean age = 85.82, SD = 8.51) with mild-to-moderate dementia and 61 staff members participated. Measures included depressive symptoms (CES-D), cognition (MMSE), resident satisfaction, staff satisfaction, and staff knowledge of residents' life stories and care preferences.

Results: Residents demonstrated a significant reduction in depressive symptoms from baseline ($M = 7.04$, $SD = 5.18$) to follow-up ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 5.06$), $t(106) = 2.08$, $p = .020$. Ninety-two percent recommended the program. MMSE decline over time ($M = 21.06$ to 19.71) was consistent with expected progression. Staff reported high satisfaction ($M = 33.57$, $SD = 5.00$) and significant increases in knowledge of residents' life stories ($t(105) = -10.24$, $p < .001$) and care preferences ($t(106) = -8.91$, $p < .001$).

Discussion/Implications: The LifeBio Memory App reduced depressive symptoms and improved staff knowledge of residents' histories and preferences, supporting its role as a scalable, evidence-informed intervention to strengthen person-centered dementia care.

Lisbeth Sanders is the founder and CEO of LifeBio. Under her direction, LifeBio created and deployed the LifeBio Memory app in health care and senior living settings to voice record people's life stories and to build summaries useful in care. Two National Institute on Aging grants have supported the development of the LifeBio Memory app. LifeBio's goal is for story to fuel care and for care partners to see the whole person beyond medical needs.

Silvia Orsulic-Jeras is a Researcher at Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging. She led the LifeBio Memory app study design, detailed focus group interviews, and the extensive clinical trial in multiple nursing home and assisted living sites. Her expertise is in psychosocial interventions for persons living with dementia and their care partners.

Sara Powers is a Senior Research Scientist at Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging; she analyzed the data and created reporting for the LifeBio Memory clinical trial. She is passionate about improving the quality of life of older adults through innovative research and evaluation initiatives

Paper Presentation Session 2

Digital Storytelling and Reminiscence Technologies in Dementia Care

Discovering New Possibilities for Life Storying with People Living with Dementia: The Use of Narrative Artifacts and Digital Stories

Melanie Lalani, PhDc, University of Toronto

In dominant discourses, those with dementia are reduced to their neurological impairment, which justifies representation of persons living with dementia (PLwD) as incapable of meaningful communication. This tragedy discourse of dementia often results in treating PLwD as though their lives have no meaning. Despite evidence revealing storytelling abilities of those living with dementia, especially when supported relationally and in embodied ways, a pervasive assumption remains that PLwD lose storytelling abilities, and the veracity of what is communicated, dismissed as non-sensical. My mother lived with dementia for over 15 years, during which she challenged these notions through sharing stories from her life right up until her final days. My daughter and I discovered that as dementia progressed, looking at photographs, material objects and strolling outdoors rediscovering natural features together had a profound effect on the elicitation of my mother's memories, her sharing many of these for the first time. We call these observable, often tactile things that stimulate sensory reactions (e.g., jewelry, plants, animals, children's artwork) 'narrative artifacts' because of their profound influence in eliciting stories. As a way of preserving the stories my mother shared with us, we created a 5-minute digital story, which includes many narrative artifacts that stimulated my mother's sharing of stories from her childhood onwards. Presenting the digital story will show how these methods can be used with PLwD to offer possibilities for new understandings of dementia and tools for meaning making in life storying.

Melanie Lalani is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto, Dalla Lana School of Public Health. Her research focus is developing new understandings of experiences of people living with dementia in long-term care and relationships with children through their stories.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Exploring Digital Technologies for Reminiscence, Life Storying, and Well-being

Technology Options for Reminiscence

Dr. Thomas Pierce and Hannah Benz, Radford University

Current digital technologies offer a wide variety of options for engaging participants in reminiscence, preserving the contents of these sessions, and making recorded life stories available to future listeners. This presentation provides an overview of software applications offering a wide range of functions and features across a variety of platforms. These tools include applications for recording and editing audio and video files, the creation of multimedia presentations of reminiscences, and software to prompt reminiscences and record them. Coverage is also provided on the use of AI chatbots such as ChatGPT to organize and record reminiscence sessions conducted orally or in writing. The presentation features products that are free and easy to use.

