

EVERY MEMORY HAS A STORY. EVERY STORY DESERVES TO BE HEARD.

One Memory *at a Time*®

GUIDED STORYTELLING
METHODOLOGY

MEMORY COMPANION TRAINING MANUAL

A simple, practical guide to helping
memories emerge and stories
be preserved.



READ
the Guided Story



PAUSE
for a Memory Moment



LISTEN
for what matters



FOLLOW
the Memory Pathway

*We don't ask for memories—
we help them arrive.*



PRESERVE
CONNECTION.
HONOUR LIVES.
SHARE STORIES.



Create the invitation.

Be there.

Listen for the story that wants to be found.

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The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© Training Manual and Supporting Resources

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1. WELCOME: BECOMING A MEMORY COMPANION

Thank you for becoming a Memory Companion.

You do not need to be a writer, interviewer, counsellor, historian or expert in memory. You do not need to know how to ask the perfect question. In fact, one of the most important things you will learn in this guide is that sometimes the best question is the one you decide not to ask.

A Memory Companion is someone who creates the conditions in which another person's memories and stories can emerge naturally. You are there to offer something increasingly rare: your attention, your curiosity and enough time for another person's story to find its way into the conversation.

The role grew from a simple discovery made through my One Memory at a Time© program. When people are continually asked to remember, they can sometimes feel pressure to produce an answer. But when they hear a familiar story, see an old photograph, recognize a place, encounter an object or simply sit with someone who is willing to listen, something different can happen. A memory arrives.

One memory may lead to another. A childhood kitchen may lead to a grandmother. A grandmother may lead to Sunday dinner. Sunday dinner may lead to a brother who always arrived late. Suddenly, what began with one small memory has opened a pathway into an entire part of someone's life.

The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© was developed to help us recognize and follow those moments without turning the experience into an interview. That distinction is important. Your responsibility is not to get a story from someone. Your responsibility is to create an opportunity for a story to appear.

Sometimes a wonderful conversation will result in a story the person wants preserved. Sometimes it will not. Sometimes the most meaningful moment may be a smile, a laugh, a long silence or the simple words, *"I haven't thought about that in years."* All of those can represent success. This guide will introduce you to Guided Stories, Memory Moments, Memory Pathways and Story Guides. You will learn why silence matters, how to follow a memory without taking control of it, and how to recognize when doing less may accomplish more.

But there is something else you will do before you begin working independently as a Memory Companion. You will experience the methodology yourself.

You will choose someone you already know, perhaps a colleague, another staff member, a family member or a trusted friend, and conduct your first guided storytelling experience with them. There is no expectation that you will do it perfectly. The purpose is to experience something that cannot be completely taught on these pages: what it feels like when another person's memory suddenly takes the conversation somewhere you did not expect.

That is where much of your real training begins.

Throughout this guide, four words will help you remember your role: **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.** Read the story. Pause when something connects. Listen to where the memory goes. And when a pathway opens, follow the storyteller rather than trying to lead them somewhere else. You are not there to find someone's memories for them. **You are there to help create the conditions in which their memories can find them.**

2. THE ONE MEMORY AT A TIME GUIDED STORYTELLING METHODOLOGY©

The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© begins with a simple idea: **memories do not always respond well to being questioned, but they often respond remarkably well to being invited.**

Most of us have experienced this without realizing it. We hear an old song and suddenly remember where we were when we first heard it. We see a photograph and remember people who were standing just outside the picture. The smell of fresh bread may take us back to a kitchen we have not thought about for decades. Someone tells a story about their first job and, before we know it, we are remembering our own.

This is why guided storytelling is different from interviewing. An interviewer generally begins with a question and looks for an answer. A Memory Companion begins by creating something familiar for the storyteller to respond to. The Guided Story, a photograph, an object, a sound, a familiar place or another person's memory can become the invitation.

The storyteller is not required to respond. They may listen quietly. They may smile. They may say only a few words. They may suddenly begin telling a story that seems to have very little to do with where the conversation started. All of these responses are acceptable because the Memory Companion is not trying to take the storyteller to a predetermined destination.

This is where one of the most important principles of the methodology appears: **we follow rather than direct.** If a Guided Story about school unexpectedly reminds someone of walking home with their brother, we do not need to bring them back to school. The brother may lead to the family home. The family home may lead to a neighbour. The neighbour may lead to a summer afternoon that has not been remembered for 60 years. The memory has shown us where it wants to go.

The methodology helps us recognize these opportunities. **Memory Moments** are places within a Guided Story where a memory may begin to surface. **Memory Pathways** are the directions that begin to appear as one memory connects naturally to another. **Story Guides** are the small clues within what a person is telling us that can help us decide where to gently follow next.

None of these are techniques for extracting information. They are ways of paying closer attention.

Silence is part of that attention. When someone becomes quiet, our natural instinct may be to help by asking another question. Sometimes that is exactly the wrong thing to do. The person may not have stopped remembering. They may have just begun. A name, face, place or feeling may be finding its way back. Giving that moment a little more time can be one of the most valuable things a Memory Companion learns to do.

The Memory Companion approach was built around three simple actions: **Read. Pause. Listen.** The deeper understanding of the methodology adds one more: **Follow.** The Memory Companion does not make memories happen but creates the space in which they can arrive.

So the role is not complicated. Read something that may create recognition. Pause when something seems to connect. Listen without immediately deciding where the conversation should go. Then follow the storyteller when a pathway begins to emerge.

There is no perfect response and no perfect session. Sometimes several memories will emerge. Sometimes only one will. Sometimes nothing will be said at all. Success is not determined by how many prompts were used or how many stories were produced. Even a smile, a quiet moment of recognition, someone saying “*I remember that,*” or simply feeling included can represent success.

The Memory Companion therefore does not carry the responsibility of finding someone's story. **The storyteller carries the memories. The methodology creates the invitation. The Memory Companion creates the space.** And then we listen for what arrives.

3. YOUR ROLE: READ. PAUSE. LISTEN. FOLLOW.

Becoming a Memory Companion does not mean becoming an interviewer. You are not there to work through a list of questions, keep a conversation on schedule or make sure a story is produced. Your role is much simpler. You are there to create a comfortable space, introduce something that may invite memory, and then pay attention to what happens.

Four words can guide almost everything you do as a Memory Companion: **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.**

Read. A Guided Story gives you somewhere natural to begin. Read it slowly and conversationally. You are not delivering a presentation, and you do not need to perform the story. Allow the storyteller time to hear the words and make their own connections. The story is not the destination. It is simply the invitation.

