

# Anne Basting

**TimeSlips: Creative Engagement in Dementia Care**  
Saturday, February 23, 2019

**Enchanting Aging:  
Inspiring Awe and Meaning in Late Life**  
Wednesday, February 27, 2019

University of Southern California



## ABOUT ANNE BASTING

- ◉ Anne Basting is a theatre artist, writer, and educator who works to embed the arts into long-term care, with a particular focus on people with cognitive disabilities such as dementia.
- ◉ She was named a MacArthur Fellow in 2016 for her visionary, alternative conception of aging, which “focuses on its possibilities as well as its challenges and views sustained emotional connections as critical to our well-being as we age” (MacArthur Foundation).
- ◉ Basting’s ideas and methodologies are changing the way people understand aging, and influencing caregiving practices for older people and people struggling with memory loss.
- ◉ One of Basting’s core insights is that the imaginative creation of new stories can be an enriching substitute for lost memories.
- ◉ She holds a PhD in theatre arts and is a professor of theatre at the Peck School of the Arts at UW-Milwaukee; founder of the nonprofit TimeSlips Creative Storytelling; and author of the books *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia*, *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture*, and *The Penelope Project: An Arts-Based Odyssey to Change Elder Care*.
- ◉ Basting’s latest project is *I Won’t Grow Up*, an intergenerational, creative exploration of the meaning and value of childhood, inspired by Peter Pan.

## ON ALZHEIMER’S AND MEMORY LOSS

Alzheimer’s is a progressive disease that begins with mild memory loss and can ultimately lead to the inability to carry on a conversation or respond to one’s environment. It is the most common type of dementia (a broad term describing a decline in memory, thinking skills, or social ability). In 2014, more than 5 million Americans were living with Alzheimer’s. The number is expected to triple to 14 million by 2060. Alzheimer’s mostly affects people over age 60, and the risk increases with age. Scientists do not fully understand what causes Alzheimer’s. There seems to be multiple causes, including age and family history. Growing evidence suggests that certain physical, mental, and social activities may reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s.

## ON IMPROVISATION

Improvisation is an important tool of the theatre artist. It refers to unplanned, unscripted dramatic activity. Improvisation can take the form of comedic improv of the type performed on *Saturday Night Live* or by groups like Second City and Upright Citizens Brigade; can be used as a practice in theatrical rehearsals, to discover new nuances of a character or story; and is often employed in theatrical training, to allow students to explore spontaneous imaginative and emotional responses. Improvisation centers on creativity, play, storytelling, collaboration, and saying “yes.”

## TIMESLIPS

“Rather than go to memory, and the expectation of memory, I would just shift and invite them to respond out of imagination in the moment.”  
—Anne Basting

When Anne Basting first started volunteering with Alzheimer’s patients, she tried doing improvisation activities based on reminiscence. But she soon realized there wasn’t much response, so she shifted gears. She tore an image of the Marlboro Man out of a magazine and asked the patients to tell her about him. It wasn’t long before they were telling imaginative stories.

TimeSlips is Anne Basting’s breakthrough project, an improvisational creative storytelling method in which older adults with cognitive impairment imagine stories and poems in response to prompts. The method not only activates their creativity and imagination, it provides a way to interact meaningfully with others and enjoy a rich social life.

In 2000, Basting created a theatrical production based on poems by residents in a Wisconsin care facility. She then developed TimeSlips into a formal therapy protocol. Over the last two decades, she has developed a series of theatre pieces collaboratively with elders, focusing on themes and issues specific to their different communities. In addition to engaging the patients, the performances raise awareness about the creative capacities and strengths of older people in general and people with dementia in particular, which helps to reduce stigma and ease isolation and loneliness.

The most well known of Basting’s TimeSlips theatrical projects is *The Penelope Project*, which emerged after Basting wondered if it would be possible to infuse TimeSlips into an entire care system. She wanted to “[use] the approach for community building on a larger scale.” *The Penelope Project* culminated in a professionally produced play that was staged site-specifically in different care facilities. Families, staff, volunteers, and others collaborated with the patients in its creation.

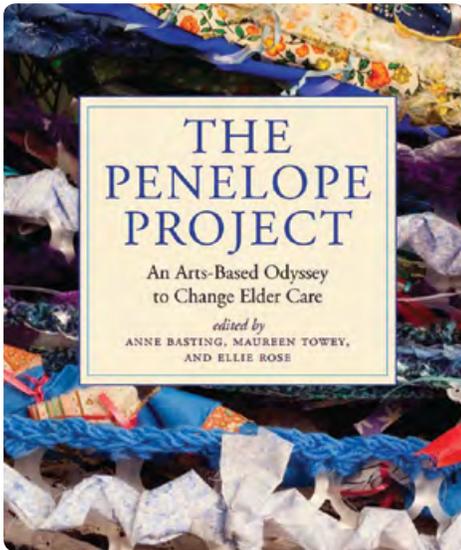
Today, Basting’s nonprofit TimeSlips Creative Storytelling offers online and in-person trainings in the TimeSlips approach to people around the world. The approach is designed to be easily taught to and used by anyone — all kinds of caregivers, housekeepers, neighbors, and anyone else seeking a new and enriching way to engage someone struggling with memory loss or other cognitive disabilities.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Why is it important to bring creativity and art into elder care and all care systems?
- Why do you think improvisation is so effective with patients struggling with cognitive disabilities like dementia?
- Anne Basting believes, “We cannot heal without story.” What do you think she means by this? Do you agree?
- How are memory and imagination similar? How are they different?

“I work to understand and transform aging from a time that we associate largely with tragedy and loss to one where we shift toward understanding it as a time of growth and possibility.”—Anne Basting





## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- 🕒 Anne Basting Online  
anne-basting.com
- 🕒 TimeSlips  
timeslips.org

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**KELSEY VUKIC** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journal articles, and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

Basting, Anne Davis. *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

**Doheny Memorial Library: RC521 .B376 2009**

Basting, Anne Davis. *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.

**Grand Depository: HQ1064.U5 B287 1998**

Basting, Anne Davis, Maureen Towey, and Ellie Rose. *The Penelope Project: an Arts-Based Odyssey to Change Elder Care*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016.

**Available online**

Cohen, Gene D. *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life*. New York: Avon Books, 2000.

**Doheny Memorial Library: HQ1059.4 .C58 2000**

Kay, Jon. *The Expressive Lives of Elders: Folklore, Art, and Aging*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018.

**Architecture and Fine Arts Library: N72.A33 E97 2018**

### DATABASES

AgeLine (EBSCO)

PsycINFO

Abstracts in Social Gerontology

### JOURNALS

*Art Therapy* (Online). Alexandria, Va: The American Art Therapy Association, 1983.

*Quality in Ageing and Older Adults* (Online). Hove, UK: Pier Professional, 2010.

### DVDS

Ellena, Eric, and Berna Huebner. *I Remember Better When I Paint*. DVD. New York, N.Y: Films Media Group, 2012.

**Leavey Library: LVDVD 3562**

