

*Peacemaking and Oral History:  
The Art of Capturing Memory through Spoken Word*

**2010 Peacemaking Conference**  
“Re-Membering Peace: Still the Believers’ Calling.”  
Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu  
August 25-29, 2010

**Saturday Morning (9am-11am): Artistic Expression Panel (large group)**

1. Show 3 minutes of DVD
2. Introduction of Self
3. Introduce Oral History and workshop

“Black Presbyterians: The Legacy Series” was produced in 2008 when I served as the Associate for the Office of Black Congregational Enhancement at the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, KY. It was intended to be a 9 part series detailing the service of African American Presbyterians and African American institutions over several decades. [talk about George Byrant and the immediacy in getting this project underway.]

This was the first DVD to be produced. There are 3 15-minute segments to this DVD: Stories of oppression, Movement, and Lives of Legacy. The series was to be a living legacy detailing as much information as possible from various individuals using the method of Oral History. As most of us know, oral history is “the living memory of the past. It is the capturing of memories through interviews wherein we get to hear the direct accounts of history through the perspectives of the men and women who experienced the event(s). We listen to understand how they made meaning out of life and the events as they unfolded around the interviewees.

I believe that everyone has a story to tell about his or her own life, which offers invaluable material for listeners. It makes no difference if our oral history project is one about family history, school districts, ethnic groups – getting a first hand perspective always makes a historical event come alive. Black Presbyterians had a story to tell and using the technique of oral history, this office listened to them tell us what it meant to be peacemakers in the midst of oppression. We listened to these men and women explain to us how they worked to be instruments of peace, justice, and reconciliation at a time when in this country, African Americans knew “no peace, nor any justice.”

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The hope was to create an Oral History project that would:

- Provide a space for African American Presbyterians to explore their identity
- Be prophetic and serve as a witness to the world and Church
- Celebrate the cultural, educational, theological, and peacemaking work of African American Presbyterians
- Educate other Presbyterians and the world about the important roles that African American Presbyterians had in shaping policy, ministry, mission, and peace
- And provide an encounter with history that could lead to a transformative experience in the life of the listener.

Today's workshop will explore the uses of Oral History for individuals and congregations. If you have a project that you are working on, interested in, or just want to learn the basics of starting an oral history project, please join us in this workshop.

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**Saturday Afternoon (2 hours): Artistic Expression Workshops (smaller groups)**

*Artists will offer a 2 hours workshop on the use of their particular medium for peacemaking.*

**My focus:**

**Workshop**

To truly understand another person, one must hear his or her story. Oral history is a form of storytelling and the art of capturing oral history is important for it allows a person to speak to his or her participation in life in his or her own words. Using their memories and spoken words, historical events come alive. Oral history also provides the opportunity to begin to understand the perspectives of others and to hear the stories of communities that have been marginalized and silenced. This workshop will explore the benefits of using oral history and the creative ways in which a person's account can be used to place historical events in context.

**Possible interviews:**

1. Do you remember a spanking you received as a child? How did it make you feel?
2. Do you remember your first peacemaking conference? What was the most memorable experience you had there (or at this conference if it is your first conference)?
3. Name the transformative (or one transformative) social, cultural, political, or ecclesiastical event or actions that started you on the path as a peacemaker.

A 'time line' can be a good way to spark ideas for oral-history interviews. To make a time line, take a ruler and a long sheet of paper and draw a horizontal line. Put a starting date at the left end of the line: for example, the date of your grandfather's birth. Dot other dates along the line, world events as well as family events. You can then use the time line to think about stories of your family you'd like to hear and the history that they lived.

Working with a team of classmates, find and interview one long-time resident for each decade--the 70's, 60's, 50's, 40's, 30's. Ask for memories of local teen hangouts, popular music and dances, customs, fads and so on.