



Crossing the Bridge

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*"Sometimes you find yourself in the middle of nowhere;
and sometimes, in the middle of nowhere, you find yourself."*

~ www.rocksnosaltmommy.com

As far back as I can remember, I have always had a fascination and curiosity with bridges; all types. Growing up in western New York, my brother and I loved running through open fields and meadows finding as many bridges possible. And, of course, we would cross each one playing out our afternoon excursions in full childhood delight! We would pretend to be sole survivors, *standing strong*, and claimed each found structure as our very own. Many a dream was fulfilled on these long summer days. Ah, the joy and pleasure of being a child!

Needless to say, anywhere that I travel, I am always on the lookout for a bridge! The above-posted photograph was taken by my wife as we traveled across the beautiful southwest section of the United States. We enjoy spending time looking at different antique shops throughout our travels, and this photograph was prominently displayed on one of the

antique dealer's tables we visited that day. "Stunning," was my immediate response! "Just look at this bridge and all the beautiful surrounding details. Certainly, this bridge gets all the attention that it needs." Bridges not only intrigue me, but remind me of what I do as a Recreation/Activity Professional; helping seniors learn to *cross bridges* and *stand strong*; ready to face each day with determination and a smile!

Many of our residents have given up with regards to their dreams; dreams that have never been reached or fulfilled. We all can attest to the simple fact that life was never meant to be easy. It's a continuous struggle, with many lows and highs. As we age, the more we recognize that hardships, even misfortunes, are sometimes unavoidable; each situation part of life's journey. But, there is a rainbow hidden behind the storm cloud. Even though we can't elude these storm clouds, we can learn how to weather them and come out shining. And this is where we, Recreation/Activity Professionals enter the picture!

William H. Thomas states, "Those of us who care about nursing homes recognize the need for bridges to connect current practice with a future that delivers a dramatically improved Quality of Life for residents. *Bridge builders* must be well acquainted with both sides of a river before construction begins. Successful nursing home reform requires both a clear understanding of our current shortcomings and a vision of what ought to be." (Life Worth Living: How Someone You Love Can Still Enjoy Life in a Nursing Home, VanderWyk & Burnham, 1996, p. 27). As I moved closer for a deeper look of the photograph, I realized, at that very moment, what *crossing and standing strong* meant in relation to my professional work, and how these two powerful phrases affect our residents every day.

Many of the seniors that we serve have the desire and capability to become stronger persons. Our position, as Activity Professionals, is to help our residents positively focus on their leisure strengths and traits providing hope and spirit that make them flourish and feel successful! Supporting them with kindness and respect through difficult times affects not only their personal outlook and lifestyle choices, but strengthens the Resident-Activity Professional relationship that is crucial to healthy and happy community living. Barry Barkan, Founder of the Live Oak Project supports this stance; "An Elder is a person who is still growing, still a learner, still with potential and whose life continues to have within it promise for, and connection to the future. An Elder is still in pursuit of happiness, joy and pleasure, and her and his birthright to these remains intact. Moreover, an Elder is a person who deserves respect and honor and whose work it is to synthesize wisdom from long life experience and formulate this into a legacy for future generation." (Barry Barkan, The Live Oak Project).

Furthermore, "Our residents and their needs are the reasons you and the rest of the health care team are employed. Too often, adequate time is not spent by team members on identifying key sources of information about residents in order to provide quality care." (Susan E. Lanza, Essentials for the Activity Professional in Long-Term Care, Delmar Cengage Learning, 1997, p. 58). As each person crosses this magnificent bridge displayed above, our residents require our greatest attention to flourish and *stand strong*.

Standing Strong encompasses a two-fold mission: learning and moving forward. Each resident has a purpose and meaning to his/her life. Recreation/Activity Professionals facilitate and lend helping hands as residents seek their passion, vision and purpose for leisure enjoyment, pleasure and fulfillment of dreams. "The MacArthur Studies on Successful Aging tell us a great deal about what it takes to be productive in old age. Three factors stand out as promoting later-life productivity: health and overall ability to function; participation in friendship and other social relations and personal characteristics, such as being better educated and believing in one's ability to handle what life has to offer." (Rowe & Kahn, Successful Aging, Masterpiece Alliance Foundation, Inc., 1998, p. 173). All three factors from The MacArthur Studies are part of a resident's Quality of Life and reinforce what recreational programming is all about!

I discovered the following story on the Internet. I believe it captures the essence of what I hope you've gleaned from above. Residents deserve continuous, dedicated care and support, so they can successfully *cross* each bridge and *stand strong* no matter what adversity comes their way. Giving freely to others, so that they in turn, learn to give with joy and build bridges for others is an essential role of the Activity Professional.

Building Bridges

~ Source Unknown

Once upon a time two brothers shared adjoining farms. For over 40 years of they worked side by side, sharing equipment and helping each other out whenever needed. Then one day a rift developed. It began with a small misunderstanding and it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by months of angry silence.

One day the eldest brother, Pete, was out in his fields when a ute pulled up. Out jumped a man who approached Pete carrying a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days of work" he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs I could do for you?"

"Well, yes I do," said Peter. "See that creek down there, it's the border between my brother's farm and mine. My brother keeps it nice and deep to stop me from setting one foot on his beloved farm. Well I'll oblige him. I want you to take that timber over there by the barn and build me a new fence, a real tall one, so I don't have to look over at my stinkin' brother and his farm no more."

The carpenter was glad to have the work, "No worries mate. I understand. Just point me to your post-hole digger and I'll get the job done."

So the carpenter set about working. Meanwhile farmer Pete drove into town to the cattle auction. When he returned at sunset he was shocked to see what the carpenter had done. There was no fence. Instead the carpenter had built a bridge and walking across it was Pete's younger brother. He held out his hand and spoke to his brother, "Pete after all I've done to you these past few weeks I can't believe you'd still reach out to me. You're right. It's time to bury the hatchet."

The two brothers met at the middle of the bridge and embraced. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder. “No, wait! Stay a few days. I’ve a lot of other projects for you,” said farmer Pete. “I’d love to stay on,” the carpenter said, “but I have more bridges to build.”



“Don’t let the fear of the time it will take to accomplish something stand in the way of your doing it. The time will pass anyway; we might just as well put that passing time to the best possible use.”

~ Earl McKnight