

Building Community Through Stories

Robin Edgar Discovers Charlotte's Heart Through Memories of the Great Depression



Robin Edgar
Professional Writer/Storyteller

Web Site

www.robinedgar.com

At a Glance:

- Author of *In My Mother's Kitchen: An Introduction to the Healing Power of Reminiscence*
- Facilitator of reminiscence-writing workshops for personal growth and developing community connections
- As Arts and Science Council Artist-in-the-Workplace, helped Carolinas Medical Center publish its 20th-anniversary book of employees' memories
- Professional actress on stage and in film, educated at SUNY Stonybrook (theater major)
- Degree in communication, Florida Atlantic University
- Married to sculptor David Edgar, associate professor of art at UNCC
- Mother of three grown children who are artists and writers

ASC Individual Artist Grant Project:

For creating the nonfiction book *Personal Legacies: Surviving the Great Depression (Charlotte/Mecklenburg 1929-1939)* with photographs by Jennifer Crickenburger, for publication in August (CPCC Press), and an exhibit at the Charlotte Museum of History, opening September 30.

By Louise Barden

Robin Edgar initially planned to interview people who had lived through the Great Depression to find out what they had learned about how to gain financial success. She says she “went looking to see what was of value to own and invest in.

“But I discovered that what brought people through the Depression was the value system they had — sharing, community, the ability to pick themselves up and make do with what they had, and looking out for one another.”

It was not the first time her life had taken a surprising turn. After almost 30 years as an actress on stage and in film, she moved to Florida to care for her dying mother. The expected six months became two-and-a-half years. Edgar began writing full time.

Community Through Memory

After her mother's death, Edgar used an acting technique called “sense memory” to teach a writing course used as the basis for a book titled *In My Mother's Kitchen: An Introduction to the Healing Power of*

Reminiscence. Senses, she says, are tied to emotions that open pathways in the brain to memories. As Edgar taught the technique to others, she discovered that in telling their stories, people comprehended the memories' significance.

“Since the beginning of time, storytelling has been used to explain our existence, preserve cultural history and honor our ancestors,” Edgar says. “The repetition of these stories engenders a powerful connection to who we are and why we are here.”

After arriving here in 2003, Edgar started collecting Charlotteans' memories of the Great Depression. She says, “One common thread — in a society where we now move from one place to another, and where families scatter — was family and community. Their advice was, ‘Trust in God, share, don't buy what you don't have money for, work hard' ...”

Charlotte's Heart, ASC's Support

An ASC Regional Artist Project Grant made it possible to hire photographer Jennifer Crickenburger to create montages of her portraits of each storyteller combined with personal and public photographs.

Crickenburger says, “Robin is inspiring. She has a good way of talking to people to get them to open up and talk about their personal memories.”

The resulting book, *Personal Legacies: Surviving the Great Depression (Charlotte/Mecklenburg 1929-1939)*, is expected in August of this year from CPCC Press. It will include 25 representative stories from almost 90 interviews. A complementary exhibit will open at the Charlotte Museum of History on September 30, as well as a documentary produced with WTVI.

The museum's vice president for collections and exhibits, Kris Carmichael, says, “Robin has captured truly heartwarming stories that speak to every generation. They are stories of perseverance, creativity, faith and family. She has a passion for the project that makes it rewarding to work with her.”

Edgar hopes the exhibit will stimulate attendees to record their own stories. She says this project has made her feel a “real sense of the heart of Charlotte and where it's come from. You know that those community values are still here.” ❖

