

TAKING TIME

by **Rebecca Escott**
Extension Home Economist



Visit To Remember

The holidays are popular times to make visits to nursing homes or hospitals. These visits are often a resident's lifetime to the rest of the world. But for the visitor, they may not always be easy. Sometimes conversations are

stilted especially if you only visit the residents once or twice a year. Other times people are visiting individuals they don't even know as a community service. But with a little planning and courage, a visitor can transform these perhaps awkward times into visits

that are truly memorable.

Conversation can be encouraged in several ways. Consider taking a local newspaper or church newsletter with you to share with your friend. Just by browsing through articles together, you can connect your friend to the community and also spark some interesting discussions. Be sure to allow lots of pauses. By waiting silently, you encourage your friend to join in the conversation.

Asking a resident for specific directions to complete a task is another way to start a conversation. Did this person make an absolutely delicious dessert? Did he refinish furniture? or garden? Think of a task that you'd like to perfect and ask your friend how she would do it.

One of the best techniques for generating good dialogue is to ask open-ended questions — ones that begin with "How," "What," "Why," "When," "Where." These questions cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "now." They demand a more detailed response. When you make your next visit, why not try one of these conversation starters: How did

you spend the holidays when you were young? Who is the most unusual person you ever met? What's one of your funniest memories from your courting days? How did you earn your first dollar, and what did it buy?

These are great ways to lead a person into a wonderful time of reminiscing and sharing. By asking an open-ended question, you take the focus off yourself and give the limelight to the person you're visiting. Over my times of visiting, I have discovered my favorite two conversation starters. They both require a lot of thought. The first is "What is one of the hardest decisions you ever had to make?" and the other is "What is the most beautiful think you know?"

During the past few weeks, I've been asking people I see "What's the most beautiful think you know?"

Here are some of the "beautiful things" they mentioned:

- clear, moonlit night.
- a red sunset on the high, windy plains of eastern New Mexico.
- "when Max or Rachel ask where I am and want to talk specifically just to me"

- a well-groomed ball field.
- being a free citizen of the United States.
- the canyon country.
- a rainbow covered with chocolate chips
- an Amish family riding in their buggy
- a new born calf taking its first breath, first step and first meal
- a well-designed tool or piece of furniture
- the "diamond necklace" effect the bridges into Manhattan make at night
- a pink rose in the morning
- a spouse or child appearing safely in the driveway when you've been worrying about him/her
- a baby when he first wakes, smiles and wiggles with joy to see you.

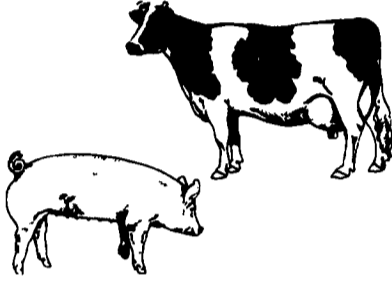
Just by asking this question, I entered into wonderful conversations that were filled with happy memories. As you take on the very important task of visiting with relatives and friends over the next month, take the time to ask some questions that stimulate conversation and allow those friends to share a gift of themselves with you.

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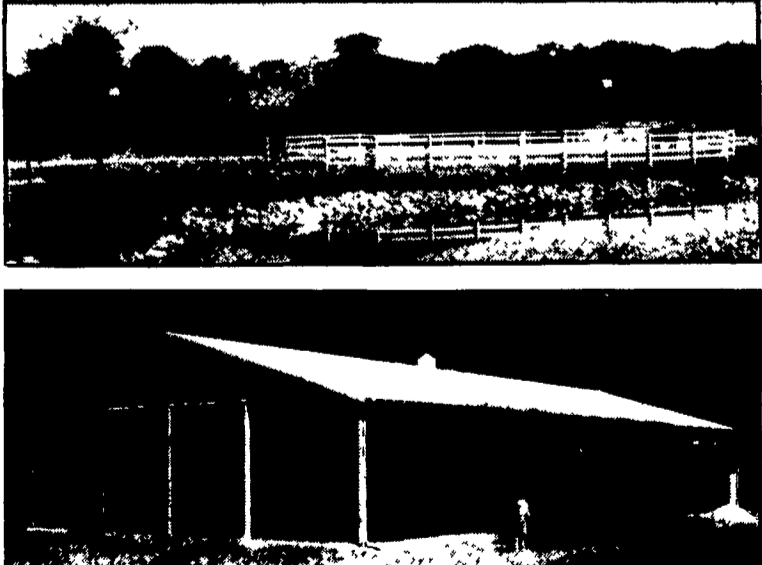
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