



## GREY MATTERS

### A Guide to Collaborative Research with Seniors

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# 6

## Narrative Research

In Chapter 6 you will learn how to conduct in-depth interviews with other seniors, using a narrative technique that was designed especially for you. We spend more time in this chapter talking about truth and meaning than we did in earlier chapters. This is because personal stories capture a personal truth that may be at odds with historical truth.

This chapter looks at the occasions when you might use narrative methods in research. It also covers some of the principles that guide the use of narrative as research; techniques for collecting and analyzing data, samples of narratives, and evaluation of the methodology as a tool for seniors.

The method is a combination of peer interviewing and a storied research model developed by Nancy Marlett, one of the principal investigators. Narrative celebrates stories as a way of sharing personal experiences, and in this method, the story itself becomes the unit of data collection and analysis.

In the first resilience research workshops, seniors told stories of resilience in their lives. Most of the focus groups began by sharing stories, for example, the spirituality group began with a question: “Could you share a time when your faith made you resilient?”

While the senior researchers were well-versed in the power of stories, it was a challenge to design a structured process that was also natural and comfortable. We didn’t want to get in the way of the rich exchanges that occur naturally when seniors talk to each other about their lives. We didn’t want to limit interaction with a questionnaire, nor did we want to encourage open conversations that would prove difficult to analyze. The method chosen uses a structured workbook approach introduced in the focus group chapter (Chapter 5). This provides a sequence for data collection, an interview guide, and a series of prompts for eliciting stories about resilience. The entire structured narrative interview guide is included in Appendix 9.

## A. When Do You Do Narrative Research?

Narrative research has become very popular in most of the health and social sciences because it provides a natural way for people to share and explore meaning. Most of what we know is held in stories and we share our ideas and feelings through stories. Stories can be shared and adapted to suit the reason for the telling. There are many current sources on narrative but we are still in the early stages of understanding how to use stories in a research context. Most often the term narrative is used when people are encouraged to recount their experiences and thoughts in their own way and the analysis then reverts to more traditional qualitative techniques of identifying themes and patterns without attention to the story structure itself. The following are some of the more common uses of narratives:

**Personal life stories (autobiographies).** As seniors look back and celebrate their lives, many are moved to write their personal story

as a way to make sense of their lives. Writing the story captures the lessons learned for family and friends to share. Desktop publishing places autobiography within most people's reach.

**Representations of memory.** The use of story is not limited to written stories. Story-boards, scrap books and memory boxes support seniors who are losing their memories. Stories captured in pictures, video, songs, and poems help people hold and celebrate their memories and connections. There is a large body of research about the use of narrative to maintain memory and cognitive functioning.

**Oral history** research, as described in Chapter 3, captures the traditional cultures of a region or specific group. Seniors have a long history as amateur scientists who collect materials and record their stories for museums, historical societies, universities, and archives. This informal research is often called "folk life research." Researchers collect a wide range of artifacts, pictures, and stories about: material cultures (houses, transportation, food, crafts, commerce, the arts, and folk medicine); oral traditions and performance (legends, humour, proverbs, songs, dance, games, and play); and family life, traditions, and customs. The ability to collect and record stories is central to this work, for all collections tell the story of the past.

**Stories as text** can be collected and analyzed as qualitative research. In this work, themes and common ideas are extracted from people's stories. We will see an example of this later in this chapter.

**Stories as structures** – the types of stories people tell, the story-telling methods, stories as examples of the scripts people live by. By looking at the various elements of stories, we have a way to study what precipitated the action of the story, the normal plot or script of the stories being told, and what were the expected outcomes. This approach is also the foundation for the research method developed for seniors.

## B. Stories in Research

Stories are used in research because meaning is created in conversation as stories are told and explored. There is no established truth that we are trying to find, no theory about what is right. For example, we did not have a theory of resilience or a hypothesis to prove. In our research we were trying to find out what people thought about resilience. We expected that knowledge and meaning would evolve and change and that resilience would mean something different for different age groups. The meaning of resilience for older adults is no more “true” than the meaning teens find in resilience, for both are meaningful within the context of the experiences of the story-tellers.

