

Seniors share life stories with friends and families

Fridays at the Costa Mesa Senior Center are a lively and busy time with volunteers, staff and patrons going about their daily activities.

This particular Friday, Oct. 16 is no different. In addition to the usual ballroom, card playing and fitness classes, there is, however, a special presentation taking place in the Grand Hall 2 room; a Guided Autobiography: Family and Friends Storytelling event.

Hosted by the Costa Mesa Senior Center and Volunteer Action for Aging, an organization centered on engaging seniors through volunteerism, this was the grand finale of a month-long adventure of reflection, writing, remembrance and most of all storytelling.

Costa Mesa Senior Center was given the opportunity to participate in this rare occasion. The Guided Autobiography is described as “a semi-structured process for life review that incorporates individual and group experiences with autobiographical writing.”

Participants attended a two-hour class every week for a month. Through guided instruction, in-class exercises and homework, the participants created their own stories; their autobiographies. The process was simple: show up, write and share, but the outcome was so much more. A written legacy for families, written stories from the heart and a month-long class that influenced, enriched and helped a population to remember, to share with others and for many, to share publicly.

During the grand finale, a Guided Autobiography: Family and Friends Storytelling event, one-by-one people like Patty,

Marilyn, Rueha, Rochelle, and mother and daughter duo Mary and Barbara told their story. There were stories of life, death, family, marriage, adoption and triumph.

Every story was different and every story was compelling. More importantly, everyone had a story.

Remembering the olive colored skin tone and dark black hair of her mother, "I remember the day mother dyed a bleach streak in her dark hair," Patty mentions. She begins to get teary eyed as she remembers the way this made her feel.

And as one presenter stated, "Everyone has a story to tell, here is mine."