

From Where I Sit

by Suzanne Fried, M.A., MFT | Clinical Director, Lakeside Park

Welcome to the quarterly newsletter of Pacific Institute and Happy New Year to all.

Each issue will feature musings from the Clinical Director of each site as well as creative work from our interns: writing, visual art, or photography.

With the start of the new year I have been thinking about what it has been like for me to be Clinical Director at AgeSong at Lakeside Park. I have been here five months and the staff, the elders who live here, management and, of course, my interns, have all touched my heart.

The work is demanding. Time flies by when I am on the floor and when I am with my interns or in management meetings; but time seems to slow down when I sit and connect one-and-one with the residents – this disparate group of individuals that the Divine has brought together at Lakeside Park. In her book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Rachel Remen, M.D. writes about “being seen by the heart”; and indeed this is what it means to be fully present with another person. This is the core of what the interns, staff, and all who work here are striving to do with the people who reside at Lakeside. Whether the residents converse in present time, with word-salad that may, or may not, at time lapse into a full sentence, communicate solely with their eyes, mouths and bodies – I watch these interactions being received by my interns and in turn, responded to with their hearts. No small task when handling the constant need for repetition, meeting residents where they are, honoring who they were and who they are in this moment in time; as well as dealing with sudden outbursts of anger or confusion; listening to curses, seeing calm replaced by panic.

The work is heart-opening, heart-breaking; the work is truly soul work. Two souls meeting in present time and I often wonder who is serving whom, who is teaching whom, and ultimately what difference does it make? The core of Pacific Institute’s teachings, of presence, heart and “client”-centered therapy is unfolding in each encounter, moment by moment, day by day. It is how we all long to be met- having someone see us, truly see us, beyond labels, judgments, projections. It is about being present, being alive in the now. Come along and see what my interns see.

... Clinical Internship Staff ...

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In Their Own Words

written by Pacific Institute interns

Ginger by Sam Moglen, MFTI

During my time at Lakeside, I have been assigned to work with many residents but one in particular has touched me and taught me. I didn't really know what to expect when I began my internship. What would I talk about, how would I be with these people with forgetfulness? I soon found out how important it was to be with my residents, deeply listening to their life stories.

Ginger spent much of her late teens and early twenties "riding the lines" of the dancing circuit in the United States during the Great Depression. In later years, she taught dancing to children in New York City.

"You seemed to really enjoy your teaching, did you miss it when you retired?" I queried one day as we sat drinking tea in the lobby at Lakeside.

"Miss it? No, I don't miss it. I think teaching is more complicated now. Children are disrespectful, more broken families, harder to teach...No, I don't miss it." Yet she appears wistful when she responds to me. Rather than imposing my agenda on Ginger, I follow her lead, as if in a dance, because, after all that is really what "therapy" is, the dance between myself and those I am with, getting to know them and establishing connections; and in this world, it is not that different from any other setting I have worked in.

"So Ginger, you loved teaching dance – would you want to teach dance to the other residents here? I bet they would enjoy it."

"No, I have no interest in doing that. And anyway, it requires a special wood floor." She looks down at the carpeting beneath our feet. "Not this." I sat back, respecting her decision, then as almost an after thought I expressed my interest in tap dancing.

She looked surprised and said, "Sure I'd be happy to show you some basic techniques."

With that she got up, gracefully demonstrated some basic footwork, gestured to me and I began to mimic the taps of my toe, and the ball and heel of my foot. Then she began describing it all to me with such clarity and detail no one observing would ever guess that she had Alzheimer's. Her fond memories of dancing are so engrained, so much a part of who she still is that not even the disease can obscure her memories. My interest in her passion about dance has opened the pathway for us to communicate – she even waves when she sees me on the floor.



Where is home? by Ashley Stokke, PsyD Intern

On the second floor of Lakeside Park, resides one of the most humble and sensitive men I have had the privilege of knowing. He stands well-groomed, with slightly sloped shoulders, hands in his pockets; and just by looking at his eyes, one can feel the emotions that he is experiencing. I feel his worry and confusion. He approaches me one day and says in his slow, mild English accent, “I feel lost.” I struggle to find the right words to console this man but soon find that it is not consolation he is searching for, he simply needs someone to share his feelings with and to be present with him in the moment. A task that sounds so simple yet can be both challenging and heartwarming simultaneously. Most of the time, Mr. L wears an expression of worry or sadness but once in awhile, he will crack a smile that has the ability to brighten those around him.