Meaning, in a narrative approach, is contained in stories about events, relationships, emotions, and thoughts. In narrative research, we look for stories to provide information, just as we looked to observations and artifacts in field-work, answers to questions in the interviews, and thoughts around a topic in the focus groups. Each method has a different way to create data.

While narrative research can be very unstructured, with stories loosely embedded within the stream of conversation, we are suggesting a method whereby stories can be elicited and studied as discrete units. Even with this structure, a story is not a clean, direct line from beginning to end. Most stories have a tendency to be messy and rich in detail that may seem irrelevant at the time. These diversions are often important when looking back at your data to find meaning or lessons in the story. However, as stories are recorded, they take on more direction and form.

We can think about the structure of stories as containing:

**The title of the story.** The title captures the essence of the story and creates a shorthand reference to it. You may have time to create a title with the person during the interview, but it is more likely that you will think of a title as you read your notes or listen to the tape. If you

have made arrangements to follow up with the person after you have recorded the stories, you might ask for input about what titles work best for them as well.

**The context of the story** – setting the stage or the backdrop to the story. The context creates a “frame” for the story: where it takes place, what is happening at that time in the community and the world, and who is involved. Others reading the story connect through common contexts.

That was like me even though we come from very different backgrounds, that story speaks to me because I knew poverty from the war too. (SP, 2005)

**The plot or script of the story.** Events fit together in order from the beginning to the end of the story. It may be effective to guide the conversation by asking the question, “*And then what happened?*” to ensure that you have a chronologically sound story.

**The lesson or meaning of the story,** why the person told the story and what they found out in telling it.

**The person’s reaction** to the process of telling the story.

**Your reactions** to hearing the story and the meaning you found for the topic being studied. You were a part of the creation of the story; you were the listener and were active in the creation of meaning. Your insights at the time of the telling are considered to be of particular importance in this method.

## C. Recruiting and Ethical Approval in Narrative

Recruiting participants in narrative research is seldom a problem, but there are some particular ethical issues when it comes to people’s stories. Stories are personal property and hold particular meaning and importance to most people. In most other research one can figure out ways to maintain people’s anonymity, but how do we hide the details

of a person's unique story? There has been a long and vocal history of groups objecting to researchers coming to record their stories. In many situations this has been seen as stealing, using people's stories in ways that the owners of the stories have not sanctioned or understood. While there has not been much concern among seniors' groups yet, it is well to learn from minority groups, indigenous people, people with disabilities and alternate lifestyles. They claim that it is their right to be named in their own stories. Thus, when deciding to use narrative as a means of collecting and presenting research, think carefully about ownership and how to share these stories with honour.

Seniors have a wealth of stories and limited opportunities to share them, and this is both an advantage and a challenge. People are willing to share their stories, not only because it validates their lives and knowledge, but because it gives them a chance to put things in order and to celebrate their accomplishments and hardships.

Telling life stories is therapeutic in a fundamental sense, for it is what humans do to make sense of their lives. Because of the benefits, telling stories can also make people very vulnerable. People generally want and need to tell stories to those who can bear witness to their struggles and accomplishments. However, in the process, they may encounter old fears, pain, and trauma. There is a fear in research communities that these old experiences need to be guarded. Some feel that painful stories are best left alone. The dilemma is captured in the following field note:

In our first rural resilience workshop, 3 of the 4 focus groups independently began sharing stories of what we would today call child abuse. As a trained researcher I tried to control this sharing because of the hurt it could bring to those sharing their stories. I assumed that these stories were too dangerous to be shared with other seniors without a professional present to "deal with the emotions." Luckily my colleague

was a long-time researcher in the north and reminded me of what I knew with other groups – people are strong and share what they want to.

