

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: INTERGENERATIONAL PHOTO-NARRATIVE PROJECT

Hello, everyone. My thanks to Uyen Mai, the student organizer of this amazing project, who is reading these brief remarks on my behalf. My name is Johanna Shapiro, I am a professor emerita in the Department of Family Medicine and, with my colleague Dr. Tan Nguyen, who will be addressing you in a moment, I had the privilege of serving as the faculty co-advisor for the Intergenerational Photo-Narrative Project.

I'm sure that Uyen and her colleagues have explained the general parameters of this project, its goals and its methods, and what was learned. I wanted to underscore a couple of aspects about this project that I found especially remarkable. First was the effects of its intergenerational aspect. The project brought together people who, whether through age or illness or both, were closer to the ends of their lives than to their beginnings; and young undergraduates, whose lives we hope stretch almost infinitely in front of them. From this intersection, both groups learned invaluable lessons. For the residents at Regents Point and the patients enrolled in the VITAS Hospice program, they saw that the stories of their lives mattered, to themselves, to their families, but also to young people just starting out on their healthcare paths. The sense of meaning and purpose that the people sharing their stories acquired was a precious gift. From the student perspective, hearing about the experiences, adventures, trials and tribulations, hope, love, and resilience that informed the lives of the people they interviewed provided much life wisdom and the reassurance that life is not always easy but it is always well worth living.

The other precious aspect of this project was that it was rooted in storytelling, through photographs and narratives. Many scholars have argued that we *are* our stories, that we understand and give meaning to our lives by the stories we tell about them. Telling their stories to the students helped participants remember that their lives were not simply one thing happening after another, but were comprised of moments of joy, sorrow, hilarity, tough decisions and satisfying resolutions that were sewn together in a unique narrative. Students, most of whom are planning careers in the health professions, realized how important it is to locate people within their lived experiences; and saw that a person-centered approach in healthcare is fundamentally grounded in being willing to receive the stories of others.

This is a project of great and poignant beauty. I am deeply thankful to the directors and staff at Regents Point and VITAS, who worked tirelessly with students to train and prepare them so that they would have the necessary skills to interact with compassion and empathy toward the often vulnerable people they were interviewing. I'm also thankful to the students who devoted so much time and effort in bonding with participants and listening to their stories. I'm especially grateful to Uyen who in the midst of a pandemic refused to relinquish her vision for this project and somehow through tenacity of spirit brought it to fruition. I hope you all enjoy and learn from this exhibit.