

The Power of Life Review

Life is a journey, not a destination. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many years ago, I spent two years working with older adults isolated in the hills and hollers of Appalachia. It was part of a program, like the Peace Corps or Vista, where people were invited to make a short term commitment to hopefully improve the lives of people in need. So, I was one of a long line of volunteers serving in this capacity.

At the conclusion of my term, I spent a couple of weeks visiting and saying good-bye to the people whom I had come to know quite well. When I began to explain that this would be my last visit, one particular woman paused for a moment. Then, she told me that she had met and become acquainted with several volunteers over the years, and that it was always so hard to see them go away. At one point, she began to wonder if it would have been better if they had never come in the first place. But, then she concluded that if I had not come, she would never have had the chance to know me, and she was grateful for that.

I learned an important lesson that day. People and opportunities come in and out of our lives throughout the lifespan, often for very short periods of time. We can either choose to resent the fact that they are gone, or we can savor the blessing that we experienced when they were with us.

In the early 1960's, Robert Butler found that as older people approach the later years, they spend more time reminiscing about their past. He used the term "Life Review" to describe this process in which people recall past experiences, evaluate and analyze those events, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of themselves. Butler believed that life review was a natural process and a developmental task for the third age of life.

Life review is deeply rooted in Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of human development, which suggests that during the final stages of life, older people strive for ego integrity, so as not to fall into despair. Life review is a process for exploring our lives and finding wholeness. Life review helps us to:

- Expand our consciousness by looking at the meaning in events
- Repair our relationships by re-examining past hurts, guilt and regrets
- Discover the gifts of a long life by finding purpose in service to others
- Create a legacy by sharing our life lessons
- Accept our current condition by viewing life in a greater context
- Embrace our mortality by helping us achieve integrity and self-esteem

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For 50 years, Laureate Group, a local, family owned business has been helping older adults and their families manage the challenges of aging. Laureate Group operates eight senior communities throughout the Greater Milwaukee area. Additional resources can be found at:

www.laureategroup.com/blog • www.laureategroup.com • Laureate Cares: 262-832-7113

Make Your Difference: www.laureategroup.com/careers

There are many ways to engage in life review. You may find yourself simply reflecting on different things that happened to you over your lifetime. You may feel compelled to share your stories with a younger person or other listening ear. Some people keep a journal or actually publish memoirs. With today's technology, it has become easier to create an audio or video recording and perhaps include

photographs and mementos.

Socrates is credited with saying: "The unexamined life is not a life worth living." In whatever way you choose to review your life, I encourage you to do so. You will achieve a greater sense of well-being, and will contribute to the growth of the coming generations.

*This article is a reprint of a blog posted by
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