



Day in, Day out: Reminiscence work in Monsall

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Reading Race, Collecting Cultures

Collections at the Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre



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Day in, Day Out: Reminiscence work in Monsall



The Roving Reader Files

I went to a **Dementia Friends** information session the other day.
Have you been to one yet?

I learned that there really is more to dementia than losing your memory. People living with dementia can live well – provided others know a little about the condition and treat them with empathetic respect. The earliest memories are the ones that remain the longest. As I sat listening, I was struck by the thought that elderly people living with dementia might actually be storehouses of information about their distant pasts...



Maybe that's why I looked twice when I saw the title of a folder in the Centre's Manchester collection cabinet: ***Then and Now: a training pack for reminiscence work*** by Patricia Duffin (published 1992). Reminiscence work? I was intrigued.

Opening the folder, I discovered it was chock-full of fascinating resources. Training units, a case studies booklet, a beautiful A2 poster. But what most caught my eye was what looked like a jolly bright yellow brochure entitled ***Day In, Day Out. Memories of North Manchester from Women in Monsall Hospital***, edited by Duffin and Ailsa Cox. Published in 1985 and inserted with its more recent companions by an unknown hand, its pages brimmed with stories of times past. Based on taped conversations in the hospital's Wards 14 and 10, within it had been captured exchanges between women then aged in their 70s to 90s. Here preserved were authentic voices from a different era.

What changes these women had experienced! From life without a welfare state and workdays that seemingly had no end, to global war and profound economic depression (not to mention what seemed like centuries of washing and ironing) – they'd seen it all. "Blow me!" I thought. "Reading these words is like eavesdropping on eyewitness accounts of life going back decades and decades!"

This remarkable work had been published by The Gatehouse Project. Based in Miles Platting, Manchester, this pioneering organisation had been co-founded by Patricia Duffin in 1977, aiming to produce books written or taped by people with reading or writing difficulties. This aim was not easy to achieve. For example, the work for *Then and Now* was funded by The Government Inner Cities Programme. To produce *Day In, Day Out*, the team liaised with North Area Community Education in making the initial link with Monsall Hospital, which eventually enabled access to the wonderful ladies in Wards 14 and 10. Quite a process!

Now, I don't know whether our Monsall ladies were living with dementia, but nevertheless my mind went back to the session with Dementia Friends. Individuals should be perceived in terms of what they have been rather than the memories they have lost. In this respect, The Gatehouse Project had certainly taken a dementia-friendly approach. Over cups of tea, books were read aloud, photographs were pored over, clothes from the then Platt Fields Museum in Rusholme were even passed around. Practical communal ways of engaging the minds of those who might easily have been cast aside...

The Centre has numerous oral history collections which preserve the reminiscences of elders from a diverse range of ethnic communities. Their backgrounds are not the same – their memories differ, as do the keys to unlocking them. But where elders may be living with dementia, we would do well to remember the approach taken with the Monsall ladies in *Day In, Day Out*. It would help us value our elders for who they really are.

Then and Now: A training pack for reminiscence work by Patricia Duffin was published by The Gatehouse Project, Manchester, in 1992. Producing *Day In, Day Out. Memories of North Manchester from Women in Monsall Hospital* (published 1985 and edited by Patricia Duffin and Ailsa Cox) was part of the work encompassed by the project represented by *Then and Now*. The Centre houses numerous oral history collections featuring the memories of elders from a variety of communities. You're welcome to come in and take a look. Dementia Friends is a national initiative run by the Alzheimer's Society, and one of the University of Manchester's social responsibility flagship programmes.