Pause. When something seems to connect, give it room. You may notice a smile, a nod, a change in expression or the beginning of a comment. The storyteller may interrupt the Guided Story with a memory of their own. When that happens, stop reading. The memory that has just appeared is more important than finishing the paragraph.

A pause does not always need to be filled. One of the habits new Memory Companions often have to unlearn is the urge to rescue a quiet moment. Silence can feel uncomfortable when we believe it is our responsibility to keep a conversation moving. In guided storytelling, silence may mean that something is happening. Give the memory time to arrive before deciding that another question is needed.

Listen. Listening means more than hearing the words. Listen for people, places, objects, emotions and experiences that seem important to the storyteller. Notice what they return to. Notice when their voice changes or when a small detail suddenly becomes important. These may become Story Guides that show you where the conversation naturally wants to go.

Listening also means resisting the temptation to compare every memory with one of your own. Sharing something briefly about yourself can sometimes create connection, but the conversation belongs primarily to the storyteller. Your own story should never become more important than the memory you have been invited to hear.

Follow. This may be the most important addition to the Memory Companion's role. When a Memory Pathway opens, follow it. If a story about someone's first job suddenly becomes a story about their father, let it become a story about their father. If the father leads to the family car and

the family car leads to Sunday drives, go there. You do not need to bring the storyteller back simply because the Guided Story began somewhere else.

Following does not mean asking question after question. Often a few words are enough: *“Tell me more about that.” “What happened next?” “What do you remember most about him?”* Sometimes the best response is simply a nod and enough silence for the storyteller to continue.

The earlier Memory Companion Guide described one of the most common mistakes as trying to do too much — asking too many prompts, filling silence too quickly and turning the experience into a question-and-answer session. Its advice was simple: **do less and let the story work**. That remains one of the most important lessons in this training.

You will not always know whether to continue reading, ask something, remain silent or follow a new direction. That is normal. Becoming a Memory Companion is not about memorizing rules. With experience, you begin to recognize the moments when the storyteller is showing you what to do next.

When you are unsure, return to the four words. **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.** The less pressure you place on yourself to lead the conversation, the more opportunity you give the storyteller to lead you.

4. HOW STORIES BEGIN TO APPEAR

One of the most important things a Memory Companion learns is that memories rarely arrive in a straight line. A conversation may begin with school and end with a grandmother's kitchen. A photograph of an old car may bring back a first date. A story about Christmas may suddenly lead to a memory of a father coming home from work. We do not need to control these changes in direction. We need to learn to notice them.

The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© gives us several ways to understand what is happening. **Guided Stories, Memory Moments, Memory Pathways and Story Guides** work together, but each has a different purpose.

A **Guided Story** provides the starting point. Instead of beginning by asking someone to search their memory for an answer, we begin with a story they can simply hear and experience, for example, a story about their youth from Volume 1 of One Memory at a Time©. The story may contain familiar people, places, activities, objects or feelings. Something within it may connect with the storyteller's own life. Then the story turns into a Guided Story, providing a gentle structure without pressure and inviting memories rather than demanding them. Both are “Guided Stories”.

Within a Guided Story are **Memory Moments**. These are places where we intentionally slow down or pause because something in the story may create recognition. The Memory Moment is not a demand for a response. It is an invitation. If nothing happens, simply continue. If something does happen, give it room.

You may not always hear the words, *“That reminds me of something.”* Sometimes the first sign of a Memory Moment is much smaller. The storyteller may smile, laugh, nod, look away or become quiet.

They may repeat a word or mention a person's name. Learning to notice these small reactions is part of becoming a Memory Companion.

When a memory does emerge, it may open a **Memory Pathway**. A Memory Pathway is the natural movement from one memory to another. Someone remembering their elementary school may mention walking there with a sister. The sister may bring back their childhood home. The home may bring back a neighbour who lived next door. The neighbour may lead to a story about summer evenings on the front porch.

At that point, the original subject of school no longer matters very much. A pathway has opened.

The Memory Companion does not need to know where that pathway will lead. In fact, trying to decide where it *should* lead can interfere with the process. Your role is to recognize that the memory is moving and allow the storyteller to take you with it.

Along the pathway, the storyteller will often give you **Story Guides**. These are the small details within what the person is already saying that suggest where you might gently follow. A person may say, *"My father never talked very much, but every Saturday morning he took me with him."* The words *every Saturday morning* may be a Story Guide. So may the mention of the father. Rather than introducing a completely new question, you might simply respond, "Where would you go together?" or, *"What do you remember about those Saturday mornings?"*

The important difference is that the Story Guide came from the storyteller, not from a questionnaire.

This is what makes guided storytelling feel different from an interview. Instead of carrying the conversation forward with a series of prepared questions, the Memory Companion learns to use what the storyteller has already provided.

There may also be times when another kind of invitation helps. A photograph, familiar song, household object, smell or local image may bring something back when words alone do not. The existing guide recognizes that memories can be triggered by sounds, smells, music and images and recommends using these sensory invitations gently rather than overwhelming the experience with too many at once.

But these are tools, not requirements. If the conversation is already flowing, there is usually no reason to introduce anything else. One of the most useful skills a Memory Companion develops is recognizing when enough is already happening.

Think of the process simply. **The Guided Story creates the invitation. A Memory Moment may create the opening. A Memory Pathway shows where the memory is travelling. Story Guides help you follow it.**

You do not have to remember those definitions perfectly during a conversation. With experience, they begin to become natural. And that is why the next part of your training is so important. Before you try to understand all of this while sitting with someone you do not know well, **you are going to experience it with someone you do.**

5. SILENCE, EMOTION AND KNOWING WHEN TO DO LESS

One of the most important skills a Memory Companion develops is learning when **not** to do something.

When a conversation becomes quiet, our natural instinct is often to fill the silence. We ask another question, introduce another prompt or move to the next part of the Guided Story. We assume that because the person has stopped speaking, the conversation has stopped.

But silence does not always mean nothing is happening.

Sometimes a person becomes quiet because a memory is still forming. They may be trying to remember a name, picture a place or reconnect with a feeling they have not experienced for many years. What appears to us as an empty pause may actually be a very active moment for the storyteller.

This is why a Memory Companion learns to become comfortable with silence. You do not need to count seconds or decide how long a pause should last. Simply resist the immediate urge to rescue the conversation. Give the storyteller a little more time. If they are ready to continue, they often will. Filling silence too quickly is one of the common mistakes new companions make. Its advice was simply to wait and allow the moment. That simple practice becomes increasingly important as you gain experience.

Memories can also bring emotion. A story that begins with laughter may unexpectedly bring sadness. Someone remembering a childhood friend may also remember losing that friend. A story about a family home may bring back someone who is no longer there. Happiness and sadness can exist within the same memory.

