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Nursing students learn from elderly patients

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BY [DUAA ELDEIB](#) Staff Writer

When Lauren Hennigan asked Helen Lesiecki what her hopes for the future were, the 83-year-old laughed.

"At this age?" she quipped.



Saint Xavier University nursing student Lauren Hennigan, 21, of Chicago's Mount Greenwood community, interviews Smith Village resident Helen Lesiecki, 83, on Monday as part of the nursing program's Reminiscing Project. (Brett Roseman/SouthtownStar)

Hennigan, a 21-year-old St. Xavier University junior from Chicago's Mount Greenwood community, was one of about 35 nursing students who interviewed residents of Smith Village Monday as part of the program's Reminiscing Project.

The goal is for the students to interact and gain insight into the lives of the elderly through the window provided by the residents of the retirement community in Chicago's Beverly community, described SXU nursing professor Peg Gallagher.

"The literature says if students have early positive experiences with older adults, they're more interested in working in those

areas," Gallagher said. "We need more nurses in gerontology with the population of baby boomers getting older."

Connecting through stories is a tool students can use in the field, nursing professor Suzanne Kimble said.

Gwen Perini, a 21-year-old student from Alsip, fought back tears as she listened to 72-year-old Catherine Flynn.

"I was really scared before I got here," Perini said. "Of course I've learned about all of this stuff in school, but to hear about it from a someone and see how it affected their life, it helps me grow."

These are snippets of their stories:

- Helen Lesiecki, 83, lived in Evergreen Park for 35 years.

"My sisters and I bought our parents the first TV in our family. It was a 12-inch TV for their 25th anniversary (in 1949)."

Two years ago, Lesiecki's children bought her a laptop. She spends mornings sending e-mails, doing research or shopping on amazon.com.

"The development of the atom bomb was scary. I still am ambivalent about it to this day. It was mind-boggling that so many hundreds of thousands of people were killed in one blast. I'm aware the reason for the bomb was to end the war, but what a way to end it."

- Catherine Flynn, 72, spent 23 years in Chicago's Marquette Park neighborhood and five years in Tinley Park.

"There was a Nazi store on 71st Street. They would hand free things out the kids as a way to get them in the store. When my son came home with a T-shirt, I marched him right back with it."

- Virginia Dwyer, 92, lived in Chicago's Beverly community for 40 years.

"I was raised in the Depression. I was one of eight. We always had enough to eat because my dad never missed a day of work and my mom worked miracles with a pound of ground beef. A lot of my friends were poor, but we didn't know any better. We were all in the same boat."

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