These sessions, from my perspective, were deeply personal and therapeutic. From the perspectives of those doing the sharing, they were stories that they had not had a chance to tell. Their experience made sense when they heard other people's stories.

Life in earlier, remote and harsh environments could not be compared to urban life today with our values and expectations. Yes, they were treated harshly, as were others. In context, the experiences were not traumatic; it made them strong and they didn't know anything different. To pathologize their experience would have been a disservice. We had come to learn about resilience, and harsh punishment had been part of their path. We had not come to learn about abuse. If it had been framed as abuse, I doubt if they would have been willing to share their stories. (NJM, 2005)

We see from this that it is important to be clear about the purpose of your research and how stories will be used. People choosing to take part in research need to be aware of the potential dangers and advantages. Research around difficult topics should not be avoided because of professional sensitivities if seniors feel it should be done. However, we need to be transparent and honest about what is expected and what safeguards are in place for everyone. Seniors are able to make decisions about what to share. They just need the information and the safety to do so.

Ethics approval should allow the option for seniors to maintain ownership of their stories and that they will retain decision-making

power over how their stories are told and distributed. This may cause concern within many university research traditions where seniors are seen as subjects, and where committees make the decisions about what is in seniors' best interest. It will be rough ride for those seniors' groups who take on the academy in its role as protector of seniors as a vulnerable population.

## D. Role of the Interviewer

A good narrative researcher is an attentive listener who follows up on ideas, explores the details, and shares short reflections from his own experience. The researcher is considered a peer, for both listener and story-teller have come to learn and to listen, to contribute and to create. While the interviewer brings experience and knowledge to this process, his or her primary goal is to make it possible for the person being interviewed to tell his or her story.

The skills and knowledge from the chapter on interviewing and the responsibilities of a group facilitator in the chapter on focus group research are all part of becoming a good narrative interviewer. The narrative research guide in Appendix 9 outlines the specific roles of the interviewer at each stage of the interview.

In addition to natural interpersonal skills, there are several skills and talents that are particular to narrative interviewing:

**Listen for stories.** It helps to begin with prompts that encourage stories such as “Could you tell me about a time when ... ? Do you remember a story about ...?” Listen for the entrance into a story, for example, the person may begin with “I remember when ...,” “When I was a little girl ...,” or “When we came to Canada...” All of these are indicators that a story is being readied for the telling. It is as if the person were setting the stage for the story to be told. We are taught as children through fairy tales that each story begins with “Once upon a time there was someone, somewhere doing something.” When the

person announces a story, listen carefully and encourage the story to unfold.

**Listen for plots.** When the story begins, most people are shy about expanding upon the details until the listener shows interest. You can prompt, “And then what happened? How did that happen?” In northern countries, most stories follow a specific format: a beginning where something happens to disrupt the status quo, a middle that describes what happens after the disruption, and an ending that re-establishes some semblance of balance or normalcy. Listen carefully for these indicators. Do not assume that other cultures follow the same structure. Some cultures tell stories that are open-ended explorations of thoughts and events combined.

**Share your own stories as prompts.** It is natural for you to share your own experiences since you are a peer in this process. When this happens, attempt to share your experiences as a story to let the person know that it is all right to talk in stories. Many seniors don’t see stories as real research and may need to see story-telling modelled. They may feel that you really want opinions and facts. You may want to practice telling a short personal story related to your topic so that you are prepared. As the person being interviewed listens to your story, they can then be comfortable that an everyday story, told in a natural manner, is acceptable.

**Explore the impact of stories as a way to extend the story.** When you hear a story, use the opportunity to comment. Do not use “good” as a descriptor; it implies that you are in a position to judge the quality and usefulness of the story. Instead, comment on how the story affects you – that the story is interesting, disturbing, moving, lovely, powerful, etc. In this way you are a witness and convey to the person how hearing the story has had an impact on you. This enables you to explore what the story meant to the narrator and what that person learned by thinking about the story again. Connect the story to the topic by sharing what you have learned by hearing the story in

the context of the topic you are studying, i.e., hearing your story really brings home how important rural teachers were as examples of resilience. Reinforce the idea that stories hold meaning and that meaning is made when stories are shared and discussed.