When emotion appears, you do not need to fix it.

A Memory Companion is not a therapist or counsellor. You are not expected to explain someone's feelings or make them feel better. Often the most respectful response is simply to remain present, acknowledge what has been shared and allow the storyteller to decide whether they want to continue.

A few gentle words may be enough. *“That sounds like an important memory.” “Take your time.” “We don't have to continue if you don't want to.”* Then allow the storyteller to lead.

The storyteller may become emotional and still want to continue. Do not automatically assume that tears mean the conversation should end. A meaningful memory can bring tears without being harmful. At the same time, never pressure someone to continue because you believe there is an important story waiting to be told. The choice always belongs to them.

There will also be times when a storyteller does not respond to a Guided Story, Memory Moment or prompt at all. That is not failure. Do not increase the number of questions because nothing has happened. Do not make the person feel responsible for producing a memory. You can simply continue reading, change the subject naturally or enjoy the time together.

The same principle applies when the conversation is already going beautifully. If someone is remembering, talking and following their own Memory Pathway, you probably do not need another prompt, photograph, sensory object or clever question. When the conversation is already engaged and meaningful, **do less**.

Doing less does not mean you are doing nothing. You are listening. You are noticing. You are allowing time. You are protecting the storyteller's right to choose where the conversation goes and how far it travels. This can be one of the hardest lessons for a new Memory Companion because we often associate helping with doing. Guided storytelling teaches us something different.

Sometimes the most helpful thing we can do is leave enough room for the memory to do the work.

6. YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE: PRACTICE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

There is only so much that a training guide can teach you about becoming a Memory Companion. You can read about Memory Moments, Memory Pathways, Story Guides, silence and training slides, but these ideas become much easier to understand once you experience them in a real conversation.

For that reason, before beginning independently with a storyteller, every new Memory Companion should complete one practice experience with someone they already know and feel comfortable with. This might be another staff member, a colleague, a spouse, a parent, a grandparent, another family member or a trusted friend.

We first introduced this approach when developing the student training for Stories Across Generations© in schools. Before students are paired with a community senior, they practise with a parent, grandparent, relative or trusted family friend. The purpose was not to create a perfect story. It was to give the student a safe opportunity to experience the process, develop confidence and discover what listening actually feels like.

We now believe the same experience can help **every Memory Companion**, regardless of age, background or where they will eventually use the methodology. Choose one Guided Story from One Memory at a Time© that you think your practice partner might enjoy. Do not spend too much time trying to find the perfect one. Remember, the Guided Story is simply somewhere to begin.

Before starting, explain that you are learning to become a Memory Companion and would like to practise with them. Tell them there is nothing they are expected to remember and no requirement to produce a story. You are simply going to read together and see where the conversation goes.

Begin by reading the Guided Story slowly and naturally. Do not rush to reach a Memory Moment. Pay attention to the person sitting with you rather than concentrating entirely on the page.

If something seems to connect, pause. Perhaps your practice partner smiles. Perhaps they interrupt you. Perhaps they say, *“We had one of those,”* or *“That reminds me of my father.”* Perhaps they simply become quiet. This is your opportunity to practise doing something that may initially feel unusual.

Do not immediately take control of the moment. Wait. Listen. See what happens next.

If a memory begins to emerge, allow the Guided Story to wait. You do not need to finish the page or return immediately to where you stopped. The memory that has appeared is now more important than the material that helped invite it.

Listen for a possible Memory Pathway. Notice the people, places, objects, experiences or feelings that appear in what your practice partner is telling you. These may become Story Guides. Rather than thinking about the next question you want to ask, listen for something the storyteller has already given you that you might gently follow.

If your partner says, “*We used to spend every summer at my grandfather's farm,*” there are already several possible Story Guides within that one sentence: *every summer*, *grandfather* and *the farm*. You do not need to explore all three. One may be enough to allow the memory to continue.

You may also discover that nothing happens where you expected something to happen. That is valuable training too. A Memory Moment that seems obvious to you may mean nothing to someone else, while a small sentence you barely noticed may suddenly unlock a memory for them.

That is one of the reasons we do not try to predict where the story will go.

Continue for as long as the conversation feels comfortable. Your practice session does not need to last an hour, and you do not need to complete the Guided Story. If twenty minutes produces one meaningful memory and helps you understand something about listening, the experience has accomplished its purpose.

At the end, thank the person for helping you learn. Then take a few minutes on your own to think about what happened.

Do not begin by asking yourself, “***Did I do it correctly?***” Ask yourself something more useful: “***What did I notice?***” That question leads directly to the next part of your training.

7. WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?

Your first practice experience is not a test. There is no score, and there is no perfect session to compare it with. Its purpose is to help you begin noticing what happens when you stop concentrating on asking questions and start paying attention to how memories naturally emerge.

After your practice conversation, take a few minutes to think about what happened. You may even want to make a few notes while the experience is still fresh. The most useful reflection is not about how many memories appeared or whether you reached the end of the Guided Story. It is about what you noticed in yourself and in the storyteller.

Think back to the moment when the first memory appeared. What seemed to bring it forward? Was it something in the Guided Story? A particular word? A person or place? Did you notice a change in expression before the storyteller began speaking? Perhaps the memory appeared somewhere you had not expected it at all.

Then think about what happened after that first memory. Did one memory lead naturally to another? If it did, you may have experienced a Memory Pathway without consciously looking for one. Where did it take the conversation? Was it somewhere different from where you expected to go?

Consider the Story Guides you heard along the way. Did the storyteller mention a person, place, object, feeling or experience that seemed to carry particular meaning? Did you follow it? Did following that small detail lead to something more? Or did you miss it at first and only recognize its importance afterward? Both experiences are valuable.

Think about silence as well. How did you feel when the storyteller stopped speaking? Did you immediately want to ask another question? Were you able to wait? If you did wait, did anything happen because you gave the moment more time?

You should also notice your own habits. Perhaps you asked several questions in a row. Perhaps you interrupted because you were excited by something the storyteller said. Perhaps their memory reminded you of one of your own and you began telling your story instead. **These are common human responses.** The purpose of reflection is not to criticize yourself for them. It is simply to become more aware of them.

Now consider what happened when you did less. Was there a moment when you simply listened and the storyteller continued without your help? Did the conversation take an unexpected direction? Did you discover something about the person that you had never known, even though you already knew them well?

This last question is especially important. The student training experience taught us that practising first with someone familiar can create value of its own. A student may begin the exercise thinking they are simply practising and discover a family story they have never heard before. The same may happen to any new Memory Companion.

