



Rescuing memories

Ashley Wilson

January 29, 2008 12:15 am

For more than 30 years, Fred Buch worked as an actor in Miami. He has been in movies, commercials and on the radio.

Four years ago, his acting career ended when he began having trouble memorizing lines, something that was usually effortless for him. Three years later, Buch, now 72, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Buch and his wife, Anne-Lise, were one of seven Western North Carolina families who participated in StoryCorps national oral history project. The nonprofit organization, based out of Brooklyn, N.Y., travels the country recording the stories of people's lives.

As part of its Memory Loss Initiative, last week the organization visited MemoryCare, a local agency that serves memory-impaired individuals and their families.

"It's a chance to tell their story," said Dr. Virginia Templeton, associate director of MemoryCare. "It's real poignant when you have a person with memory loss whose memory is changing to tell their story. So often, when you talk about memory loss and dementia, it's something negative. This is just a very positive project."

Since 2006, StoryCorps has been reaching out to people affected by memory loss, encouraging them to tell their stories. The participants are usually interviewed for 40 minutes by a member of their family or close friend, with a facilitator sitting in.

The interviewers typically come up with their own questions to ask. Most of the stories revolve around love, relationships and family.

"Instead of having an outside individual who is not inside the history of the person, this is opportunity for oral history that is a bit more personal so maybe a son or daughter may think of different questions to ask," said Michelle Swinehart, a StoryCorps facilitator.

With the participant's permission, the stories will be archived in the Library of Congress with abbreviated versions of posted on StoryCorps' Web site. Some are edited for national broadcast on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition." The participants also get to take a copy of their interview home.

During his interview, Buch talked about his childhood, growing up in Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota. He told stories of his father. For him, the session was a chance to enjoy and celebrate memories that are still intact.

"In the beginning when I first found out I had Alzheimer's, it was really upsetting because my mother had the same thing," Buch said. "After, getting pretty upset about it, I realized you have to try to enjoy what you've got as long as you can."

Note: Audio clips are provided by StoryCorps, a national project to instruct and inspire people to record one another in sound. www.storycorps.net.

Learn more

For more information about StoryCorps, visit www.storycorps.net.