

EMPOWERING RESIDENTS

Good afternoon, I am Charlene Coffey Alexis, mother of 4, grandmother of 6 and a brand new great grandmother who is a librarian with 20 years experience with the state of Colorado. I was a member of the very first faculty when Metropolitan State University began 50 years ago in 1965. I was the librarian before volume 1. It became the largest library, which merged to become the Auraria Library (Denver Colorado). That's why I was so surprised when I heard myself say to a tablemate, "I used to be a Librarian!" I gasped at the sound of what I had just said. I am still a Librarian, an academic librarian; I just happen to be retired!

My first day in the care center's dining room, I asked a tablemate who was the person entering the room. "Nobody!" was the answer I was given! Shocked, I blurted out, "Nobody is Nobody!"

Unique—and of value! This is not the end of the world. What are you good for? I am happiest when I am writing something. CREATING. I see myself as an OBSERVER/REPORTER—even if the reporting part may only be inside my own head. OR--- the observation just may wind up being a "novella" based on something, which happened to a member of the center's staff, but basically intended to be read by an individual audience! I do this because I am UNIQUE and for the record so are all residents and everyone here today! I have published two books while living in a care center, why not? This is not the end of the world!

What does that have to do with you? What does that have to do with Activities as a profession?

In my view, it's not SOLELY your job to entertain us, but to EMPOWER residents to do the best we can with the talents we have already. PLUS what WE can develop now. My request of Becky, our Activities Director, is "EMPOWER ME!" In the words of an old movie, "Song of the South":

"It's what you do with what you got, and never mind what you ain't got. It's what you do with what you got that gets THERE in the end!"

We are your responsibility, but why not make US your PARTNERS! We will gain from it and so will you!

A CONTRIBUTING resident is a HAPPIER resident, for we are THEN STILL VALUED and more FULFILLED.

Good Care Centers try to make residents feel at home. Well, every family member has some role, some voice. Why not EMPOWER each of us to fulfill a chosen role, to interact with fellow residents and staff in a meaningful, constructive and growing role.

Of course, I am aware that not all individuals wish to participate, to be a vocal leader or even participant, but please do not be too quick to judge, too critical or

judgmental in viewing capabilities and desires.. Still some of you might question my competency when you see me eat my scrambled eggs with a spoon until you realize that is the best tool to use for incorporating eggs with the salsa I desire. But I will leave a lesson in Resident Speak for another day. In other words, OBSERVE and LISTEN first and then ASSESS.

Please do not just automatically think “NO” of any one! Nobody is Nobody! Vinegar and baking soda produce a mini-volcano! In the words of mystic poet, Emily Dickinson, “I’m Nobody. Who are you? Are you Nobody, too? Then there’s a pair of us!” The right one PLUS one can equal an audience of 4 or 10! Everybody is Somebody!

Get to know each of us. What are my core values? “The most valuable asset a man has is his own good name.” This was taught me by my tenant farmer parents and grandparents. That became who I am. My Irish maiden name means VICTORIOUS. Although my Daddy didn’t own a square inch of land until I went away to graduate school all five of us, my four younger brothers and I each got at least one degree, and some of us 2 degrees. Everybody is SOMEBODY. Get to know us.

LIFE IS A FOUR LETTER WORD is my account of being in a care center. And VICTORIOUS recounts my childhood in Oklahoma during the dust bowl and Great Depression days. Both were published while I was a resident in a care center and are available through Amazon dot com, but this isn’t just a selfie!

TAH ! ..DAH!

I’d like you to meet Donna, a fellow resident. She taught Crafts at Thornton’s Senior Center for a number of years. Now she runs The Cupboard also known as the little store. It has saved my neck a number of times by supplying just the right birthday card. But the sale rush by others is the variety of 2 penny candy or chilled can of soda at a lower price than the vending machine on Wednesdays and Fridays. You just need to shop for yourself to appreciate the variety.

