

Appendix 4

"I Want To Tell You About My Mother "

A Guide to Providing Helpful Information to Nursing Home Staff
Developed by Carter Catlett Williams, MSW, ACSW, Consultant

When a person enters a nursing home an important and valuable part of the experience is to talk to staff about herself and what life has been like. However, many individuals may have to rely on their families to give such information for them.

All of us have the stories of our relatives' lives inside us. These stories are so much a part of us and our own lives that we hardly know where to begin. We aren't used to stepping back a little to see our parents' lives in their wholeness. We're more used to exchanging much-loved anecdotes about mother, father, aunt, or uncle, in family gatherings.

To introduce your relative to nursing home staff, helping them know who this person is, is one of the most important things you can do! It will rescue your relative from the limbo of being in strange surroundings where *"nobody knows who I am."* It'll make all the difference in staff understanding your relative's actions and responses because they will know some of the thoughts, feelings, habits and life experiences that lie behind those actions and responses.

But where to start and what to include? There are the easy-to-recite concrete facts that the social worker, or other staff, will request at admission time. Then there is your relative's unique life story that you'll want to be sure the staff knows as well. Both are necessary for staff to come to know your relative. In addition, this is the appropriate time to describe to staff what kind of day makes a good day for this particular person.

To illustrate the type of information you'll want to give staff, look at the following outline. It might give you ideas about other details to include. *Assume your mother is being admitted.*

Facts: Tell about your mother's:

Birth date and place

Number of sisters and brothers; where your mother falls in the birth order;
number of sisters and brothers still living

Rural or urban childhood

Your mother's ethnic community

Schooling

Marriage and date of marriage

Children

Employment outside of home before and after marriage

Religious affiliation

Hobbies

Date of divorce or widowhood

Living arrangements during marriage and afterwards

Reason for entering the nursing home.

■ **Story:** A person's story includes hopes, aspirations, and accomplishments, as well as disappointments, losses, and the things that didn't go so well. It includes the person's characteristic ways of handling the ups and downs of life. Here are some suggestions to help you think over your mother's life and tell her story.

What she looked forward to in life: as a child, as a teenager

How much she was able to realize her dreams

If she had a career outside home and family, what the career meant to her How she and her family coped with the Great Depression of the 1930's How World Wars I and II affected her life, as well as the Korean and Vietnam wars

What she wanted for her children

Her relationships with her family

Whether religious faith was important to her and how she expresses that:

prayer, reading scripture, attendance at church, synagogue, or mosque, volunteer activity, helping others in the community

What she had, and now has, the most fun doing: cooking for the family; hosting family gatherings; gardening; singing; reading; fishing; playing bingo; handwork; going to the movies; sports as a player or spectator; enjoying nature; seeing family and old friends

Whether she likes to crack jokes or enjoys other's jokes

How she handled money

Whether she had pets and what they meant to her

What angers her

What pleases her

What saddens her

What comforts her

Whether she generally has an optimistic attitude or tends to see more the dark side of things

Her major satisfactions and disappointments

What she values most in life

What you value most about her

To add further richness to your mother's story, collect photographs in an album for her room and take others to hang on her walls.

What Makes a Good Day for your mother, covering:

Daily schedule

When she likes to get up and go to bed, times of rest and quiet

How she prefers to spend her day

What her mornings and evenings are like at home

Times of her favorite radio and/or TV programs
When and what she likes for snacks
When and how often she likes to go outside
Her usual bowel and bladder patterns
Her patterns with: bathing, eating, and food preferences
The particular things that give her satisfaction and pleasure
Particular foods at certain meals
Careful grooming in the style she prefers
The chance to be alone at least some part of each day
Activities she enjoys: music, movies
Attendance at worship service or other expression of her faith
Where she prefers to place things in her room and at her bedside
How she typically expresses affection and is comfortable receiving
affection: hugs? kisses? touching?

Remember no detail is too small if it's significant to your relative!

■ **For Men:** If your relative is a man, the same type of information as previously listed is equally important. In addition, you need to be sure that activities and the response of staff consider things from a man's perspective. More physical outlets or more traditionally masculine pursuits might need to be offered for your relative.