

Dewey or Don't?

The Lifescapes of Reading and Libraries

Washoe County Library System
Lifescapes Project
Nevada

2006

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Introduction

G. Robert Carlsen, a young adult literature specialist at the University of Iowa, once noted that “every once in a while groups of self-appointed intellectuals get themselves uptight . . . about the status of reading in a culture.” (*The English Journal*, February 1974, 23-27.) And in our electronic age, certainly, the status of books, reading, and libraries has been challenged by film, video, video games, and all the permutations of the worldwide web: Google, Wikipedia, Ask Jeeves, newspapers and books online. But books and reading are no “fragile flower,” Carlsen explained. Reading “is not so delicate that it needs any special protection.” The pieces in this collection support his contention. They were written by leaders of *Lifescapes*, a senior citizen life writing program sponsored by the Washoe County Library System. In an introductory meeting for the leaders of the 2006-07 program, we asked participants to write about books and libraries: early memories of libraries and reading, recollections of pleasant and unpleasant experiences in libraries, comments on specific books and reading experiences generally. The writers responded not only with good stories, but with eloquent writing, a testament to the *Lifescapes* program motto that “Everyone is a writer” and our conviction that writing “from the heart” provides writers with all the words and syntax they need to create literature worth saving and savoring. We hope you, the reader, will enjoy these tales of libraries and reading: *Dewey or Don't?*

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Incline Library.



Downtown Reno Library.

Contents

Words in the World: Memories of Books and Reading

<i>Discovering Sanctuary</i>	Linda Weigel	9
<i>The Old School's New Library</i>	Joe Parks.....	10
<i>The Most Wonderful Library</i>	Esther Early	11
<i>Heaven and Hell</i>	Diane Pickett	12
<i>Grandfather Started It All</i>	Michele Walsh.....	13
<i>The Library and the Side Street:</i>		
<i>An Early Library Experience</i>	Kathy Berndt	14
<i>Memory Trek</i>	Alexis D. Greene	15
<i>The House on Strawberry Drive</i>	Karen Solberg.....	16
<i>The First Book</i>	Grace Fujii.....	17

Life in a Word: Stories from the Library and Beyond

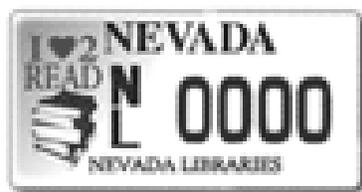
<i>Life Is So Unfair</i>	Lois Smyres	21
<i>The Perfect Book</i>	Pamela Slicker	22
<i>Director to the Roof</i>	Bud Fujii.....	23
<i>You Found It Where?</i>	Judy Soper.....	24
<i>Faint of Heart</i>	Leslie Burke.....	25
<i>A Favorite New Book:</i>		
<i>Take Big Bites</i>	Marilyn Matylinski	26
<i>Turkish Delight</i>	Julie Machado.....	27
<i>Purpleness</i>	Sherl Landers-Thorman.....	28
<i>The Larger View</i>	Phyllis Rogers.....	29
<i>In Golf</i>	Andrew Ivanov	30

Postscript

Lifescapes:

How It Fell Into My Lap

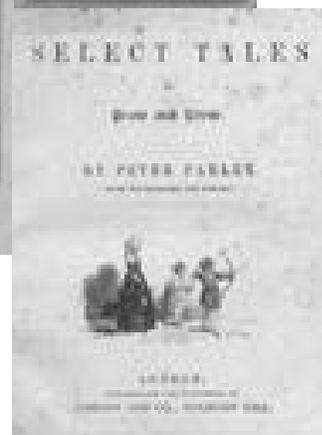
<i>And Everything Fell Into Place</i>	Marc Johnson	31
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**Special Edition Plate
Now Available!**

Words in the World

Memories of Books and Reading



Discovering Sanctuary

Linda Weigel

As a child, I loved to go to the library, but our family's visits weren't frequent. My earliest recollection is about age five. My older brother and sister and I would run up the wide stairs and enter the huge old stone building. Even if I'd been blindfolded, I would have recognized where I was by the library *smell*. Once inside we had to take the narrow marble stairway up to the children's department. The steps were worn into a concave shape, and the banister was darkened from so many hands. I loved that building! Over the years, I spent many hours in that cool, dark place. My mind cannot focus on the details of the books or furnishings. The *building*, was the destination.

