



Sharing Your Story

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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As a psychologist I have had interesting opportunities. This month I have been staying in northern Alberta doing crisis work. Firebag has a population of about 4,000 workers but none of them are permanent residents. They travel in and out of the dry camp from homes all over the world to accommodate their shift schedule.

Over the last six days I have been able to watch how the lives of these people interconnect and listen to their communication with each other.

It is obvious that some of the workers are from the same "hometown" and that their families have known each other for years. At the airport and on the shuttle buses that take them to their designated drop offs, they reminisce about the days gone by. Details about grandparents, school and times long gone are recounted back and forth with each person adding a memory that sparks yet another.

Some of the workers might have met because of their employment and when they see each other they offer the common greeting "How were your days off?" The reply offered tells tales of landscaping the yard, playing with the children or perhaps highlights of a trip to a holiday destination.

A third group of employees is obviously new and hasn't made the connections yet. They are fairly easy to spot because they are held up at airport check-in when their luggage is over the allowed limit, their dress does not match that of the more seasoned workers, or they just look a little nervous - not knowing what to do next. These are the people who need experience and time to build their relationships in the new setting.

Yes, everyone has a story. It is a story of growing up, living in a community, and finding their way to the oil sands employment. Their stories are laced with triumphs and losses, hurts and healings, as well as the bonds that they have formed with others over the years. Even if they have travelled half way around the world, they share common experiences when it comes to personal and family connections.

But their lives are not stagnant and as they move into their new role where they will live in camp for several days at a time followed by several days of being able to go home, they begin sharing their story with others and forming new connections that will support them.

Some people think it is a form of weakness to talk about loneliness or disappointments or fear but those who are brave and trusting enough to do so often find that what had tried to tear them down actually serves as fodder for building stronger relationships than they might otherwise have had.

Yes, the community here has learned how to band together for the betterment of everyone. When someone is hurting, there are listening ears. When a family loses a loved one, others grieve with them. Financial hardship of one sees others reaching into their pockets to help ease the burden.

Building relationships is about being willing and able to share your story with others and allowing them to share theirs with you. For it is in the stories that the tied of friendship and commitment form.