

# Journaling opens up great family dialogue

**M**y grandmother, who is 87 years old, was in the Women's Army Corps.

One of my favorite stories that she tells about her time in the service is when she and some of the other women she was serving with went to church on Christmas Eve.

As the story goes, the girls had a pact that no matter their religion, they would head over to Mass on the day before Christmas.

One year, while they were at church, the barracks were bombed. My grandmother maintains that if they were not at church, surely some of the women would have been injured, if not killed.

My grandmother was a woman before her time. She took the words "and obey" out of her marriage vows. She had a career, joined the service, and caused a lot of trouble when she was young.

She has a lot of great stories that I want to preserve for my children. So, when I found out about the journaling class at Leeza's Place at Provena Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet, I signed up my grandmother, my mother and myself



**Dawn Aulet**  
Around Town

The four-week journaling class was great for a number of reasons.

Leeza's Place has always had a special place in my heart. The facility serves mostly caregivers of Alzheimer's patients, but it really has a place for anyone.

Although I never dealt with Alzheimer's before, my mother has multiple sclerosis, which impairs her memory. Then, earlier this year, my grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and dementia.

I hoped the class would get the two of them talking, writing and remembering.

What ended up happening was that for four weeks, every

Thursday morning, my grandmother, mother, youngest son and I would go to Leeza's Place and talk about our stories.

Then, we would drop off my son at preschool and go out to lunch together.

In the car I always heard more of the wonderful stories.

In my years in journalism I have learned that everyone has a story. You might think you don't, but you do. This is especially true within families.

Those who research genealogies would agree how interesting it is to look at one's ancestors, what they did for a living, their interests and hobbies, and see how those things survived in families.

Through the time at Leeza's Place I learned that my grandmother had a number of brothers, none of whom survived past infancy. I learned that a wayward lamp nearly set my younger brother's room on fire when he was a child.

I learned more — about where my parents met and how my grandfather proposed to my grandmother.

In addition to writing down

our stories, **Kim Jackson**, the instructor and author of "Journaling your Life," encouraged us to bring in photos.

I saw a photo of my uncle; it showed how much my youngest son really does look like him.

I saw photos of my mother as a young girl and one of my grandmother and her sisters as young adults.

The journaling class is really a venue to encourage thinking, talking and writing about stories that are important to families.

Of course, we want our loved ones to stay around forever, but they cannot. At least with their stories, part of who they were lives on for current and future generations to enjoy.

And for my family, we not only built three memory books, but on four Thursdays in November we built memories.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KIM JACKSON

**Kim Jackson (standing, right) assists Dawn Aulet's family — in a journaling session. With Dawn are (from left) son Nathaniel, mother Mary Michi, and grandmother Marilyn Donovan.**