Thomas W. Pierce is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Radford University and serves as the Editor of the *International Journal of Reminiscence and Life Review*. He has a B.A. in Psychology from McGill University and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Maine. He was a Post-doctoral Fellow in the Center for the Study of Aging at Duke University Medical Center.

Hanna Benz earned her M.A in Experimental Psychology at Radford University. She has undergraduate degrees in psychology from Radford University and early childhood education from Louise-Otto-Peters Schule in Wiesloch, Germany. She is a faculty member in the Psychology Department at Radford University.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Exploring Digital Technologies for Reminiscence, Life Storying, and Well-being

Using AI to Create Personal Memory Scripts about Health Information

Emily Bristol, Maris Susas, & Dr. Nicole Albada, University of California, Santa Barbara

The lack of diverse communication techniques between practitioner and patient may be a contributing factor to low levels of health literacy in the U.S.. Low levels of health literacy are associated with decreased trust in health institutions and decreased levels of compliance regarding public health recommendations. Narrative health messages (personal stories that aim to promote health-related behaviors) are an increasingly used approach to convey health-related information. Prior literature has shown that one's own memory from their personal past (their autobiographical memories) have social, learning, and behavioral uses in everyday life. We wanted to explore whether these uses are also present when receiving health-related information. To do this, we needed to create a realistic video of a person telling their story about a health-related topic that participants could watch (in comparison to a factually similar video with no story). To make the video as relevant as possible to the sample (university females), the HPV vaccine was the health topic and the storyteller was a 20-something year old female university student. The video was created by pulling facts from a pre-existing scale on HPV vaccine knowledge. ChatGPT was then used to create a realistic autobiographical story script: providing it with facts about HPV, the general storyline we wanted to have, and using literature on narrative medicine and best practices about learning via recorded content. This paper will showcase the final product and talk about how we can leverage generative AI to create realistic personal stories to be used in future research.

Emily Bristol and Maris Susas are Research Assistants at the UC Santa Barbara's TALE Lab, currently conducting a thesis project under the supervision of **Dr. Nicole Alea Albada**, an Associate Teaching Professor within UC Santa Barbara's Psychological & Brain Sciences Department.

The TALE (Thinking About Life Experiences) Lab investigates why humans remember their personal past and the implications of sharing memories with others in varying contexts. Emily and Maris are conducting research to investigate the implications within a healthcare context such as the effect of narrative health messages containing autobiographical memories.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Exploring Digital Technologies for Reminiscence, Life Storying, and Well-being

Human-Centered, Multilingual AI for Older Adults Without Digital Literacy: Telephone-Based Life Storytelling and Mental Well-Being in Underserved Communities

Cameron Graham, CEO, Dr. Yuxuan Yang, Taylor Vander Well, Storii,
Inc & Dr. Juliette Shellman, University of Connecticut

Reminiscence is a powerful tool for promoting mental well-being and social connection in later life. However, many digital life story tools remain inaccessible to older adults who lack internet access or digital literacy—barriers that disproportionately affect rural and underserved populations. This presentation introduces Storii, a telephone-based life story platform that uses human-centered artificial intelligence behind the scenes to transform spoken memories into structured, accessible narratives. Older adults do not interact directly with technology or AI; instead, they simply respond to automated or call-in phone prompts using landline or mobile phones. AI transcribes recordings, generates readable life story summaries and biographies, identifies recurring themes and life events and produce audiobooks and printable transcripts for families and caregivers. In this model, AI operates entirely in the background to amplify human voice rather than replace it, preserving the authenticity of lived experience while reducing documentation burden. Storii's multilingual and global capabilities further advance narrative equity. Automated calls can be conducted in American, British, and Australian English, Spanish, French, Japanese, and Italian, with flexibility for storytellers to respond in any language of their choosing. This approach supports culturally authentic storytelling for linguistically diverse populations, with planned expansion to additional languages. The presentation will also introduce a proposed NIH-funded study focused on enhancing Storii for rural older adults and their informal caregivers. Building on prior randomized trial evidence demonstrating improvements in psychological well-being, the study aims to expand accessibility, reduce loneliness, and strengthen social connectedness through scalable, AI-enhanced telephone reminiscence.