Your practice experience may also have felt awkward. That is all right. You may have wondered when to pause, whether to ask something or how long to allow silence. Those decisions become more natural through experience.

Before moving on, ask yourself one final question: **Was I trying to find the story, or was I allowing the storyteller to show me where it was?** That distinction is at the heart of becoming a Memory Companion.

You have now read about the methodology and experienced it with another person. You have begun to recognize Memory Moments, follow Memory Pathways, notice Story Guides and become more comfortable with silence. You are not expected to have mastered any of them. **You have simply begun to notice. And noticing is where good listening begins.**

8. WHEN A STORYTELLER WANTS THEIR STORY TO BE PRESERVED

Not every guided storytelling conversation needs to become a written story. This is an important distinction. The purpose of The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© is first to create opportunities for memory, conversation and connection. Sometimes a memory is shared, enjoyed and left within the conversation. That can be enough.

At other times, something different happens. A storyteller shares a memory and recognizes that they would like to keep it. Perhaps it is a story their children have never heard. Perhaps it describes someone important to them. Perhaps it captures an experience they suddenly realize they do not want to lose. That is when a conversation may become a story worth preserving.

The decision should come naturally and should always belong to the storyteller. A Memory Companion should never approach a conversation believing that a written story must be produced. If we begin measuring success by the number of stories we collect, it becomes very easy to stop listening for memories and start searching for material.

When a storyteller does want a memory preserved, the Memory Companion can help. The simplest way may be to record the storyteller describing the memory in their own words. Recording should only happen with the storyteller's knowledge and permission. The storyteller should understand why the recording is being made, what will happen to it and who, if anyone, will have access to it.

The recording, perhaps using your smartphone, lets the Memory Companion stay present during the conversation rather than trying to write everything down. It also helps preserve something particularly important: the storyteller's own words, expressions, personality and way of telling the story.

VERY IMPORTANT: WHAT TO DO WITH THE RECORDING

Once a storyteller has given permission to have a memory recorded, the recording becomes the source from which their written story can be prepared. It should be treated carefully and used only for the purpose the storyteller has agreed to.

*The first step is to **transcribe the recording**. A transcription tool may be used to convert the spoken conversation into written text. Do not worry if the transcript contains repeated words, unfinished sentences, pauses or places where the storyteller moved back and forth in time. That is how people naturally speak. The transcript is not the finished story. It is the raw material from which the storyteller's story will be prepared.*

*Before doing anything further, **review the transcript against the recording**. Pay particular attention to names, places, dates and words the transcription software may have misunderstood. If something cannot be clearly understood, do not guess. Mark it for clarification with the storyteller. The transcript can then be provided to an approved artificial intelligence tool to help prepare a readable first-person draft. The Memory Companion should give the AI a clear instruction such as:*

“Using only the information contained in this transcript, prepare a first-person version of the storyteller's memory. Preserve the storyteller's voice, personality and meaning. Remove unnecessary repetition and organize the material so it reads naturally as a story. Do not invent facts, dialogue, descriptions, emotions, names, dates or events. If information is unclear or missing, do not guess.”

*When the draft is returned, **read it carefully against the original transcript**. AI is an assistant, not the storyteller. Check that nothing has been added simply because it makes the story sound better. Check names, dates, places and important details. Most importantly, ask yourself whether the draft still sounds like the person whose memory you heard. The draft must then go back to the storyteller.*

Read it with them if they would like assistance. Invite them to correct anything that is wrong, remove anything they no longer wish to include, change wording that does not sound like them, or add something they remembered after the original conversation. Seeing their memory in writing may itself open another Memory Pathway. If that happens, allow the story to grow.

Continue revising until the storyteller is satisfied. Only then should the story be considered complete.

THE RECORDING ITSELF

The recording deserves the same respect as the written story. It contains the storyteller's voice and potentially personal information. It should not be forwarded, copied, uploaded to an unapproved service, shared with another person or retained for some future purpose simply because it may be useful.

Once the approved written story has been completed, follow the privacy and retention requirements of the organization through which you are serving as a Memory Companion. If there is no approved reason or explicit permission to retain the recording, it should be securely deleted from the recording device and from any other location where a copy was created. Never assume that permission to record means permission to keep the recording indefinitely or to use it for another purpose.

Remember the sequence:

PERMISSION → RECORD → TRANSCRIBE → VERIFY → PREPARE THE DRAFT → REVIEW → STORYTELLER APPROVAL → PROTECT OR DELETE THE RECORDING
At every stage, one principle remains unchanged: **The technology may help us preserve the memory. The Memory Companion may help shape it into a readable form. But the memory, the voice and the final story always belong to the storyteller.**

Technology can then assist with the next step. A recording may be transcribed, and an approved artificial intelligence tool may help organize the transcript into a more readable first-person story. Used properly, this can remove repetition, improve punctuation and organize thoughts that naturally moved back and forth during conversation.

But technology has a very clear boundary. **It may help organize the story. It must never invent the story.**

Artificial intelligence should not add events that were never mentioned, manufacture emotions, create dialogue the storyteller never used or fill gaps because something appears to be missing. The student training materials make the same distinction: AI may assist with organization, but the resulting story should still sound like the senior — not the student and not the software.

The Memory Companion also has a responsibility not to become the author. It can be tempting to improve a story by making it more dramatic, adding descriptive language or rewriting sentences in our own style. Our responsibility is different. We are helping the storyteller preserve **their** memory in **their** voice.

Sometimes, reviewing the first written version will bring back even more. The storyteller may remember another person's name, correct a date, add something about a place or suddenly recall what happened next. The written story itself can become another invitation to memory.

That is perfectly natural and a wonderful feeling when it happens.

Preserving a story therefore does not necessarily happen in one step. A conversation may lead to a recording. The recording may lead to a transcript. The transcript may become a first draft. Reading that draft may bring back another memory. The story can continue to develop until the storyteller feels it says what they want it to say. This may be over several visits.

There is also an important difference between **preserving** a story and **sharing** it. A storyteller may want a written copy for themselves without wanting anyone else to see it. They may want to give it to their children or grandchildren but not allow it to be used publicly. Permission to participate in guided storytelling is not automatically permission to record, and permission to record is not automatically permission to publish or share.

This guide already establishes these as separate permissions and makes clear that participation is voluntary and the storyteller retains ownership of the story. That principle applies to every Memory Companion and every setting in which the methodology is used. Permission forms are in the Appendices.

The Memory Companion helps make preservation possible. Technology can make preservation easier. But neither the Memory Companion nor the technology acquires ownership of what has been shared. Because once a memory becomes a written story, one principle becomes more important than all the others: **The storyteller always has the final word.**

9. THE STORYTELLER ALWAYS HAS THE FINAL WORD

Before any preserved story is considered complete, it must go back to the storyteller.

