

Capturing the Memories

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“They seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say, even though I can talk the hind legs off a donkey!”



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Abstract:
Capturing The Memories

First year students from University Centre Hastings captured the wartime memories of pensioners from the local Women's Royal Voluntary Service as part of an interviewing practical for their Broadcast Media course between November 2008 and January 2009. With the pensioners used to telling their stories and the students new to both interviewing and the technical apparatus, the balance was tipped in the favour of the elderly. But as their stories unravelled, revealing the full horror of what these pensioners had experienced as children during the war, the students began to engage more in the subject matter and less in their own discomfort.

While most students observed in their reflective essays that they were passive interviewers in the face of such a wealth of memories, the over-riding experience that both interviewer and interviewee took away was the mutual respect and reassessment of intergenerational communication. Stereotyped judgements were replaced by the universal language of humanity, proving the power of storytelling across the ages.

Some of the students' work will be posted on the WRVS' Heritage Plus website and its oral history project to which the students' work will contribute, will be stored at the British Library.

Gilly Smith, lecturer in Writing for Media at UCH, who organised the assignment, introduces some of the students and pensioners to discuss how their perceptions were changed by the experience and how both interviewer and interviewee benefited. She suggests that media students can use the interviewing process to raise their own confidence while providing a valuable therapy for their interviewees and contributing to the vital work of capturing oral history.

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