Cameron Graham is Founder and CEO of Storii; he has spent over 10 years at the intersection of senior care and technology. He leads the development of Storii's unique telephone-based platform, which provides vital reminiscence support and social connection to older adults, regardless of their digital literacy or internet access.

Yuxuan Yang is the Clinical Research Scientist at Storii, leading the NIH-supported evaluation of the Storii platform. With a background in nursing and clinical research, she oversees study design, recruitment, regulatory compliance, and cross-institutional collaboration. Her work centers on rigorously assessing the effectiveness of Storii's product in improving mental health outcomes and reducing social isolation among older adults.

Taylor Vander Well, has spent the past six years supporting the growth and operational success of Storii. She has played a key role in advancing technology solutions that promote person-centered care. Her background in cultural management and social engagement further strengthens Storii's mission to enhance connection and well-being among aging populations.

Juliette Shellman, PhD, RN, FGSA, is an Associate Professor at the UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing serves as Director of the International Center of Life Story Innovations and Practice. For more than 20 years, her research has explored life story work through a cultural lens, emphasizing the use of narrative approaches to improve the mental health and overall well-being of older adults.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Exploring Digital Technologies for Reminiscence, Life Storying, and Well-being

No Story Left Behind: Enhancing Well-being and Relationships through Digital Storytelling

Melody Williamson, Grace Holliman & Glenn
Holliman, Melody Williamson Stories

This "Paper" is in the form of an interactive screening of two Digital Stories that highlight how Digital Storytelling can increase individual wellbeing and strengthen connection with others. Digital Storytelling (DST) encourages deep reflection, re-framing of one's experiences and creative expression, helping individuals discover, tell, craft, and share meaningful moments in their lives. By focusing on both the process and the final product, DST allows not only individual reframing of experiences but also promotes connection with others through both a co-creation process and a facilitated sharing of these stories. We found this process appeared to enhance wellbeing while fostering a sense of inclusion, validation, and strengthened the family relationship between father and daughter. We would like to share two 4-minute Digital Stories:

- 1) The first story is told from the perspective of Grace Holliman, a daughter who finds it difficult to understand her 79-year-old father's attachment to his collection of photos and historical documents. However, as she spends time with him, she comes to understand his need to share his story with both present and future generations.
 - 2) A story that Grace subsequently develops with her father, Glenn Holliman, illustrates the evolution of his perspective on his Vietnam War experience through a collaborative process that included in-depth discussions with the facilitator.
- Each story will be shared, followed by a brief, facilitated discussion.

Melody Williamson, BA, MSc., and Common Language Level 3 Digital Storytelling Facilitator, has spent most of her life in the world of storytelling and interpersonal connection - from sharing the stories of her extended family, to a career in professional theatre, to consulting to organizations embracing diversity, to helping voices that aren't typically heard find, tell, and share their stories. She has worked with groups of all ages, varying abilities, those on a cancer journey, those with medical complexities, parents who have lost children to SIDS, medical researchers, and those helping others to cope with life's challenges and celebrate what matters deeply. Co-creating with others feeds her soul and she loves her work!

Grace Holliman is a professional writer, Guided Autobiography (GAB) Instructor, and Common Language Level I Digital Storytelling Facilitator. She is currently pursuing a second master's degree at Virginia Commonwealth University in gerontology. In the fall of 2025, Grace led a GAB course for individuals living with dementia and their care partners. She enjoys listening to people's life stories and understanding what matters to them.

Glenn N. Holliman spent 1969 in South Vietnam with the 1st Infantry Division. As a chaplain's assistant, he was exposed to many aspects of the war, including ministering to troops in the field, coming under fire on numerous occasions, visiting orphans, and typing condolence letters to the families of soldiers killed in battle. After the war, Glenn earned his master's degree in history, taught for many years, directed a capital campaign firm, and retired as vice president of the Episcopal Church Foundation. He currently serves on the boards of local, state, and national historical preservation societies.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Legacy, Life Stories, and Wellbeing: Innovative Approaches to Narrative-Based Care

The L.E.G.A.C.Y.[®] Appreciative Life Review Model: A Novel Construct for Life Review