Linda Weigel is a part-time gardener from Sparks, Nevada. She works at the North Valleys Library.



North Valleys Library.

An Old School's New Library

Joe Parks

The school is our country's oldest public high school, Boston Latin School. It was a venerable, almost tradition-bound 325-year-old when inspectors from the Boston School Board reported that the school had an inadequate library. Shock ran from the headmaster's office through the administration and faculty to the student body and the alumni. True, the library had been unchanged since 1926, when the school's current building had been completed. Only a few books sat on only a few shelves. The library had morphed into the inner sanctum of Lee J. Dunn, a student advisor for what seemed like a century. By 2001 funding from the school board was overwhelmed and surpassed by contributions from concerned alumni, and a handsome new wing had been erected. It had a dining hall. Thus the cafeteria in the original building—a cafeteria some suspect had been used to depict a prison mess hall in several movies—had been transformed into a handsome library: a learning center with PCs and Macs, meeting rooms, a reference desk, and more. For students it became the school's community center. Boys and girls from South Boston, Dorchester, Roslindale, and the North End who had access at home to only single telephones, now could get online to the world. On their next inspection, the school board gave Boston Latin's new library high marks.

Joe Parks is a retiree, amateur curmudgeon and writer, and a professional leisure hound. He writes and volunteers with the Northwest Library Lifescapes program.



Boston Latin School.

The Most Wonderful Library

Esther Early

I was eight years old and in the third grade when the family moved from our isolated, small ranch in northern Nevada for the birth of my sister. I was awed by the size of the grammar school and what I believed to be a “big city.” What stands out in my mind, however, was the public library. It was built of granite, with stately columns in front. The dignity of the quiet interior made me feel that I was treading on holy ground. I already was an inveterate reader, so the stacks of books seemed like an adventure into another world. To be able to browse and sample books and to select one to take home to read was like the bounty of the universe. Even the walk through the middle of town was like a ritual in accessing the entry to the library and the wonderful world of literature.

Esther Early is a native Nevadan who has lived in many places and always in search of adventure in her life and the lives of others. She directs the Lifescapes program at the ElderCollege program in Reno.



Heaven and Hell

Diane Pickett

My first memory of a library was in Winnemucca, Nevada, my home town. It was located in the bottom of the court house, which is the largest and most stately in Winnemucca. You enter in through the back, or you could walk through the main entrance, crossing the lobby and then going to the back stairwell. I preferred the back entrance—it was quicker access. After a number of steps down, a door opened into a marble-floored hallway. It was summer, and this particular day was hot. The cool air was lovely, and the marble floor even better. I was often barefooted, and when my feet touched the floor, it was heaven.

The room was long and narrow with stacks running parallel to the walls, with the librarian's desk at the north end of the stacks. I perused the stacks, inspecting the shelves I could reach, honing in on my broad interests of science, mythology, and the classics. After making my selections, I placed them on Mrs. Miller's desk and waited for her to remove the cards, write my name on them, and let me retreat to one of the wood tables tucked into the corner.

Instead, on this day, she looked over my selections and said, "You may not check these out. They are ar above your level of reading and comprehension. Your section is over there." She pointed to the children's meager shelves, confiscated my picks, and dismissed me.

I didn't argue—you didn't sass adults—but I thought, "How does she know what my level is and what I understand?" I wanted to pluck her pencil out of her bun and do her bodily damage. However, I retreated to my assigned section, looked it over, and found that everything there was what I had already read or had no interest in. I waited till she was back at her desk after shelving my choices, quietly took them, and walked out of the library.

Thus began my life of crime in the library, and in my child's heart, a sure ticket to hell, even though I returned what I took, but took again and again.

Diane Pickett works at the Spanish Springs Library, and it is heaven. She doesn't take books any longer without checking them out—we need those numbers.

Grandfather Started It All

Michele Walsh

I believe in the lifelong relationship with books, and my grandfather started it all. *Call of the Wild*. *Buck*. *Frozen Worlds*. *Friendship and Trust*. He read *Call of the Wild* out loud when I was about six years old. I am sure I know the story, because later I read it to myself at least once and then to him in his aging years with failing eyes. But I remember that story by the sensory memories of sitting on the couch next to him, of holding his hand, of hearing the tone of his voice, and of wiping my tears on his shirt. Now . . . now that I have been given this treasure by him to hold and read to my own daughter, my passion for the life and relationship to a book, a story, an experience come full circle.