Mr. L’s physicality is that of someone years younger than his 92 years of age yet he is mourning the loss of independence and agility that he once had before the signs of aging and forgetfulness set in – things I realize I have taken for granted in my own life. Perhaps his worry and sentiments are twofold, as the subject of his anxiety is often his 93-year-old wife who also lives with him in the same room at Lakeside Park. Mrs. L is a woman that he has adored and doted on for over six decades – something I cannot yet completely fathom in my young adulthood. I have so much to learn about love, loss, and the act of simply being genuine. I often watch as Mr. L sits next to his wife’s wheelchair, holds her hand, and looks at her with total devotion. This routine encounter for them often brings a gentle smile to my face. All I know is this couple has shown me so much about life and love. Both suffer from different forms of dementia and have forgotten many details about their own lives but they can never forget about each other and the feelings they share. Though the caregivers do a wonderful job of taking care of their residents, I believe it is Mr. L who has made sure that the emotional needs of his wife are met. When I first met Mr. L, he would often inquire about where his home was with frustration and anxiety. He and another intern placed a sticker on his and his wife’s room number. It is labeled, “Home.” Since then, he has not inquired about where his home is. It still resides there and every time I see it, I know that Mr. L came to the conclusion that it does not matter where “home” may be, but that he and his wife are together. Sometimes when I sit with just Mrs. L, I tell her how lucky she is to have such a loving and caring husband, for Mr. L is a true gentleman. A man who has lived 92 years and is still ready to tackle the next hurdle, as long as he has his cherished wife alongside him.

... Upcoming Events ...

Internship Open Houses

Friday, February 19th

3:00 -5:00 p.m.

Rooftop at Laguna Grove Care

624 Laguna Grove

San Francisco 94102

Tuesday, March 2nd

3:00 -5:00 p.m.

AgeSong Lakeside Park

468 Perkins Street

Oakland 94610

Sunday Morning Prayer Group

by Martha Lukaszewski, MFTI

It is Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. Two residents arrive at my small office. They park their walkers outside the door, come inside, and sit in the two armchairs beside my desk.

Cora Lee is a 91-year-old African-American woman who raised her children and grandchildren in Berkeley. She had a warm attachment to the young choir members as the organist and choir director at her church.

Emily, 93, is another proud African-American woman who was raised in the South. She had a wonderful marriage, and misses her husband who died 10 years ago.

Each week I try to find a psalm or passage from the Bible that might hold some special meaning for them and inspire all of us. We bow our heads and direct our prayers to God.

As she takes her turn at leading the prayer, Cora Lee's eyes are closed. As she speaks, I find myself connecting to my own God, the One who brings us all together in the here and now: all generations, diverse backgrounds, and all religions. I sit in awe and listen.

Cora Lee is very articulate and poetic as she gives an uplifting prayer to her God, with whom she has had a long-standing relationship. She is humble yet bold, asks for forgiveness and guidance in her dark times, and shows gratitude for the simplest of gifts that He has bestowed on her.

Sometimes we pray for another resident who is ill or in the hospital. We also pray for our friends and family members. I have found this Sunday morning ritual gives more access into the contemplation of one's own life and inner dialogue than the traditional therapeutic setting.

I have also brought in poetry by Maya Angelou for inspiration and they have loved every word of it.



When Emily was taken to the hospital, we prayed for her health and that she return soon. When she returned, she was a little weaker, but very appreciative of the prayers and energy sent her way. She seemed very happy, and maybe a little envious, about the news that Cora Lee would be moving back home in a few weeks.

On December 31st, Cora Lee moved back home. I miss her presence already. Today, I found out that Emily passed away peacefully in her sleep. I felt sad when I heard the news. As I reflect on her special contribution to Sunday morning prayer group, I know now that she too "is going home."

Pacific Institute is dedicated to teaching health care professionals and lay caregivers humanistic, process-oriented models for working with people in need of care and support.

We understand that a non-pathologizing, non-judgmental attitude towards people in need of help is as important for care to take place as is skill and expertise.

For more information, visit www.pacificinstitute.org or call 415-861-3455