Dr. Nicole Onori, The College of Saint Scholastica

The L.E.G.A.C.Y.[®] Appreciative Life Review Model is the first values-centered, strengths-based, and meaning-focused approach to life review designed for use across the lifespan. The model synthesizes theories and concepts from lifespan development, the traditional life review, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), narrative therapies, and occupational therapy. L.E.G.A.C.Y.[®] is also the first life review model to incorporate AI as well as a retrospective-prospective framework and experiential elements into the life review process. Experiential learning bridges narrative approaches with “doing” to support lasting change in meaningful and relevant life contexts. The appreciative life review is defined as “an intentional process that facilitates remembering positive and negative experiences, in context, to create appreciative and meaning-focused narratives that facilitate healing, well-being, and adaptive responses” (Onori Hansen, 2017, slide 42). An appreciative approach to life review is vital for facilitating identity development, healthy adaptive responses, purpose and meaning in life, and the development of positive psychosocial resources, such as positive reframing, meaning-making, forgiveness, acceptance, and resilience. Moreover, developing purpose and meaning in life is an essential foundation for mental health and well-being. The name, L.E.G.A.C.Y.[®], is a trademarked acronym for Life, Experiences, Gifts, Aspirations, Contributions, Younger Generations, which are the six core content areas of the appreciative life review. L.E.G.A.C.Y.[®] is a semi-structured process that may be conducted in one-to-one sessions with individuals and small or large groups. Each core content area has four fundamental elements that have been strategically designed and developed to facilitate and guide the appreciative life review process.

Dr. Nicole Onori is an Assistant Professor and Doctoral Capstone Coordinator in the Occupational Therapy Department at The College of St. Scholastica and Fellow at The Patient Revolution. Her primary areas of interest include meaning-making, the influence of meaningful living on well-being, life review, narrative therapeutic approaches, therapeutic use of self, and interprofessional communication and collaboration. She also has expertise in curriculum design, course development, and accreditation.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Legacy, Life Stories, and Wellbeing: Innovative Approaches to Narrative-Based Care

Mo'olelo: Culturally Adapting Life-Story Sharing for Native Hawaiian Older Adults (Kūpuna)

Native Hawaiian (NH) older adults play a significant role within family structures, community well-being, and the cultural fabric. Sharing their memories is essential for a thriving NH culture and family. Despite this recognition, older NHs (kūpuna) face mental health challenges, including severe depression nearly twice as high as other ethnic groups, and NHs have been found to have higher trauma exposure and prevalence rates of PTSD. Unresolved trauma memories may impede successful aging. Because life-review (LR) encourages personal reminiscing and has been found to contribute to “successful aging,” our project sought to understand how to culturally adapt an existing LR intervention or develop a new NH version with different types of questions. We collaborated with community-based senior centers programs to host focus groups with NH kūpuna community members to explore the feasibility and acceptability of LR within the NH paradigm. This resulted in 6 different focus groups that met within one year in two different locations on the island of Oahu (Hawai'i) to learn from NH kūpuna what values, beliefs, and practices can be applied towards developing a NH version of LR. During the interviews, most of the 9 kūpuna participants shared their personal stories and from the transcripts, we identified codes and themes that were consistent with findings from other NH studies. The themes and feedback resulted in totally new LR questions grounded in NH values: not chronologically listed, relationally based, prompts about connection to land/ocean, sharing about the origin of their names - all delivered as a color-coded deck of cards.

Dr. Lori Daniels is a Professor of Social Work at Hawai'i Pacific. She earned her MSW from the University of Chicago (1987) and her Ph.D. in Social Welfare from the University of Hawai'i - Mānoa (2002). Her clinical practice treating traumatic stress among veterans spans over 20 years. Her team includes **Philip McCallion, Ph.D., Temple University, Dolly Tatofi, LCSW, Patricia Watson, Ph.D., Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth & Isaiah Gundermann-Graham, MSW.**

Paper Presentation Session 3

Legacy, Life Stories, and Wellbeing: Innovative Approaches to Narrative-Based Care