## E. What Kinds of Stories Can Be Collected?

The following are the types of stories that were most commonly told by seniors in our research. These are presented in a sequence that emerged from listening to seniors tell stories in the focus groups. All types of stories may not be relevant for your particular research project. We found that progression assisted the participants to feeling at ease.

**Topical life story.** If your research is about the person's life story, this section will be the entire research project. However, in narrative research, the life story is generally tailored by the teller to fit with the topic of the research. Out of the thousands of events and markers that could be included, people will select those stories that they think have most relevance to the topic they have been asked about. The selection of stories is interesting in itself. In the following example, Bea is being interviewed about resilience and rural life. Her story about her grandmother is tailored to this topic. It is written by the interviewer.

Bea talked about how their family fled from Eastern Europe with only their clothes and photographs. They settled in the west where she had three brothers, two died in childhood in accidents on the farm. Bea went to school and eventually became a teacher in a small town. Her father died in an accident and her mother continued on the farm where she died alone and wasn't discovered until a week later. Bea married and had four children. She lost her husband and eventually moved in with her remaining sister in the city where she has now joined a seniors club and helps out with baking for events. (Bea's life story, 2007)

**Stories in the third person related to the topic.** Most of our work seemed to begin with stories about family. While this may be due to the topic of study, resilience, telling stories of other people seems to break the ice and overcomes shyness about telling personal stories.

Bea talks about how her mother was feisty and resilient. She loved to care for sick animals, and took hurt animals into the farm house when her husband was away. Her mom was a wonderful baker and made extra money baking for the hotel in town. She also made due with cast offs and made things nice in spite of hardships and isolation. In the end, she felt her mother lost her will to continue and died of the grief of losing her two sons and husband. (Narrative data summary, 2007)

**Personal stories.** Once people are comfortable and have practised telling stories about other people, they are able to call up personal stories about the topic.

Bea tells the story of the death of her older brother and how she felt it was her fault, how she finally told her Sunday school teacher who was very kind and helped her understand that accidents in farming are a part of life. She tells how she spent many hours in the fields that took her brother away and how, in learning to love the fields through the seasons, she found some peace. She likens the passage of the seasons to life and resilience. (Narrative data summary, 2007)

**Topic-related stories.** If your narrative interview follows a focus group or workshop, you may be able to relate to the focus group results to trigger specific stories. The following story was told as part of being raised in a rural setting and resilience. Bea thinks back over her other stories, and the interviewer reports:

In thinking of resilience among her children and what she could pass on to them, she muses on the importance of a connection to something bigger than oneself in being able to find meaning and move on. For her, it was connecting to the land, but her sons live in the city now and her grandchildren know little of her past. She thinks that she may invite the youngsters to visit the farm and spend time in nature with her. That way she could help them find something that might be meaningful for them. (Narrative data summary, 2007)

## F. Data Collection: Gathering Stories

While it is easy to listen to stories, it is much harder to record them. Sharing stories includes not only the words, but body language and shared meanings acknowledged but not spoken out loud. There are several methods for capturing stories told in conversation.

**Written stories.** Collecting stories can be done by asking people to write or record their own stories about a topic. It is helpful to share examples with them so that they understand that you are looking for full stories. We found that an effective way to encourage written stories was to introduce a topic for discussion and model story-telling then invite people to write their own stories at their own pace. You need to be sensitive to the discomfort of some seniors when asked to write, so include a secondary activity, such as a coffee break, so that those who are reluctant can ask for help without feeling singled out.

**Write up the stories after the conversation.** You can engage in a conversation where you take brief notes and write up what you remember. You tend to remember the first and the last part of any story and the stories that resonate with your own experience. This means that, if you are like most people, you will remember only parts of the story.