This is not simply a final proofreading step. It is one of the most important principles of The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology®. The story came from the storyteller's life, memories and experiences. They therefore remain the person who decides what the final story says and what happens to it afterward.

When the storyteller receives the first written version, invite them to read it or read it with them. The purpose is not to ask whether the writing is good. The more important question is much simpler: ***“Does this sound like you?”***

The storyteller may correct a name or date. They may change some wording because it does not sound quite right. They may remember another detail and want it added. They may decide that something they originally shared feels too personal once they see it in writing and ask for it to be removed. Every one of those decisions should be respected.

The storyteller may also decide that the story should not be preserved at all. That decision must be respected too.

A Memory Companion should never become so invested in a story that preserving it becomes more important than respecting the person who shared it. A wonderful story does not become ours simply because we helped someone find it. This is particularly important when artificial intelligence has assisted in preparing the written version. AI can make a transcript easier to read and help organize memories into a coherent story, but it can also misunderstand a name, change the meaning of a

sentence or make language sound more polished than the storyteller would naturally use. That is another reason the storyteller's review is essential.

The training materials make this responsibility very clear. The completed story is returned to the senior, who may identify anything missing, request additions or removals, and provide final approval. The senior has the final approval — always.

Approval of the written story does not automatically mean approval to share it.

The storyteller may want a copy for themselves. They may want their family to receive it. They may be comfortable having it included in a community collection. Or they may want it to remain completely private. These are separate choices, and the Memory Companion should never assume one permission because another has been given.

The same principle applies to recordings and photographs. Permission to participate in a conversation does not automatically provide permission to record it. Permission to record does not automatically provide permission to retain or share that recording. Permission to take a photograph does not automatically mean the photograph may be published.

The storyteller should understand what they are agreeing to and should remain in control of those decisions. The existing materials in this manual reinforce this by treating permission to record, family sharing and public use separately while affirming that the storyteller remains the owner of their story.

This is about more than consent. It is about dignity.

The Memory Companion may have helped create the invitation. A Guided Story may have opened the first Memory Moment. A Memory Pathway may have carried the conversation somewhere unexpected. Story Guides may have helped us follow. Technology may have helped preserve what was eventually shared.

But none of those things change whose story it is.

- **The life belongs to the storyteller.**
- **The memories belong to the storyteller.**
- **The story belongs to the storyteller.**

And the storyteller always has the final word.

10. YOUR FIRST ONE MEMORY AT A TIME SESSION

You have now learned the basic principles of becoming a Memory Companion. More importantly, you have already experienced the methodology with someone you know. You have read a Guided Story, allowed pauses, listened for Memory Moments, noticed possible Memory Pathways and begun to recognize Story Guides.

You are ready to begin. Your first One Memory at a Time© session does not need to be complicated. In fact, the less pressure you place on yourself and the storyteller, the more natural the experience is likely to feel.

Begin by creating a comfortable setting. Sit somewhere reasonably quiet where conversation can happen naturally. You do not need a classroom arrangement, special equipment or a formal introduction. This should feel more like two people spending time together than someone conducting a program.

Explain briefly what you are going to do. You might simply say that you have brought along a story to read together and that sometimes hearing another person's story brings back memories of our own. Make it clear that there is nothing the storyteller is expected to remember and nothing they are required to share.

Then begin. Read the Guided Story slowly and naturally. Do not concentrate so much on reading correctly that you stop noticing the person sitting with you. Watch for the small reactions you learned to notice during your practice experience. A smile, a nod, a laugh, a change in expression, a few words or a sudden silence may all tell you that something has connected.

When that happens, pause.

If the storyteller begins sharing a memory, the Guided Story has done its job. Put it aside if necessary and listen. You do not need to finish the story simply because you started it.

Remember that the storyteller may take you somewhere completely unexpected. A Guided Story about a first job may lead to a father, a bicycle, a neighbourhood store or the first thing they bought with their own money. Follow the Memory Pathway rather than trying to return to the subject you originally introduced.

Listen for Story Guides within what the storyteller is already telling you. If they say, "*My mother used to make that every Sunday,*" you do not need to search for your next prepared question. The storyteller has already given you somewhere you might gently follow.

There may also be times when nothing happens. Continue reading. Allow another Memory Moment to arrive. If the storyteller simply enjoys listening, that is perfectly acceptable. The existing Memory Companion Guide emphasizes that there are no required responses and no pressure to participate; sometimes simply hearing the story is enough to bring something back, and sometimes listening itself is the experience.

Do not worry about how long the session lasts. A meaningful conversation may take twenty minutes or considerably longer. Follow the storyteller's energy and interest rather than the clock. If the person seems tired, distracted or ready to stop, bring the conversation to a natural close.

Most importantly, do not enter your first session with the objective of leaving with a written story.

If a memory emerges that the storyteller wants preserved, you now know how to begin that process. If nothing is preserved, the session can still have been completely successful.

The earlier Memory Companion Guide reminds us that success may be as simple as a smile, a moment of recognition, someone saying "*I remember that,*" or a person simply listening and feeling included.

Afterward, take a few minutes to reflect just as you did after your practice experience. What did you notice? Where did the conversation travel? When did you follow? When did you perhaps try to lead? Was there a silence you allowed to remain? Did something happen that surprised you?

Do not ask yourself whether you conducted the session perfectly. There is no perfect session. Each storyteller will be different. Each conversation will be different. And each experience will teach you something that this guide cannot. Your training therefore does not end when you begin your first session. **In many ways, that is when your training really begins.**

11. LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Becoming a Memory Companion is not something you finish learning by reaching the last page of this training manual. This guide gives you the foundation, but much of what you will learn will come from the people you sit with and the conversations you share.

Every storyteller will teach you something different.

One person may begin sharing memories almost immediately. Another may prefer to listen for several sessions before saying very much. One person may respond strongly to a Guided Story, while another may be more affected by a photograph, a familiar place, a song or a small detail that you did not expect to matter.

Over time, you will become better at noticing these differences.

You will begin to recognize a Memory Moment without consciously looking for one. You will hear a Memory Pathway opening as one memory begins connecting to another. Story Guides will become easier to recognize because you will be listening differently. You will become more comfortable allowing silence to remain in the conversation rather than immediately filling it.

Perhaps most importantly, you will begin to trust the storyteller.

At first, you may feel responsible for keeping the conversation moving. You may wonder whether you should ask another question, introduce another prompt or return to the Guided Story. With experience, you begin to understand that you do not always have to make something happen.