Donna isn’t alone in staffing the store, Jackie, Marie and other residents help as well as community volunteers. At the close of business everything is tucked neatly inside a cupboard located in the lobby. The Culture Change group sponsors this activity.

In addition Donna leads a Crafts activity group every other week. In her spare time she makes seasonal wreaths whether it is for Easter or Broncos during football season. We have quite a group of rabid Bronco fans at Avamere Brighton. Sale of the wreaths provides income to buy fabric and other supplies for the wreaths. There is often a waiting line for a Mickey Mouse or other wreath to be finished. In Community meetings the next design is often the topic question. Proceeds also buys the paper to print the NEWSLETTER where residents can read such exciting stories as “What is Resident Council?” and “Things We Learn from Our Grandkids.”

The NEWSLETTER provides me and others a monthly outlet to write such informative stories or biographies of residents or selected staff members. Birthdays are listed as well as welcoming notices of new staff members. Seriously the most popular features are puzzles, jokes and word search items. Independence is valued, for we do not expect the administration to finance these efforts. Donna uses her wheels to deliver the monthly NEWSLETTER to all the residents.

A new and developing activity is a cooking class lead by Wynona. News and dessert to be continued!

This prompts me to list new titles, CHALLENGES for you with the thought of the MOTIVATOR, INCUBATOR, ENCOURAGER, and in the constructive sense: ENABLER, spontaneous activities which could grow into something more permanent. Those should be your new titles, your new roles. We need to be invited to EXPLORE, to test ideas. SPONTANEOUS ACTIVITIES!

So why not become a TOM SAWYER ACTIVIST? It's a new take on an old idea, getting friends and residents aware that their gifts and talents, their previous experiences are still useful. Valued, TREASURED!

I suggested two of them TREASURE TIME and Square Table Chats. These are just developing POSSIBILITIES. Treasure Time could be seen as an opportunity for individuals to present an enhanced, blended version of "Show and Tell, a step toward "Getting to Know You!"

One item pending is the story behind a treasured wedding picture, which hangs on a resident's wall. I share a picture of Alexis, my grand daughter, A TEACHER AND NEW MOTHER reading to my then 6 months old GREAT GRAND SON, to introduce this idea to our Resident Council meeting. As the CBS News feature says, "Everybody Has a Story." Knowing fellow residents creates a more home like atmosphere. One thing that is still lacking is truly active participation by the male contingent! We're working on it!

Tom Sawyer enlisted his friends to whitewash the fence. It was his task, but many hands and heads make lighter and more productive work. Guidance, encouragement, assistance when needed equals EMPOWERMENT.

From Athens, Greece, Emily, my grand daughter e-mailed a quotation that meant a great deal to me.

"Knowledge is power; a good librarian doesn't hoard it!" Then she listed several things I had taught her. I was amazed by these un-known lessons.

YES, EVERYBODY HAS A STORY!

The "Love" chapter in my book, Life Is A Four Letter Word is basically a devotional filled with personal experiences, original poems and scripture verses. The natural outgrowth of that is my involvement with the Sunday Church services and co-

leadership in the weekly activity called CHRISTIAN STORIES. I supply copies of hymns and their history, how they came to be written, for example. If it is a well known hymn we may even sing a verse. Then Becky brings a brief story of her choosing. We don't consult before the event, but always they complete and enrich, support the other's contribution to the program. Other residents are invited to add comments if they wish.

Tom Sawyer's fence was whitewashed, but you will notice our fence is BLUE, not just ordinary whitewash—you can enhance the events and still please, EMPOWER the efforts with hollyhocks and other unique splashes. We are here long term, so build on our strengths. Allow us to share with others. Enrich our experiences. I encourage you, even CHALLENGE you.

EMPOWERMENT is rewarding. Be an EMPOWERING ACTIVIST!
Everyone can benefit. A CONTRIBUTING resident is a HAPPIER RESIDENT!

Seek out your Donna, Charlene and others. They may be called Margaret or Frances or even Sam or Pablo. Seek them out and EMPOWER them. I challenge you:

Be an EMPOWERING ACTIVIST!