**Recorded and transcribed stories.** This was the method chosen for the Kerby study because it enabled the interviewer to focus on the questions and the flow of the interview. This meant that a good-quality tape recorder had to be found and mastered. Some seniors preferred to have someone else handle the equipment. At Kerby we had students who were there to help out with the initial training sessions and handled the tape recorders.

**Group interviews.** Narrative work can also be done in groups where the group can ask questions and make comments as a person tells his or her story. This method was very popular and is effective in making seniors comfortable with sharing their stories. People tend to remember more when interested listeners ask questions and respond. We used this method of sharing stories to start focus groups and workshops. The trick is to sort out each person's story since they become mingled. It may mean piecing the bits together with each person.

## **G. A Method for Recording Stories**

The particular method presented in this chapter was created specifically for seniors. It is a structured interview with a specific topic as the focus. The interview is taped and stories are composed as the interviewer listens to the tape and records stories following the structure in a workbook. The questions facilitate the telling of stories and the researcher uses the same format to record. This consistency in method simplifies the data-collection process and leads directly to analysis and interpretation.

Table 12. Sample of story form used in composing stories from transcripts.

Title of the story:
Context: the setting, what is happening before the story starts, the characters,
The trigger: what happens to start the story action.
The plot: sequence of events that occur.
Consequence: what is the outcome of the story, the lessons learned.
The storyteller's reaction to the story when told.
Your reaction to hearing the story and links to the topic.
Signed (recorder) _____ Date _____
Was this version shared with the person? Yes/No
Permission to share the story _____
Date _____ signed _____

### *Composing Stories from a Taped Interview*

This manual does not include information about full transcription. In full transcription you attempt to turn an oral experience into a grammatically correct written form. This is an extremely time-consuming process (about six hours per hour of tape), and it involves translating sentence fragments into a coherent written document. If not done well, people are embarrassed when they see their thoughts transcribed into written form and may avoid working with their own story.

An alternate form of narrative transcription creates a script based on speech rhythm, writing each phrase (marked by a pause or breath) on a separate line. The transcript looks like the example below:

Well  
I really got caught up  
With everyone else you know

In the bigness of the thing

Little did we ever think

That once we were into the storm that the sucker would not  
let up

This method was developed by Nancy Marlett and allows you to type everything that was said but in a form that looks like a poem of the spoken word. This method of transcription takes about 1.5 hours per hour of tape once you have learned to listen for the pauses. People are intrigued with how it sounds when they read their words on the page. They are more willing to maintain ownership of their words and thoughts with this method. It is relatively easy to analyze this style of text. Ideas seem stand out even though they are often short fragments.

The method created for seniors in this manual involves listening for stories and writing coherent stories using the person's own words whenever possible. In listening to the tape, you are asked not to transcribe the conversation word for word, but to listen and take notes about events and thoughts until you can piece together a summary of each of the stories. Most of the seniors liked this process, although it was very time-consuming in the early stages. Some found it helpful to listen with a friend or co-researcher. One even invited the person interviewed to help write the stories.

When composing stories, use as many of the person's own words as possible, but do not feel shy about adding materials or leaving other parts out to make sense of the story.

Remember that stories as told, wander, perhaps not as far as that shaggy dog, but wander they do. It is your task to bring the parts back together again and to write a coherent story with a beginning, middle and end, using the elements in the above format – title, context, plot, and lessons learned.

The following story is taken from the tape:

**Title:** Mom's Version of Bouncing Back

**Setting the stage (context):** Mother and three children (in elementary school) living on 20 acres when father is away at war.

**The plot:** As children we had little money and mom went to work cleaning houses for neighbours. We children did most of the work at home and looked after the animals and gardens, as well as our schoolwork. We had summer jobs picking berries for extra cash. We often missed the first few months of school because we were working, and then we had to study extra hard to catch up in school. Many friends and neighbours visited, brought food, and stayed to play.