This Memory Companion Manual expresses this as learning to “*do less*.” It warns against asking too many prompts, filling silence too quickly and turning the experience into a question-and-answer session. Those are not simply mistakes to avoid. They are habits that experience gradually teaches us to recognize in ourselves.

You will make mistakes. You will interrupt at the wrong moment. You will sometimes ask a question and realize afterward that you should have waited. You may miss a Story Guide and only recognize it later. You may become so interested in something the storyteller says that you accidentally begin telling too much of your own story.

That is part of learning.

Do not measure your development by whether every session produces a story. Instead, notice whether you are becoming a better listener. Are you more patient with silence? Are you asking fewer questions but hearing more? Are you becoming more comfortable following the storyteller somewhere you did not expect to go? Are you noticing the small details that once might have passed unnoticed?

You may also discover that what you learn as a Memory Companion extends beyond One Memory at a Time©. Learning to give someone your full attention, becoming comfortable with silence and listening for what matters to another person can change ordinary conversations as well.

The most successful Memory Companions will not necessarily be the people who know this guide best. They may be the people who gradually need it least.

This Memory Companion Manual recognizes this when it said that people do not need to be trained perfectly before they begin and that confidence comes through experience. We can now take that idea one step further. Experience does more than build confidence. **Experience develops the ability to notice.**

There will always be another storyteller who responds differently, another Memory Pathway you did not anticipate and another moment when silence teaches you something. That is why becoming a Memory Companion is not about mastering a technique. It is about developing a way of being with another person.

You began this guide with four words: **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.** As you gain experience, those four actions should begin to feel less like instructions and more like instincts. And when that happens, you are no longer thinking about how to conduct guided storytelling.

You are simply learning how to listen for the story that wants to be found.

12. QUICK REFERENCE FOR MEMORY COMPANIONS

You have reached the end of the training manual, but you do not need to remember everything you have read before beginning. The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© was designed to remain simple. When you are sitting with a storyteller, you should be thinking about the person in front of you, not trying to remember a training manual.

If you remember only four words, remember these: **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.**

Read the Guided Story slowly and naturally. Do not perform it and do not rush through it. The story is simply an invitation. Something within it may connect with the storyteller's own life, or it may not. Either response is perfectly acceptable.

Pause when you notice something. A smile, a nod, a laugh, a few words or a sudden silence may be a Memory Moment. You do not need to immediately ask what the person is thinking. Give the moment room. Sometimes the memory needs a little time before it becomes words.

Listen to more than the words being spoken. Notice the people, places, objects, experiences and feelings that seem important to the storyteller. Listen for the small details they emphasize or return to. These may become Story Guides showing you where the conversation wants to go.

Follow when a Memory Pathway opens. One memory may lead naturally to another. Do not worry if the conversation moves away from the subject of the Guided Story. The storyteller does not need to follow your story. You need to be willing to follow theirs.

Remember that silence is not something you need to fix. If the storyteller becomes quiet, wait. They may be thinking, remembering or simply enjoying the moment. If they want to continue, give them the opportunity. If they want to stop, respect that too.

Do not measure a session by how much was said or how many stories were preserved. A smile, a moment of recognition, a memory that has not surfaced for years or simply the experience of being listened to can be meaningful. The Memory Companion Manual makes this an important measure of success: even one moment matters.

If a memory becomes something the storyteller wants preserved, ask permission before recording it. Technology and artificial intelligence may help transcribe and organize the storyteller's words, but they must never invent details or replace the storyteller's voice. The finished story always goes back to the storyteller for review and approval.

Never assume that permission to tell a story is permission to share it. The storyteller decides whether their story remains private, is shared with family or is used more widely. Those choices belong to them.

If you find yourself asking too many questions, return to listening. If you feel uncomfortable with silence, wait a little longer. If you lose track of the Guided Story because a wonderful memory has appeared, let the Guided Story wait. If you are unsure where to go next, listen for something the storyteller has already given you.

And if a session does not unfold the way you expected, do not assume you did something wrong. There is no perfect Memory Companion. There is no perfect session. There is simply another opportunity to become a little more patient, a little more observant and a little better at listening.

This Memory Companion Manual captures the essential role in three words: Read, Pause and Listen. Everything we have learned since then has helped us add one more.

READ. PAUSE. LISTEN. FOLLOW. You do not have to find the memory. You do not have to find the story. **Just create the invitation, and be there when it arrives.**

13. A FINAL WORD TO MEMORY COMPANIONS

You began this guide by learning that becoming a Memory Companion does not require you to be a writer, interviewer, counsellor or expert in memory. It requires something much simpler: a willingness to sit with another person, give them your attention and listen.

Along the way, you learned about Guided Stories, Memory Moments, Memory Pathways and Story Guides. You learned that silence does not always mean the conversation has stopped and that sometimes doing less allows more to happen. You also experienced the methodology yourself before beginning with another storyteller.

These ideas will become more natural with every conversation. Eventually, you may stop thinking about Memory Moments or Story Guides by name. You will simply notice them. You may stop reminding yourself to allow silence because waiting will begin to feel natural. You will become less concerned about finding the next question because you will have learned to listen for where the storyteller is already taking you.

That is what becoming a Memory Companion is really about. There may be days when no story emerges. There may be conversations that travel somewhere completely unexpected. There may be a memory that lasts only a few minutes but brings a smile to someone's face. There may also be a story that a person chooses to preserve and that one day becomes something treasured by children or grandchildren. You cannot know which of those things will happen when you sit down together. And you do not need to. Your responsibility is simply to create the opportunity.

The Bird Feeder

There is an image I often use to explain what I eventually came to understand about memories. Imagine two people who want to see birds. The first person spends the day chasing them. Every time a bird lands nearby, they hurry toward it. The bird flies away, so they chase the next one. They work harder and harder, but the closer they try to get, the farther the birds seem to go.

The second person does something quite different. They build a bird feeder. They put it in a comfortable place, add the right seed and then sit nearby and wait. Before long, the birds begin to arrive on their own. That, to me, is guided storytelling.

We do not chase memories with question after question. We create the conditions that make it easier for them to arrive. The environment is the feeder. Guided Stories, photographs, sounds, smells, familiar places and gentle invitations are the seeds. The memories are the birds.

And the Memory Companion is the person patient enough to sit nearby and notice when one arrives. Some days, many memories may come. On other days, perhaps only one. And sometimes, none will come at all.

We do not chase them. We keep creating the invitation. Perhaps that is the simplest way to remember everything you have learned in this manual.

You don't have to find the memory. You don't have to find the story. Simply create the invitation. Be there. And listen for what arrives.