Michelle Walsh is a silly and deep person trapped in a body with a passion for chocolate and books. She is Program Director at Promenade on the River.



The Library and the Side Street: An Early Library Experience

Kathy Berndt

The dark brown building with red shutters sits on its own grassy island. It is truly the center of the small village of Elberon, New Jersey. As a nine-year-old girl, I was allowed to ride my bike, maybe two miles away, to the library to choose new books.

A bookmobile served our area and stopped close to home, but I never wanted to wait that long for its return, plus I needed more variety. My brother trailed along and to this day, I remember wishing I could be alone to enjoy the ride and my thoughts of the new books I could find.

Two years ago, I traveled back to New Jersey to see my dying father-in-law. The library still stands—the same—as though time has stood still.

The side street where we sometimes parked to visit the library was still the same . . . The same as the day my Dad parked the car in front of the bike shop to tell me that Mom had terminal cancer. I was eleven years old.

I was changed forever.

Kathy Berndt is a teacher, quilter, and lover of books who works at the South Valleys Library.



South Valleys Library

Memory Trek

Alexis D. Greene

I am seven years old, remembering the long walk to the library as a child, my mother, with my bratty baby sister in the stroller, heading down Church Street, the sound of street cars rattling accompanying us as we walked.

The library was on 24th Street, a hilly walk with an occasional stop to browse shop windows—and oh, the delicious sweet smells from the Star Bakery . . . Finally we made it!

I remember the front of the library with its granite stairs, a run-around courtyard, a rippling flag, and an ornate window above the double entrance door.

Walking into the building I was greeted with the cool freshness of polished stone floors, massive dark tables, vaulted ceilings . . . and silence.

Alexis Greene is in between the worlds and a cosmic questioner. She works at the Circle of Life Hospice in Reno.



The House on Strawberry Drive

Karen Solberg

My favorite childhood home was on Blueberry Drive, named for the large blueberry patch at the end of the cul de sac. I had a very special bedroom that had an attic door connected to the garage, which gave me not only a secret hiding place, but also the ability to slip outdoors at any time of day or night.

This older home on the outskirts of town also had an old outhouse which had not been in use for many years. One day, my brother and I decided—probably more my brother’s idea—to knock the old outhouse down. We climbed on top and began rocking back and forth while hold onto overhanging tree branches. Before long it tipped over and hit the ground with a big crash. Success! However, our parents had other thoughts on the matter and swiftly meted out just punishments.

Karen Solberg is a confused person (soon to be retired), who is still trying to decide what she wants to do when she grows up. For the moment, she works at the Sierra View Library.



Sierra View Library.

The First Book

Grace Fujii

Eighth grade; Central Junior High; 1954.

I walked up the narrow stairs; the door opened into a small room with a ceiling that slanted downward. A Round window was to my right, with dust motes floating around me in the afternoon light.

I stood still for a few minutes, looking around, moved slightly, then turned to a shelf of books behind me, pulled a red book from the shelf.

My first book: *The Red Planet*.

Grace Fujii loves to collect stories and to tell extremely long, detailed stories. She loves her job at the Verdi Library.



Verdi Library.

Intrigued

Jana MacMillan

Intrigued.

As a child, that was me. Intrigued by stories, mysteries, words.

I was a voracious reader, devouring any book set in my path, especially one of my favorite series: Carolyn N. Keene's *Nancy Drew Mysteries*. And that's what set me apart from all the other kids in my neighborhood, forever. Here's how it happened:

I had come across the word "intrigued" in my Nancy Drew books. I *liked* it. I wanted to use it. But how? As I sat in the grass, picking clovers, deep in thought, my neighbor Christine saw me.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Looking at this clover," I said.

"Why?" Oh that fatal question.

"Because I am intrigued by it," Said I.

Silence. And then a loud, distinctive tearing sound as the fabric of my childhood universe was torn. Christine stared at me in total incomprehension. Then began the jeering, the catcalls, the relentless teasing over *my* new word. Suddenly I was set apart from my peers as being both smart *and* stupid for wanting to expand my vocabulary. For reading. It hurt at the time.

And yet, I'm still intrigued by words, stories, books.

