



Every Memory Begins with a Door

Text and photos by Margaret Patricia Eaton

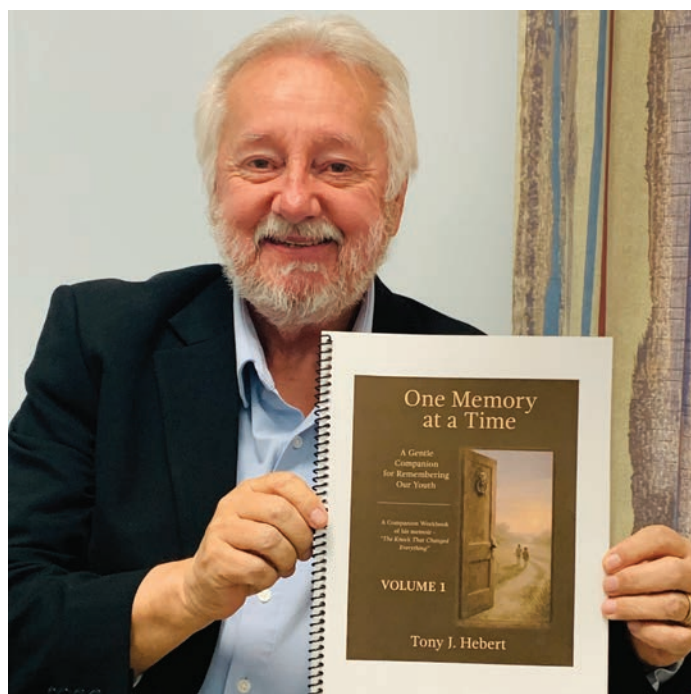
Tony Hebert's program, *One Memory at a Time* © 2025, is helping seniors reconnect with their past — not by asking questions but by telling stories.

One Memory at a Time: A Gentle Companion for Remembering our Youth, Volume 1 is a companion workbook of Tony Hebert's memoir, *The Knock That Changed Everything*. Published in 2025, it is a reflective and sensitive collection of stories about the people and places that influenced his life as an entrepreneur and community volunteer. Because he believes "that ordinary moments often carry the greatest meaning", and that our childhood shapes who we are, he begins by sharing anecdotes from his early years, growing up in a family of nine in Saint John in the 50's and '60's, and his first full-time summer job as 15-year old, selling Fuller Brush products door-to-door, which provided the book's title.

A friend, who works as a seniors' recreation director, read the memoir and contacted Tony, amazed by his ability to recall detailed memories, and by how his stories of delivering newspapers, walking to a small elementary school, and serving as an altar boy, stirred up similar memories, of things he hadn't thought about in years. It also occurred to him that this approach could be of value to his clients.

"He called me," Tony said, "because he was trying to help clients with memory but didn't have a program and he asked if I could adapt the stories in my book to create one. It was something he said he could use and he would buy from me. But I told him I don't like the word 'buy', I like the word 'free', and if I do this, it's not going to cost you anything."

That phone call resulted in the formation of the program *One Memory at a Time*, with the publication of the first of a series of six workbooks, entitled *A Gentle Companion for Remembering our Youth*. It contains eight short stories from *The Knock that Changed Everything*, followed by prompts to help readers recall their own stories.



To order, download and print your free PDF 48-page copy of *One Memory at a Time*, email Tony Hebert at hello@onememoryatitime.org. The printing and distribution of this free memory companion was made possible through the generous community support of the Foundation for a Better Future.)

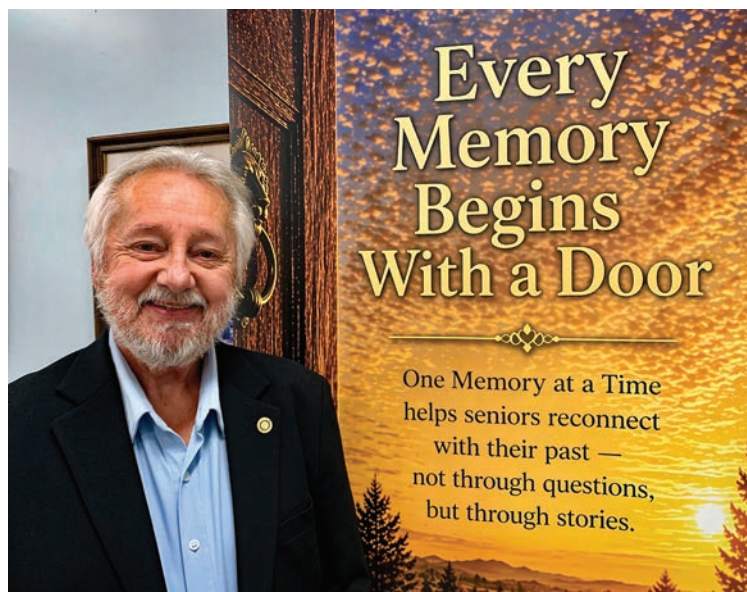
It's designed, Tony said, "for seniors and their families and friends, including those experiencing memory changes. It respects pace, welcomes repetition, and values emotional truth over perfect recall." It can be used alone, with family, in community, faith and fellowship groups, or care settings and does not require any training or equipment.

Tony envisions three distinct purposes for the program: to leave a legacy and bridge the intergenerational gap; to build community and connect with friends, and to restore dignity to seniors in care homes who may have some level of dementia.

For example, seniors might want to write a book of memories for their grandchildren, but don't know where to start. "With One Memory at a Time, a senior could read the story about the place where Tony grew up, ("Woods, Walkable Schools and Community Parents"), or about his ancestors ("The People who Shaped Me"), which would trigger their own memories, which could be recorded.

A second use involves developing social circles. A group of friends could meet once a week, with someone reading one of the stories, after which members take turns reminiscing about their experiences with the same subject, sharing what they learned and why it mattered. Retirees regularly gather at coffee shops to chat about the news or the weather, but don't go deeper. Sharing memories through story telling can help friends learn more about each other.

A third use is for seniors "whose cognitive abilities are a little bit rusty, but through story sharing they can reconnect with who they are. People with cognitive disabilities can remember but they get tired when bombarded with questions, and that is not the way to treat people. I have three friends with dementia, and they open up every time I ask them for a story." The program has now received enthusiastic responses from 56 LTC facilities across Canada, from Newfoundland to British Columbia



Coming next: Volume 2, "Planes, Trains and Automobiles", will focus on journeys and first cars, and be published in October 2026, with four more volumes scheduled over the next three years. Tony is also looking to develop education partnerships which would see student volunteers, or co-op education students working with seniors, and the material is available in French and English.

For more information about Tony Hebert's program, *One Memory at a Time*, visit www.onememoryatatime.org

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