**The lessons of the story for resilience:** Mother taught us children to work and play hard together. We learned many skills early and had an attitude that there was nothing that we couldn't do – if something doesn't work try another way or do something else. We learned the importance of other people coming to help and play. They learned to enjoy working hard to overcome difficulties and to love others.

**The person's reaction to telling their life story:** I realized how important my upbringing was to me, how much my mother's attitude to work and play has become my own. I really appreciate my mother and understand more about why she was away so much.

**What I learned about resilience from this story:** I realized the importance of a consistently loving upbringing where the

mother's attitude is adopted by the children. They learned to be accountable and to have fun as well as to work hard. The children were not embarrassed by the gifts of others and accepted food and help with a natural appreciation.

## H. Story Analysis

Collecting and presenting stories may be the goal of your research project, but in this chapter we are exploring how stories may provide data for studying a research topic. Analysis begins as you listen to the tape and check to make sure each of the story elements is present. You continue as you discover new knowledge and establish patterns from working with a number of stories on the same topic.

Recording the story in the format is the first stage of data analysis.

- The contexts and what they teach about the conditions that led to the telling of stories. You will see later in the chapter how the contexts led us to explore the conditions that created the need to become or to be resilient.
- The plots and what they teach us about the underlying scripts or strategies to deal with challenges.
- The endings and what they teach us about what people expect as outcomes.
- Personal meaning. Thinking about the meaning is the second stage of analysis – for both the story-teller and for you. This may be a simple emotional reaction:
- Themes and patterns. You can also use the structure of the stories to perform more sophisticated analysis.

Look for metaphors in the stories, for common themes within stories, and search for relationships between themes. There is no limit to the work that can be done with stories as data.

## I. Interpreting Stories

The following interpretations emerged from a PhD seminar on resilience and seniors. The seminar was an opportunity for students studying resilience at the doctoral level to study in partnership with senior researchers who had just completed the resilience project. During a portion of the seminar, we studied the stories that the seniors had collected about resilience and together we analyzed the data.

The contexts of fifty stories were studied to identify common themes related to the conditions that either taught people to be resilient or signalled the need to respond in a resilient manner. For each of the stories we looked at the plots of the stories to identify the strategies people used to become resilient. We then grouped stories. This work is in the very early stages but eventually others will hopefully share the excitement we felt at finding a new way to think about resilience.

**Disaster/war.** A shared experience that threatens loss of a way of life and status. People expect that a disaster will be time-limited. People are not chosen to experience the disaster, it is beyond people's control. Personal loss is seen as chance. There is no blame attached.

The strategies or scripts of resilience were all based on a temporary setback and the loss of fathers. Strategies included: taking on non-traditional roles (mothers working outside the home, children taking on adult roles); sharing labour and resources with others (friends and family and neighbours); doing with less; working extra-hard and giving without expectation of receiving in return.

**Loss of loved ones, of a way of life, or of competence (disappointments of aging).** These challenges were spoken of as a

never-ending sadness, a dragging down, a loss of interest or a depression. The notion of burden was also mentioned (a dying parent, a disabled child, etc.). Sometimes, the burden seems to be the source of personal meaning.

Resilience scripts in a situation of loss include becoming absorbed in ways to find meaning, focusing on relationships with others, finding a way to contribute, or finding a reason to go on.

**Illness, disability, and chronic pain.** While illness seems to be more time-limited, it still invokes the need to be resilient and to adjust to changed lifestyles and relationships. Persistent pain generates worry – the anticipation of pain can be more damaging to resilience than the pain itself. Resilience strategies and scripts included distraction, acceptance or finding meaning in pain, and making pain a companion.

We end this section with a story that emerged from a focus group; it begins as the group discusses the topic and then shifts to a story told by one of the group participants. The voice is of the recorder for the group.

### *Story Analysis: A Balancing Act of Caring*

**Setting the stage (context).** The health focus group was interested in why women who were caregivers seemed resilient. They thought that resilient people were those who took the time to care for and help others. The group thought that people (women) who were expected to be, and were trained to be, caregivers had an advantage over men who were not taught to care for people. This is the starting point for a follow-up story with one of the focus group members.