The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology© began with the understanding that memories do not always need another question. Sometimes they need a story, a familiar feeling, a little time and someone willing to listen. That someone is now you. Thank you for becoming a Memory Companion. **Read. Pause. Listen. Follow.** And remember: **We don't ask for memories — we help them arrive.**

Did you earn your certificate?



APPENDIX A - STORYTELLER PARTICIPATION & PERMISSION FORM

Storyteller: _____

Memory Companion: _____

Date: _____

One Memory at a Time© uses guided storytelling to create opportunities for memories, conversation and connection. Participation is completely voluntary. You decide what you wish to remember, what you wish to share and whether anything from your conversation is preserved. You may pause or stop a conversation at any time. You do not have to discuss anything you would prefer to keep private. Your memories and stories remain yours.

If you decide that you would like a memory or story preserved, we may use a recording and transcription technology, including approved artificial intelligence tools, to help prepare a written version of your story. Technology may help organize your words, but it must not invent memories, facts or experiences. Please indicate your choices below.

Participation

☐ I am comfortable participating in guided storytelling conversations.

Recording

☐ Yes, I give permission for my voice to be recorded for the purpose of preparing a written story.

☐ No, I do not give permission for my voice to be recorded.

Transcription and AI Assistance

☐ Yes, I give permission for an approved transcription and/or artificial intelligence tool to assist in preparing a written version of my recorded story.

☐ No, I do not give permission for my recording to be processed using these tools.

Sharing With Family

☐ Yes, after I have reviewed and approved my finished story, it may be shared with my family.

☐ No, I do not give permission for my story to be shared with my family.

Sharing Beyond My Family

☐ Yes, after I have reviewed and approved my finished story, I may separately consider whether I want it shared more widely.

☐ No, I want my story to remain private.

I understand that agreeing to participate does not require me to agree to recording, preservation or sharing. I may ask for something to be removed or corrected, and no written story will be considered final until I have had the opportunity to review it.

Storyteller Signature: _____

Date: _____

Memory Companion: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B - STORYTELLER STORY REVIEW & FINAL APPROVAL

The Storyteller Always Has the Final Word

Storyteller: _____

Story Title: _____

Memory Companion: _____

Date Reviewed: _____

Thank you for sharing your memory. Before this story is considered complete, it comes back to you. Please take whatever time you need to read the story, or have someone read it with you. You may correct a name or date, change wording, add another memory, remove something that feels too personal or decide that you no longer want the story preserved. The purpose of this review is not simply to check spelling or grammar. We want to know something more important:

Does this story sound like you? After reviewing my story:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ I am satisfied that it reflects my memory and my voice. | ☐ I would like something added. |
| ☐ I would like changes made before I approve it. | ☐ I would like something removed. |
| | ☐ I do not want this story preserved. |

Changes or comments, if any:

If I approve the final story, I would like:

- ☐ A copy for myself.
- ☐ A copy shared with my family.
- ☐ My story kept private.
- ☐ To discuss separately whether I would like my story shared more widely.

I understand that approving the written story does **not** automatically give permission for public sharing, publication, use on a website, social media, newsletter or other public use. Any such use requires my separate permission. **This is my story, and I decide whether and how it may be shared.**

Final Approval - ☐ I approve this story as my final version.

Storyteller Signature: _____

Date: _____

Memory Companion: _____

Date: _____

This form operationalizes the principle already present in the student guide: the completed story returns to the storyteller, who may request additions or removals and has final approval.

APPENDIX C - MEMORY COMPANION REFLECTION – WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?

Memory Companion: _____

Practice Partner/Storyteller: _____

Date: _____

☐ Practice Experience ☐ First One Memory at a Time© Session

Becoming a Memory Companion is learned partly by reading and partly through experience. After your conversation, take a few minutes to think about what happened. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose is simply to help you become more aware of what you noticed.

What seemed to invite the first memory or reaction?

Did you notice a Memory Moment? What happened?

Did one memory lead naturally to another? Where did the Memory Pathway take the conversation?

What Story Guides did you hear — a person, place, object, feeling, experience or small detail that seemed worth following?

Was there a moment of silence? How did you respond, and what happened when you waited?

Did you find yourself wanting to ask another question? Did you ask it, or did you wait?

Did the conversation go somewhere you did not expect?

Was there a moment when doing less allowed more to happen?

What did this experience teach you about listening?

What might you do differently in your next conversation?

You are not being evaluated on how many memories emerged, how long the conversation lasted or whether a written story was produced.

The purpose of this reflection is much simpler.

What did you notice?

And before your next conversation, remember:

READ. PAUSE. LISTEN. FOLLOW.

APPENDIX D – THE EIGHT OBSERVATIONS FROM MY BOOK “HOW STORIES WANT TO BE FOUND”

The following eight observations first appeared in my book “*How Stories Want to Be Found*”. They grew from the experiences and conversations that helped me understand what would eventually become The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology©.

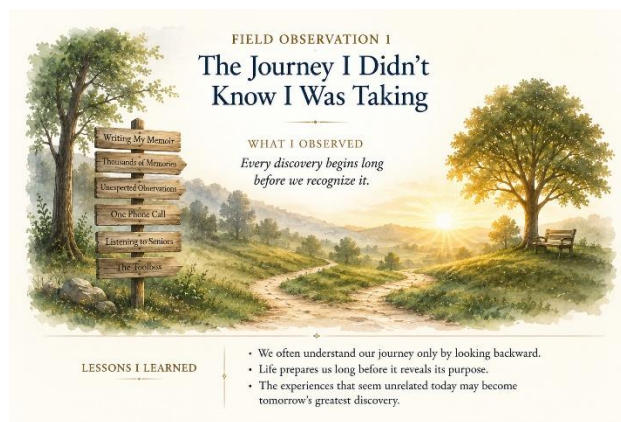
I have included them here because, together, they offer a simple visual reminder of much of what you have learned in this training. They remind us to remain curious, follow the memory that arrives, trust silence, create invitations rather than demands, and never underestimate the importance of simply being present. You do not need to memorize these observations, but I hope you will experience them.