Jana MacMillan is a hermit, a recluse, and most importantly, a reader. She works at the Spanish Springs library.



Spanish Springs Library.

Life Lessons:
Stories from the Library
And Beyond





Carlee McElroy, Washoe Libraries Centennial Poster.

The Perfect Book

Pamela Sliker

The dirty green bag hit with a thud on the reference desk.

She yanked it open saying, “I need a book.”

Elbow deep, her arm swirled around inside the bag. Around and around, stirring up the Kleenex and odd envelopes. Out, with a flutter of coupons, came the tightly wadded post-it note. Her gnarled fingers handed it to me.

“Here,” she said.

I unfolded it to read: *The Dementia Code*.

Pamela Slicker is a humanitarian and thrift store addict who works at the Sparks Library.



Sparks Library.

Life Is So Unfair

Lois Smyres

Of course, it's obvious when you think about it: the reason there are angry patrons is that their finances are affected.

When the University of Nevada Library started using a collection agency, the calls started.

"I can't get a loan to buy a house because of Lost Books. You better take care of that."

Suddenly I'm to blame for their having ignored three or four overdue notices, plus a billing statement—none of which were returned because of the wrong address. My suggestion that they return the books or pay for them so I can notify the collection agency was not what they wanted to hear.

Life is soooooo unfair!

Lois is a retired supervisor of the collection department of the University of Nevada Library and the volunteer leader of the Sparks Library Lifescapes program.



"Don't forget to bring it back."

Director to the Roof

Bud Fujii

My department was responsible for all building maintenance in Washoe County, including the Downtown Reno Library. There was a problem on the roof with a substantial leak. The acting director at the time was Martha Gould, a five-foot-tall, no-nonsense, get-it-done woman who wore ankle length skirts and was always impeccably dressed. She insisted on going up to see the problem, even though no other director had ever been up there.

The access to the roof was up a twenty-foot tall, vertical ladder attached to the wall, and through a roof hatch with a twenty-four inch parapet wall. Martha would not be dissuaded from going up there, so one of our technicians went up first, opened the hatch, and waited on the roof. Martha hiked up her skirt between her legs and started up the ladder. I stayed right behind her, looking up at her round bottom, and imploring her to hang on and not fall or we would both be in trouble. She made it to the top and hiked herself over the parapet wall—this was exciting!

Getting back down was another adventure, but she did make it. And that's another story!

Bud Fujii is a retired old fogey/curmudgeon seeking new avenues of adventure. He is also a member of the Library Board.



Downtown Reno Library.

You Found It Where?

Judy Soper

My most memorable job in my library career was that of “Library System Collections Office Assistant.” This was a glorified title for collection agent.

As time went by in the position, I heard every excuse imaginable: “My dog ate it” “I stacked them onto the top of my car and they fell off somewhere on the Jersey Turnpike.”

But my favorite came from our own library trustee.

She came in so remorseful for having apparently lost it.

“I was the only person to check this book out,” she said. “It is so beautiful, the library *must* have it.”

So she bought another copy for us.

Later she came in to say that the book finally surfaced. It was holding up one corner of her son’s water bed.

You found it where?

Judy Soper is a rabid mystery reader locked up in a retired librarian’s body. She returns her books to the North Valleys Library.



*Found on the New
Jersey Turnpike.*

Faint of Heart

Leslie Burke

First day jitters, of course . . . I had them with every job I've ever had. Will they like me? Where's the bathroom? What if I don't know the answer? Of course, any library "first day" is a piece of cake compared to my first day at Stanford Hospital when I was twenty.

I was enrolled in a nursing assistant program that interned at Stanford, and after several months, we were ready for actual patient care on the units. It was with both eagerness and trepidation that I was assigned to West 1A, a medical/surgical floor. My first assignment of the day was to take patients' vital signs: temperature, pulse, blood pressure. I took the chart and decided to start way at the end of the ward in a private room. After introducing myself, I took the woman's blood pressure. It was 210/180. My god, I'd never seen one so high! I felt dizzy, clammy, nauseated.

I sat down, feeling I was going to faint. The patient, concerned now about me instead of herself, pushed the emergency buzzer, then got out of bed and pushed her IV bottle down the hall with her little hospital gown flopping as she walked, calling for help.

A medical student, some nurses, and my supervisor pushed into the room. They put me in a wheelchair and took me to the treatment room, where I promptly passed out.

