



Press Release

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New Documentary Shows Benefits of Communicating with Those Who Have Alzheimer's Disease: Reveals Ways to Remain Connected

CHICAGO (August 15, 2007) -- With more than 5 million Americans affected by Alzheimer's disease today, and that number rapidly growing as Baby Boomers age, a new documentary, *There is a Bridge*, reveals different ways of communicating with those who have dementia and explores how these emotionally profound relationships can change our lives.

There Is a Bridge, which premieres on public television stations nationwide beginning September 1, 2007 (check local listings), challenges conventional notions of people with Alzheimer's as "unreachable" and this disease as "the first of two deaths." Interviews with preeminent thinkers and poignant footage of family members, care partners, and schoolchildren building emotionally rich relationships with people with dementia illuminates depths of memory and personal identity not erased by Alzheimer's disease.

Hosted by former United States Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, *There Is a Bridge* explores the deep, complex nature of human solidarity by weaving together mental health, psychology, art, philosophy and education to highlight individuals and path-breaking programs reaching out to elders affected by Alzheimer's.

Many mistakenly associate the diminishment of memory with the loss of self. However, no degree of dementia deprives people of the need for human contact, as this documentary reveals. "Today, growing awareness about the remaining capacities of severely disoriented seniors is inspiring us to communicate with them on more meaningful terms, regardless of their cognitive impairment," notes Michael Verde, founder and president of Memory Bridge: Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory. He adds, "This approach to listening, learning, and loving offers families and friends of people with dementia a way to stay connected to people with dementia until the very end of their lives." By staying connected with loved ones, Verde explains, we stay connected with significant parts of ourselves. "People with dementia," he says, "can remind us of aspects of our own humanity that *we* are forgetting."

Josh Dorman, a nationally recognized artist, explores in his paintings the rich internal world of elderly people with advanced dementia. Dorman's work attempts to capture in color, symbol, and line the inner lives of five seniors in the later stages of Alzheimer's disease. His visually and emotionally arresting paintings reveal our need to learn the art of listening.

There Is a Bridge illustrates how anyone, with love and patience, can bridge the communication gap with an Alzheimer's sufferer. The film captures astonishing interactions from a trailblazing program that pairs junior high and high school students with elderly residents in Chicago's long-term care facilities.

Another segment captures a series of profound exchanges between friends and family and elders suffering from varying degrees of dementia.

In one of the film's most moving and memorable moments, 87-year-old Gladys Wilson and Naomi Feil, an internationally renowned expert in reaching people with Alzheimer's disease (she founded Validation Therapy), have a dramatic breakthrough brought about by compassionate touch, behavioral mirroring, and a deep connection between patient and practitioner.

Other segments highlight the experiences of Blas Ortiz, a former opera singer who continues to communicate through the language of music; Southern belle Lula Pearl Jackson, who comes mirthfully alive when asked about Kentucky, racehorses, and her male suitors; and teenagers who ask animated 90-year-olds about their former boyfriends and spouses.

In a stirring close, Robert Pinsky reads from his translation of a Dante poem about those dimensions of identity that persist beyond the loss of memory.

The film features the song "Silent House" by The Dixie Chicks. The ballad, from their double platinum album from 2006, *Taking the Long Way*, celebrates how the power of love's memory can triumph over the destructive impact of Alzheimer's disease.

Produced in 2007 by Michael Verde, founder and president of Memory Bridge: Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory, and directed by Ted Kay, *There Is a Bridge* is supplied by TMK Productions and presented by American Public Television through the Exchange service at no cost to public television stations nationwide.

There Is a Bridge is available on DVD for \$34.95 plus \$4.00 shipping and handling. To order, call: 888-616-6767, or order online at: www.memorybridge.org.

Note to Media: Clips from the documentary are available for viewing at: www.thereisabridge.org. A DVD of the entire documentary is available for review by contacting Stephen L. Davidow, 708-284-2300, or sldavidow@ameritech.net. A complete media kit also is available with background and photos of the individuals and programs highlighted in the documentary. Please visit www.thereisabridge.org for the most up-to-date list of stations airing *There is a Bridge*.

About American Public Television:

For 45 years, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation's public television stations. APT distributes more than 300 new program titles per year and has 10,000 hours of programming in its library. It is responsible for many public television milestones including the first HD series and the 2006 launch of the Create channel featuring the best of public television's lifestyle programming. APT is known for its leadership in identifying innovative, worthwhile and viewer-friendly programming. It has established a tradition of providing public television stations with program choices that strengthen and customize their schedules, such as *JFK: Breaking the News*, *Battlefield Britain*, *Globe Trekker*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Great Museums*, *Jacques Pépin: Fast Food My Way*, *America's Test Kitchen From Cook's Illustrated*, *Broadway: The Golden Age*, *Lidia's Family Table*, *California Dreamin' – The Songs of The Mamas & the Papas*, *Rosemary and Thyme*, *P. Allen Smith's Garden Home*, *The Big Comfy Couch*, *Monarchy With David Starkey*, and other prominent documentaries, dramatic series, how-to programs and classic movies. For more information about APT's programs and services, visit APTonline.org.

About Memory Bridge: Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory:

Everyone, regardless of their degree of mental sharpness, needs companionship, not only to physically survive but also to live emotionally. Memory Bridge creates programs that connect people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias to family, friends, and other people in their local community. We also create programs that reveal to the general public the depths of memory that dementia does not erase. Our goal is to create a global community of people who are learning to listen to people with dementia for what they have to teach us about our own humanity.

Since 2004, Memory Bridge has created an interview guide used by the Library of Congress Veteran's History Project; launched an art exhibit called Mapping Lives: the Art of Listening; designed and implemented an award-winning curriculum and school program called the Memory Bridge Initiative; and produced the documentary *There is a Bridge*.