

Visual Memoirs at SAGE

They came to class with giant tote bags and wheeled carts, massive plastic bins, bulging plastic bags and overflowing storage boxes. They carried glue guns, scissors, rocks, fabric, paper, cabinet cards, Girl Scout badges, baby shoes, tintypes, World War II medals, games pieces, canning equipment, and just about anything else they could load up for the four week SAGE class at UMPI in Presque Isle.

Called VISUAL MEMOIRS, this class was a rather unique offering at SAGE, as Marliee Morgan said, "not much lecture but lots of hands on". The course was created by Pam Crawford, a new SAGE member who had taken a written memoirs class at SAGE last spring. A self-taught artist and recently retired teacher, she realized then that many people who do not wish to write memoirs might well enjoy creating a 3-D memoir instead, using collected memorabilia to do so.

Crawford provided examples of visual memoir pieces she had created in the past: art quilts, jewelry, assemblages, fabric books, altered books, and even an altered tambourine. Students were encouraged to determine how they might best depict the memories they wanted to share via art and to develop a piece over the duration of the class.

Course participants were given several exercises to generate memoir project ideas, among them creating a life line and then a mind map of ideas for designing a particular project. Since each student would be creating something unique and very personal, a general supply list was provided but each student then rummaged through lifelong collections, stored boxes of family heirlooms, school yearbooks, dusty photo albums, and even a sister's house to find the items most useful for their personal memoirs.

We all have stories to tell, so everyone raided their past for the raw materials that would become art asking the viewer to "Remember me!" Many of the projects created in class memorialize special people, events, vacations, locations, and experiences. The collected mementos, turned into family heirlooms, tell interesting and unique stories, even when there are no words.



Mary Godfrey of Limestone, enrolled because she "liked the whole memory thing." She explained that her "four children are into memories, too", and that in creating assemblage boxes for two friends she will gift them with her memories of their special times shared over many years of friendship.



Adelma O'Bar, who hails from Caswell, does a lot of canning during the growing season, so she decided to create an assemblage using a canning jar box filled with the tools the trade - canning jars, jar lifters, slotted spoons, faux fruit, and more. The finished piece reminds her of her volunteer work at a local food pantry as well, since she cans hundreds of jars of jam each year to put in holiday food baskets.



Charlene Buzza of Presque Isle says "I took the class because I wanted to make visual memoirs of my father for my children. After collecting his military records, medals, photos and more I realized it was too massive a project to complete in class, but I was so happy just to get started on it. Now I know what else to hunt for to complete the project." Charlene was not idle for one minute in class. She also got a start on her retirement scrapbook, a record of all the places she has traveled since retiring, including the Quebec Winter Festival, a Red Sox game, and camping at Daisey Pond.



Marilee Morgan, also of Presque Isle, explains that "At SAGE I usually sign up for everything, but this year I was a little pickier. By the process of elimination, this class remained on my list. I had no idea what to expect but after the first class ideas kept coming to mind - and I started to collect all kinds of things from my childhood to create my visual memoir."



Penny Kern, another Presque Isle resident, signed up for the course after hearing about it in the spring memoir writing class. "As the unofficial family historian I have to figure out what to do with all the stuff I have inherited - things like my grandmother's shoes, the milk jug my father carried to school every day, hundred of cabinet card photos of my parents and grandparents . . ."

Penny also worked on documenting the history of Girls Scouts in the region, with the goal of making the collection available to the local historical society when it is completed.



Pat Graham, of Mapleton, took the class because she needed motivation to sort family photos, memorabilia, and the "stuff " one collects over the years. She created a document box and a colorful Christmas box in which she will store special mementos of the holidays - greeting cards, small gifts, handmade ornaments, and photos.

Maureen Hamilton, from Presque Isle, took the class "because it sounded like fun. I wanted to memorialize something - to use all the old junk I have collected for years! I want to make more box assemblages to organize all my junk, to keep it all as a way to remember good times and good places." Maureen recreated a very detailed beach scene from the area near a family home on a Maine island, the home that has been in her family for 5 or 6 generations.