And perhaps, as you begin sitting beside storytellers yourself, you will discover a few observations of your own:

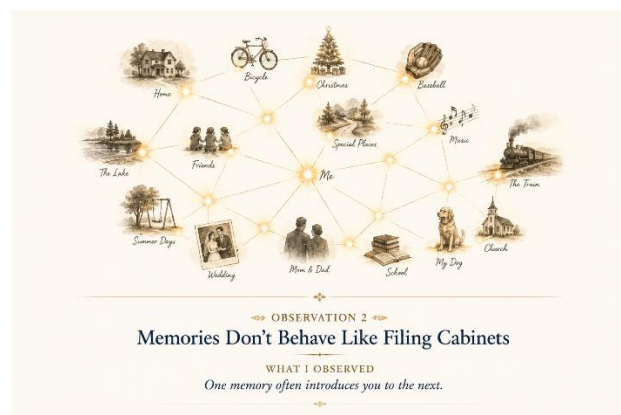
1. Be open to discovery. → 2. Follow how memories travel. → 3. Invite rather than interrogate. → 4. Create the conditions; don't chase the story. → 5. Allow silence. → 6. Remember that the listener is the most important tool. → 7. Understand that both people are changed. → 8. Recognize that those relationships can strengthen a community.

The following eight observations are reproduced from my book, *How Stories Want to Be Found*. For a free copy, send me an email to tony@tonyhebert.com

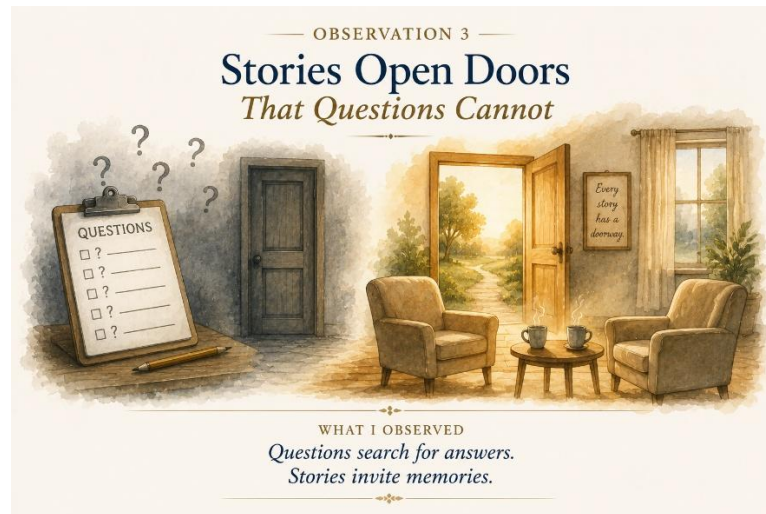
Observation 1 — The Journey I Didn't Know I Was Taking



Observation 2 — Memories Don't Behave Like Filing Cabinets ... Memories Travel in Pathways



Observation 3 — Stories Open Doors That Questions Cannot



Observation 4 — The Bird Feeder Principle: The Best Stories Are Never Chased



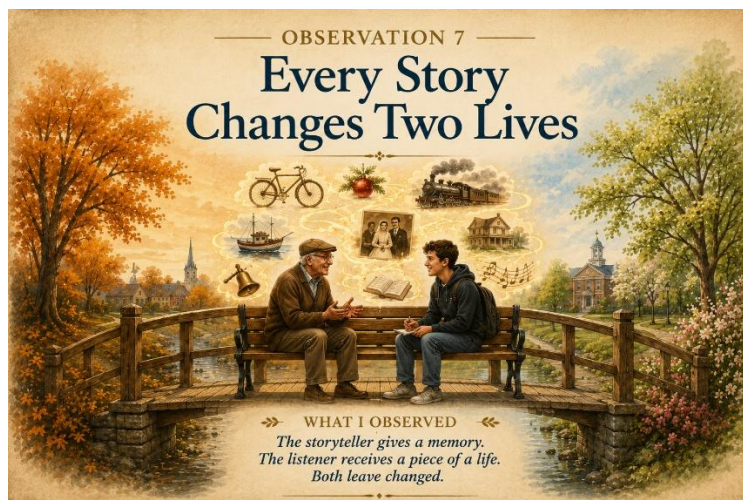
Observation 5 — Silence Is Sometimes Doing the Work



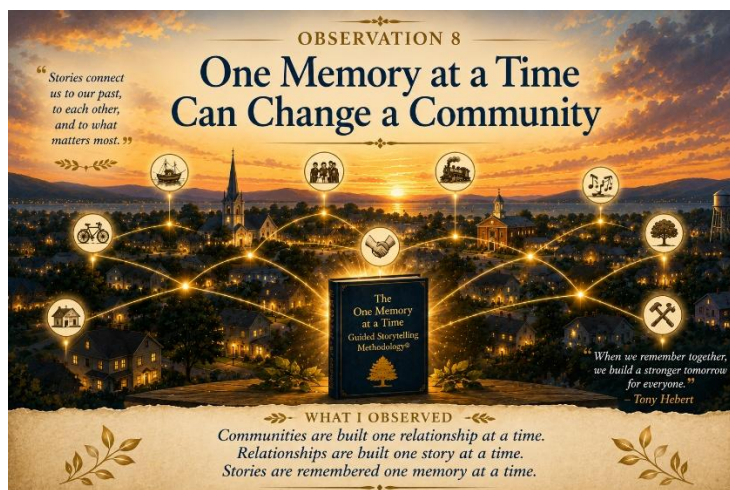
Observation 6 — The Most Powerful Tool Was Never in the Toolbox



Observation 7 — Every Story Changes Two Lives



Observation 8 — One Memory at a Time Can Change a Community





THE BEST STORIES DON'T COME FROM QUESTIONS.

They come from connection.



This training guide prepares you to become
a Memory Companion using

The One Memory at a Time Guided Storytelling Methodology®.

You'll learn how to create the invitation,
notice what matters and be there when
a memory or story wants to be found.



WHAT YOU'LL LEARN



READ

the Guided Story—
an invitation, not an interview.



PAUSE

when a Memory Moment
appears.



LISTEN

for what matters—people,
places, feelings, details.



FOLLOW

the Memory Pathway and
the Story Guides the
storyteller gives you.



WHO IT'S FOR



Staff & Volunteers

in seniors living, home care &
community organizations



Educators & Students

engaged in intergenerational
storytelling projects



Family Members

who wish to connect across
generations



Faith Communities

creating meaningful connections



Anyone

who wants to listen, connect
and help stories come alive

WHY IT MATTERS



Strengthens connection
and reduces isolation



Honours a life
and preserves dignity



Creates lasting stories
for family and community



Builds understanding
across generations



Every story shared
is a legacy



*“ You don't have to
find the memory.
You don't have to
find the story.
Create the invitation,
and be there when
it arrives. ”*

A PRACTICAL, EASY-TO-USE TRAINING GUIDE
for confidence, connection and stories that last.



From your first practice experience to your first
session and beyond, this guide will help you
become the kind of listener every storyteller deserves.

READ. PAUSE. LISTEN. FOLLOW.



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GUIDED STORYTELLING • MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS • LASTING LEGACY