Since that day, I have often repeated my tale to other nervous first time employees who are sure they will be fired that afternoon. The bumbling bus boy, the confused sales girl on the verge of tears, to them I freely offer up my story. After all, I tell the "newbies," I was subsequently hired on that very unit and worked there for eight years.

Leslie Burke is Programs Librarian at the Northwest Reno Library. She has held a variety of jobs and hasn't fainted anymore, though she has often felt like it.



Northwest Reno Library.

A Favorite New Book:

Take Big Bites

Marilyn Matylinsky

I had a wonderfully exciting opportunity to attend the public librarian association conference in Boston, with over 90,000 other library folk in February 2006. When I read in the schedule that Linda Ellerbee would be the keynote speaker, I wanted to find out more about her, so I checked out her new book: *Take Big Bites*. I read it on the plane to my husband and myself and on our way to Boston.

At the conference, we sat in the first row to see and hear Linda, and I'm so glad we did. She speaks just like she writes—in staccato fashion, full of humor, with engaging, colorful, and thoughtful stories. She's a politically correct world traveler who makes friends everywhere through the food, collecting and publishing the recipes.

Linda was inspiring to us librarians to do great things.

After the lecture, we met and talked with her, and she autographed our book, “To the Downtown Reno Library—Linda Ellerbee.”

Marilyn Matylinsky works in Reference at the Downtown Reno Library.



Elia Pirtle Centennial Poster.

Turkish Delight

Julie Machado

One day a gentleman who had been coming to the library for about a year came up and asked if he could speak to the manager. You never know what this means, but usually it's *not* good. Benjamin—"Been-ha-mean" as he introduced himself—was introduced to Dianne, and she invited him to sit down in her office.

Been-ha-mean wanted to know if he could use one of the meeting rooms on a regular basis. He and his wife were from Turkey, and he wanted to teach Turkish culture to his kids and other Turkish families in the area.

"What did you have in mind?" asked Dianne.

"Well, we wanted to use a white board to talk about history. And have the kids learn the language and reading and writing. We also wanted to bring in snakes."

"Snakes?!" said Dianne. "What kind of snakes?"

"Well Turkish cultural snakes, to show other parts of the culture."

"Would you keep them in the room?" asked Dianne.

"We could share them if you like."

"Well, would they be in cages?" Dianne wondered.

At this, the man looked puzzled and answered slowly, ". . . No."

At that, Dianne asked how they would be used, and Benjamin said, "We would eat them."

This stopped Dianne until she had a moment of inspiration and said, "Oh . . . You mean 'snacks'."

"Oh yes," said Been-ha-mean. "Snacks. Like Turkish Delight."

As a result, we had many Turkish Delights shared with the library every Sunday.

Julie Machado is a bass player whose bar experiences as a musician help her with the true reference questions and interesting patrons at the Northwest Reno Library.

Purpleness

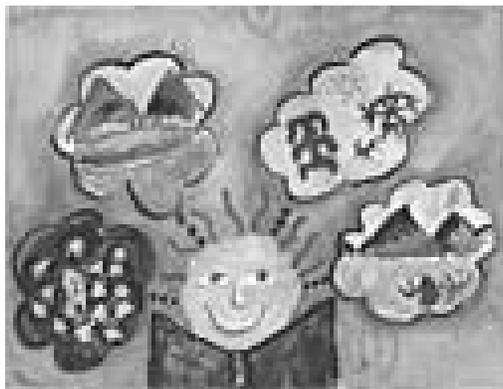
Sherl Landers-Thorman

The second week of my first experience as an elementary school secretary, a very tall, very pale, very thin woman with long stringy hair approached the office with two, very tall, very thin, very pale children with long stringy hair. They were all dressed in clothing that had been dyed various shades of purple. She wanted to enroll the children in school but explained, “It is mandatory to their Karmic well being that certain conditions be met.”

She went on to explain that they could not arrive before 10 am; they must have certain seats she would select in their classroom. They were a 2nd and 4th grader, and they must be in the same classroom. They could eat lunch only at the time she designated, which changed according to astrological charts. And all the books they used she would cover with purple cloth or paper.

The children were brought to school only the four days remaining in the week. I never saw them again.

Sherl Landers-Thorman is a library maven who hangs out in the Lifescapes “hood” at Sierra View, South Valleys, and North Reno.



