**A DIGITAL JOURNEY BACK TO THE 20th CENTURY**

by Brian Norris

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When I first became involved, as a teenager, with community projects with the Toc H charity in the 1960s, I never imagined that 60 years later at 78 I would be using digital media to connect with older people, including those living with dementia, in communities all over the UK and beyond. The difference is that we are using archive films and newsreels to time travel back to the 20th century to trigger memories that encourage conversations, with family, friends and neighbours and across generations.

Our project started in 2014 with two years of research running reminiscence sessions showing the films in care homes and Memory Cafes across Cornwall. The enthusiasm of the audiences and very positive feedback from organisers lead us to set up the non-profit Living Memories C.I.C. to create a series of Living Memories DVDs with accompanying printed Reminiscence Guides. These DVDs were Finalists in the UK Nursing Times Awards and are ideal for use one-to-one or in groups where WiFi is unavailable.  
  
Having seen the success of the DVDs, NHS and care home executives then asked us if we could develop an online reminiscence service offering easily accessible archive films. So I spent several years searching for a suitable technology, which I finally discovered just as Covid lockdown arrived in 2020. As a result, for the next two years we spoke to and received amazing support and license agreements from key UK archive collections, including Reuters, Imperial Wars Museums, Beaulieu National Motor Museum and many others.

We then created a small team, working virtually over two years, to download almost 3000 archive and newsreel titles and related metadata and then upload each one to our new interactive Living Memories Online streaming platform. On uploading each title to the platform we also converted the speech to text so that we could offer subtitles for users with hearing impairment.

During 2022 we spent hundreds of hours trialling the technology of our new [Living Memories Online](https://livingmemories.imagencloud.com) archive film streaming service in a selection of care homes across the UK. A 5-minute example of one of those trials of a reminiscence group in action at a care home in Tavistock, Devon, can be viewed at: <https://livingmemories.imagencloud.com/record/2550>.

Our platform can be used at home and in Memory Cafes, care and residential homes, hospitals, Community Health & Wellbeing Hubs, church and community groups, etc..

The feedback that we receive from older people who participate in the reminiscence groups and those who run them is really heartwarming, with conversations about the memories triggered often lasting for weeks.

The benefit of subscribing to Living Memories Online (£10 per month or £108 per year inc VAT) is that it can be used on all digital devices and in any location. This meant that when I was in hospital recently for surgery I was able to show films on my mobile phone and then have a personal reminiscence session with a patient in the next bed who lives with early-stage dementia.

A subscriber to the platform can save their favourite archive films to their own Collection and it is also possible to email that Collection to another subscriber, who might be a friend or relation living elsewhere in the UK or around the world. We have also held a trial international online reminiscence session between residents in a care home in Devon, UK and another in Vancouver, Canada.

We are also finding that there is interest in using the platform in schools and for home education about the 20th century, as well as helping the recovery of older patients who have had brain trauma.

We shall shortly activate new aspects of the platform which will enable us to upload and present recorded video and audio life stories. These can then, with permission, be shared across generations and communities.

If you would be interested in using Living Memories Online and/or our DVDs and have any new ideas or questions, please get in touch with me:

Email: [brian.norris@livingmemories.io](mailto:brian.norris@livingmemories.io)

Phone: 01297 552358 or 079223363

Web: <http://www.livingmemoriesonline.com> and <https://livingmemories.imagencloud.com>