

Seniors explore their past in memoir workshop

By Danielle McCrea, Las Vegas Sun

Five women sit in the quiet upstairs wing of a church, in a high-ceilinged room that serves as a computer lab, desktop computers sitting on rows of long tables. They take turns reading aloud from papers handwritten and typed with intimate stories of their past.

Linda Coble, 73, grey hair falling onto a thick flannel shirt, teases the room with a family secret involving her father. She alludes to homes for unwed mothers, child abuse and domestic violence. She doesn't disclose details but promises to write it all down so her children will know the truth.

Christie Haynes, 96, her voice shaky, shares a story of a family tradition of going "pine-nutting" in White Pine County. When her children were growing up, they would collect pine nuts after the frost had opened up cones on the trees and bring them home in a gunny sack to roast in the open stove. She passes around black-and-white family photos taken from 1906 to 1920.

Ann Marshall, 71, with curly blonde hair and bright eyes popping behind smile lines, shares a trick on how to draw out memories. She'd found a moon calendar online to check the sky from a night in July 1967, the night she drove her boyfriend's car – a 1963 white convertible Corvette – into a ditch on the French countryside. The calendar confirmed her memory of the "very, very dark" night.

The women are attending a weekly memoir-writing workshop. Some have been coming for months, others for only a week or two.

The "Life Stories" workshop, launched in 2010, is designed to

inspire the members of the older generation to put their most precious memories, good and bad, to paper. Many write for their families, others to tell first-person perspectives of history, and some for therapy, to cope with hard memories and make sense of the present.

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