**An individual contribution.** In talking about men, Mary tells of her husband who had been a widower, and when his wife died he was pretty helpless; he had been waited on for years. She told of his mother who had done everything when he was a child and as an

adult he was not self-sufficient but found a willing wife. When Mary started dating, it was apparent that she was to be the next in line as a caregiver. She made it clear that he had to learn to look after himself before they married and that she expected to be looked after too. There was much laughter and talking about similar situations.

**Lessons learned.** We talked about whether seniors can be taught to become more resilient and everyone agreed that it could happen but it would take persistence.

**The person's reaction to telling their life story.** Mary felt strongly that many people do not want to learn to be self-sufficient; they don't want to put the effort in when someone has always been there to help. If people show that they can do things they will be expected to do them on their own.

**What I learned about resilience from this story.** I believe that children should become more self-sufficient and that everyone should learn to take care of others as a way of learning to take better care of themselves. This story also raises issues about caregiving as a contribution to others and the important link between caring and resilience. This also begs the question of learning resilience through socialization, and this could be one of the reasons why people see women as more resilient and likely to outlive their male counterparts.

## J. Suggestions for Training Narrative Researchers

We decided to introduce a relatively sophisticated interview process when we completed the focus group research because we knew that the senior researchers were both competent and eager. We created this narrative method to take advantage of their skills and abilities.

The experience taught us that it is possible for seniors to conduct in-depth narrative interviews with relatively little training. We only had time to introduce this new method and to provide some experience in conducting in-depth interviews during the funded project.

However, there was so much interest that we conducted a follow-up session focusing on narrative. We were able to complete the analysis with the PhD class that began after the project was completed. The following outline reflects the steps we took:

**Pre-reading.** Read relevant sections on interviewing and facilitating focus groups. Have participants bring a autobiography or personal story to the first class.

**Listening for stories.** Practice finding stories within autobiographies. This leads to a discussion of the elements of a story and practice in working with the story-analysis forms.

**Narrative in research.** Review this chapter and discuss the various types of research that can be done. Discuss the ethical and clinical implications of this type of research. Practice telling stories to each other about a topic. Create your own workbook based on the narrative interview guide in Appendix 9.

**Technical aspects.** Practice tape recording. Practice listening to tapes and extracting information.

**Conduct interviews.** Work in pairs (one doing the taping and the other the interviewing). Bring the taped stories back to the group. It is important that the group be able to work with stories prior to the actual research. It is only as stories are analyzed and interpreted that the reasons behind this method become apparent.

The seniors' evaluations made it very clear that this is a powerful method, but it is difficult to master without time and practice.

## Summary

This chapter has introduced a new method of narrative interviewing. It was the culmination of the previous methods, and it has great potential as a method in research done by seniors about seniors. The stories that were collected yielded rich understandings of resilience that could not be obtained from any of the other methods. A senior

researcher noted that “the interviewee’s story had so much power and sincerity that, at times, it was overwhelming.”

## Resources

The foundations of the storied method used is contained in an unpublished manuscript called “Empowering stories; a topic and a method,” available from the author, Nancy Marlett (marlett@ucalgary.ca).

Dan McAdams , *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993) introduces the reader to the rationale for using narratives.

Jerome Bruener’s *Making Stories: Law, Literature and Life* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003) is a classic on how narrative underlies all our understandings.

For the more academic, Donald Polkinghorne’s *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988) is well worth the read.

Jean Clandinin. provides a personal exploration of how to work in a narrative way in conducting field research in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000)

A recent book on narrative, *Narrative Analysis* (qualitative research method) by Catherine Reissman, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993) marks the movement of narrative into more formal research designs.

Web-based searches on narrative will put you in touch with narrative research conferences, listservs, and web sites devoted to narrative methods and research.