Madison Wabom Centennial Poster.

The Larger View

Phyllis Rogers

Austin lived with me for one year. Austin is the son of my son. He came to live with me during the year his daddy lived in Iraq. Austin came to my house with his mom and his baby brother. As we eased the little family into our home, I found Austin and his mom crying differently with the temporary loss of Sam. And with the fear. Austin's mom spent her daytime hours on the couch in front of the TV, holding the baby. Clinging to the baby, she wanted Austin with her on the couch. If he couldn't stay quiet on the couch, she wanted him to sit in front of the television she had put in his bedroom.

I saw my job to be giving Austin his childhood back without undermining his mother's authority. We did this outside. In the winter, we went sliding in the driveway. In the summer, we hiked. Austin ran ahead on the trails, chattering, never going out of voice range. When he tired, I loaded him in the backpack where he spotted birds and snatched at low lying branches.

We walked a fire road one afternoon toward the summit of the Mt. Rose ski area. We wanted to watch the big equipment working on the ski lifts at the summit. The trail was much to step for Austin, and beyond the tree line it was too barren to offer him any visual entertainment. He amused himself by standing on the backpack frame, throwing his body from left to right. He was bored. I was annoyed. In desperation I turned around to show him the views. Reno lay below us, as did Carson Valley, all ringed by mountain ridge after ridge that folded finally into purple.

Austin reached forward to rumple my hair. "Granny, can we see Baghdad from here?"

I knew that he could point to Iraq on the globe in our living room.

"Baghdad is on the other side of the world—too far for us to see."

He was insistent. "Granny, can my daddy see me up here?"

"I think he can, Austin." I defied the laws of geography and listened to my heart.

If Austin remembers that afternoon at all, he remembers the earth moving equipment that rumbled across the summit of the mountain. I remember the afternoon that we grieved together for a few moments and walked away feeling happier.

Phyllis Rogers is a reader, writer, hiker, and grandmother to four boys. She works at the Incline Village Library.

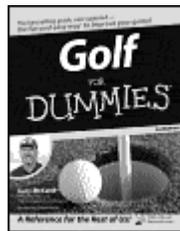
In Golf

Andrew Ivanov

In golf, you need to play your game
And not the better player's game.
Remember you're playing some tight links
Not that better player nor what he thinks.
So don't be macho, play within yourself and hit 'em clean.

Take a less lofted club and reach the green.
 Avoid complaints blaming your club's avarice.
 Golf is a game of constant recoveries.
Try to be in a good mood; don't be terse,
Even if your game today couldn't be worse.
Chasing an elusive perfect play is like chasing the perfect swing.
Golf is a game of finesse, rhythm, and a flowing thing
As long as you give your best shot, you did your thing.

Andrew is a golf starter at Brookfield Golf Course and a Lifescapes participant and invaluable volunteer at the Northwest Reno Library.



Postscript

Lifescapes: How It Fell Into My Lap And Everything Fell Into Placate

Marc Johnson

After a number of years in college as an English Lit major, I left school with only five classes left. I had no direction and went off to find a meaning for my life.

After my grandfather spent two years in an assisted living facility and passed on, I was left feeling that I had done all I knew how to do for him but should have done more. While we had held meaningful conversations about life, all I had left were my interpretations.

When I went back to school to finish my degree, my regular advisor wasn't available, and my temporary advisor was Dr. Monica Grecu, one of the founders of Lifescapes. She was a little sad and frustrated at the difficulties the Lifescapes program was having. I told her about my grandfather and offered my services as an intern, because it would fulfill my desire to enhance the lives of the seniors around me.

As the Lifescapes group developed, I realized that preserving a personal history is essential, and I was inspired to interview my mother on video. I was fortunate to have used the lessons learned in Lifescapes to capture my mother's personal history, because a few months after we started, she was diagnosed with end-stage cancer.

The importance of what we had done hit me like a tidal wave and inspired me to work with my father. Throughout their process of coming to the end of their journeys, we enjoyed celebrating their personal histories. Now that they are gone, I often reminisce by enjoying their stories and feeling close to them again.

I thank the Northwest Library and the UNR English Department.

Marc Johnson is a personal historian who started Access Generations to help people preserve and celebrate their personal history. He has been an inseparable part of Lifescapes since its inception.