Life Review as a Wellness Practice in Later Life

Kathryn Skrabo, MSW

The presentation will explore how structured life review can move beyond reflection and into a distinct late life developmental phase oriented toward generativity and meaning transmission. Life review is often framed as a therapeutic intervention for older adults in clinical contexts. This paper proposes a broader, more empowering lens: life review as a proactive wellness practice - form of self-care and social medicine that fosters emotional resilience, identity coherence, and intergenerational connection. In later life, structured reflection offers more than closure; it affirms meaning, nurtures legacy, and strengthens psychological well-being. Storytelling becomes a tool for integration, helping older adults reframe past experiences, cultivate gratitude, and deepen relationships. When shared in community, these narratives foster inclusion, belonging, and collective healing. Emerging models—such as life story groups, spiral-journey circles, and life mapping—demonstrate how narrative practices can support emotional wellness, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. Reframing life review as self-care activity positions elders not as passive recipients of care, but as active agents of wisdom, connection, and cultural transmission. Digital platforms expand the reach of these practices, enabling virtual storytelling circles and activities. Integrating life story work into community wellness initiatives offers a scalable, low-cost, and deeply human approach to aging well—one that honors the past while building bridges toward a more connected future.

Kathryn Skrabo, MSW is an educator and guide in the narrative dimensions of aging, meaning, and life integration. With decades of experience in human development and lifelong learning, hospice volunteering, and reflective life-story work, she brings both personal insight and grounded depth to the question of how we make sense of our lives.

Paper Presentation Session 3

Legacy, Life Stories, and Wellbeing: Innovative Approaches to Narrative-Based Care

Leaning into Legacy: Exploring the Experience of Creating and Sharing a Legacy of Values

Dr. Sarah Neller, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Creating a legacy of values is a way for individuals to reflect on their own life and communicate what's most important to others about themselves and also about the recipient. This presentation will report on the development and pilot testing of a legacy of values guidebook used to help community-based older adults create their legacy of values. Participants (n=18) completed two focus groups. In the first focus group, participants completed a Legacy of Values Exploration Session—an informal and interactive portion of the focus group where they were introduced to the guidebook and explored legacy broadly. Afterward, participants had two weeks to draft their legacy of values in any format. During the second focus group, participants reflected on their experience of creating a legacy of values and then had the opportunity to share their legacies with the group followed by a group reflection on the experience of sharing personal legacies and hearing others' stories. A thematic analysis was conducted using the focus group transcripts. Three major themes were identified: Legacy is built through consistency in everyday actions—not a single moment; Creating a legacy of values is a prompt for intentional living; Sharing legacies inspired mutual affirmation and deeper reflection. For participants, creating a legacy of values prompted them to take structured action to communicate what matters most. Participants reported the guidebook was clearly written, promoted reflection, and provided a useful outline to get started. Future research will explore the impact of sharing legacy of values with the intended recipients.

Sarah Neller, PhD, APRN, AGPCNP-BC is an Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Tennessee. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Nursing and Gerontology Certificate from the University of Utah. Dr. Neller's work explores the cultivation of generativity and the concept of leaving a legacy of values to enhance social and communal engagement for older adults, ultimately helping them find purpose and remain actively involved in their communities as they age.

Paper Presentation

Life Story Practice, Education, and Research Collaborative: Program Needs and Development

Dr. Millicent Malcolm and Dr. Juliette Shellman

Life stories play a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of older individuals, families, and communities. The UConn International Center for Life Story Innovation and Practice focuses on engaging faculty, researchers, students, and practitioners to advance the field and promote health and well-being. The Life Story Collaborative is a virtual forum for interested parties across the globe to network, collaborate, and disseminate best practice among life story practitioners and those with interest in the field. A needs assessment was conducted among global participants at our inaugural meeting to identify learning needs, interests, desires from participation, program suggestions, presentation opportunities, and meeting time preferences. There were 15 participants from across the United States, the Netherlands, and Japan representing 5 time zones. Ten of the fifteen participants completed the needs assessment. The group consisted of academic researchers and educators, clinicians, ethnographers, a film maker, and product and service innovators. Participants shared interests in professional development for life story approaches to enhance health outcomes throughout the life span including end-of-life, learning to best work with culturally diverse and underrepresented groups, networking and resource sharing, disseminating their work to advance and draw attention to the field. Suggestions for program development included specific guest speakers and topics such as the use of artificial intelligence, brain research, practice methods, and funding mechanisms. Several positive comments were shared about the inaugural meeting and future directions for this group. The results indicate there is a wide variety of interests around the field of life story work, but few opportunities for formal engagement and collaboration. We have taken the first step to fill this gap with a needs assessment that will guide the development and implementation of The Life Story Collaborative.

