WKTV’s ‘VOICES’ oral history project collects West Michigan individuals’ narratives for the entire community’s benefit

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Pamela Benjamin came to the U.S. from Australia on a spousal visa only to discover she couldn’t even check out a library book.

Angelique Mugabekazi fled the atrocities of the Rwandan genocide when she was five years old, then struggled to survive daily life in a lawless refugee camp.

Grand Rapids native Donna Troost remembers a rubber shortage during World War II and the time her dad had to get permission from the government so that she could ride her bicycle to school.

Three women with very different backgrounds—and one thing in common: Each shared her unique journey with WKTV’s VOICES, a personal and family oral history project. The project’s mission is “to collect, share and preserve the narratives of people in our community”—of our lives; of people from all walks of life.

Other people who have shared their journeys so far include 87-year-old twin sisters, a labor organizer, an Army veteran, two ArtPrize artists, and a trailblazing woman entrepreneur. More stories are scheduled for sharing as people sign up on the project’s website at wktvvoices.org.
A free public service, **VOICES** travels throughout the West Michigan region to encourage neighbors, friends and family to tell their stories—the narratives that make us human—of our lives, experiences, sorrows, triumphs and tragedies. We all benefit from knowing each other’s background; the shared bond that helps us build community.

**VOICES** offers a comfortable, mobile video recording studio with a relaxed atmosphere, and utilizes high-tech video and audio equipment to capture the narratives for posterity. Interviews usually take place between two people who know and care about each other. These can be friends, family, or mere acquaintances. Any topic may be explored, whether a specific event in a person’s life, a childhood memory, a family tragedy—no subject is off limits.

**VOICES** is the perfect vehicle for collecting stories from retirement communities, schools or similar organizations where people are motivated and interested in preserving their memories for posterity. It’s a great way to commemorate significant milestones, enrich relationships, and connect with people who are important to your organization.

Oral history—the collection and study of individual histories, experiences of disasters, important events or everyday life—is a tradition as old as civilization itself. Using audiotapes, videotapes, or transcriptions of planned interviews, oral history strives to obtain information from different perspectives, most of which cannot be found in written sources. Some academics consider oral history akin to journalism as both are committed to uncovering truths and compiling narratives about people, places, and events.

Those who step inside **VOICES**’s 1958 Airstream trailer—outfitted as a mobile studio—are welcomed into an inviting atmosphere to sit back, relax, and have a conversation. All **VOICES** conversations are audio- and video-recorded to provide participants with a link to each conversation and for possible airing on Channel 25 in Wyoming, Kentwood and Gaines Township (U-Verse Channel 99).
The second Saturday of each month, VOICES parks at Marge’s Donut Den at 1751 28th St SW, Wyoming, MI for ‘Second Saturdays at Marge’s’.

VOICES participants find the experience valuable and gratifying. Read and listen to people’s stories online on our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/wktvvoices/ and visit http://wktvvoices.org for more information and important links.

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