Millicent Malcolm DNP, GNP-BC, AGPCNP-BC, APRN, FAANP is an Associate Clinical Professor at the UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing. She has provided advanced practice nursing care for frail older adults in their homes, assisted living facilities, and skilled nursing facilities as a Gerontological Nurse Practitioner within a primary care practice. Dr. Malcolm is the facilitator of the Life Story Collaborative.

Juliette Shellman, PhD, RN, FGSA, is an Associate Professor at the UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing and serves as Director of the International Center of Life Story Innovations and Practice. For more than 20 years, her research has explored life story work through a cultural lens, emphasizing the use of narrative approaches to improve the mental health and overall well-being of older adults.

The Use of Virtual Reality-Reminiscence Interventions in Older Adults Living with Dementia or Cognitive Impairment: An Integrative Review

Marah AlSmadi, PhD student, University of Wisconsin, Dr. Abdallah F. Abu Khait, Hashemite University, Jordan & Dr. Juliette Shellman, University of Connecticut

This presentation summarizes an integrative review of Virtual Reality-Reminiscence Interventions (VR-RI) for older adults living with dementia or cognitive impairment. With the rising prevalence of dementia, VR-RI has emerged as a promising non-pharmacological approach to support emotional well-being and enhance engagement. Using Whittemore and Knaf's (2005) integrative review framework, eleven studies were analyzed to evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, and therapeutic value of VR-RI. Findings show that most older adults actively engaged with VR content, demonstrating comfort, interest, and positive emotional responses. The review also identified limitations in current evidence, including small sample sizes, variations in intervention design, and limited attention to factors such as dementia type, individualized VR content, and cultural relevance. This presentation will highlight key findings, methodological gaps, and recommendations for future research, emphasizing the need for larger, high-quality studies to further assess the impact of VR-RI on cognitive, emotional, and functional outcomes in older adults with dementia.

Marah AlSmadi is currently a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin. She earned a master's degree in psychiatric nursing from Hashemite University, Jordan.

Abdallah Abu Khait earned his PhD from the University of Connecticut School of Nursing in 2020. He is currently an associate professor at the Hashemite University, SON, in Jordan. His research interests focus on developing a national reminiscence program for people living with mental illnesses in Jordan.

Juliette Shellman, PhD, RN, FGSA, is an Associate Professor at the UConn Elisabeth DeLuca School of Nursing and serves as Director of the International Center of Life Story Innovations and Practice. For more than 20 years, her research has explored life story work through a cultural lens, emphasizing the use of narrative approaches to enhance the mental health and overall well-being of older adults.

Upcoming Events and Resources

Life Story Collaborative Virtual Meeting May 6th, 1:00 - 2:30 PM EST

Meeting Link:

**[https://uconn-cmr.webex.com/uconn-cmr/j.php?
MTID=mdaaf69f451778bf0065d69ba8af8d80f](https://uconn-cmr.webex.com/uconn-cmr/j.php?MTID=mdaaf69f451778bf0065d69ba8af8d80f)**

**Contact juliette.shellman@uconn.edu to join our
SharePoint site to receive updates, meeting
recordings and more!**

International Journal for Life Review and Reminiscence

<https://journals.radford.edu/index.php/ijrlr>

**Contact: Tom Pierce, Editor, with questions
regarding article submissions.
tpierce@RADFORD.EDU**

ICLIP Website

<https://iclip.nursing.uconn.edu/>

ICLIP Training Program

**Educational opportunities are available to help you
develop the skills needed to facilitate safe and
effective reminiscence and life review sessions.**

**If interested, contact Juliette Shellman
juliette.shellman@uconn.edu**

Thank You

Dear conference participants,

As director of the International Center for Life Story Innovations and Practice, I thank you for attending our third virtual international conference at the University of Connecticut.

Our conference continues the legacy of the National Reminiscence and Life Review Society, fostering collaboration, innovation, and knowledge exchange in our field. I want to express my gratitude to our presenters, moderators, participants, and everyone who contributed to making this event possible.

Thank you for being here today. Whether you're a longstanding member or new to our community, your participation is invaluable. I hope you found the conference inspiring and rewarding.

Sincerely,

Juliette Shellman, PhD, RN, FGSA
Director, International Center for Life Story Innovations
and Practice

