



STORYCORPS, A NONPROFIT organization that records oral histories from all over the country, came to Middlebury's Lodge at Otter Creek on Tuesday and interviewed six local senior citizens. Monkton's Lorraine Hoag, right, seen here with Anne Lindert of Elderly Services and Matt Herman of StoryCorps, was one of the subjects of the interviews.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Seniors share their lives with StoryCorps

By **JOHN FLOWERS**

MIDDLEBURY — The lives of six Addison County seniors had taken many different twists and turns during their more than eight decades on this earth, but their paths led to The Lodge at Otter Creek on Tuesday for a common purpose.

To tell their life's stories.

The six seniors in question each sat down for about 45 minutes with representatives of StoryCorps, a national, nonprofit initiative established in 2003 to record the stories and life histories of thousands of everyday Americans.

StoryCorps, with a huge assist from Elderly Services Inc. and The Lodge, paid its first visit to Addison County on Tuesday to interview six area seniors. The intent: Capture their stories for posterity and for future generations before those memories are lost forever.

Elderly Services helped select six area seniors for the StoryCorps interviews.

"We were thrilled and honored," Elderly Services Assistant Director Caroline Donnan said of the StoryCorps collaboration. "Because so much of our work is oriented to bringing joy,

laughter, dignity and value into elders' lives, (both organizations') philosophies mesh so wonderfully."

The interviews are proving to be a win-win for everyone, Donnan noted. They will add to a growing archive of great future historical value, while greatly boosting the morale of those being interviewed.

"Everyone wants to think that they matter," Donnan said. "StoryCorps goes for what is the essence — and that is that most people, having

(See *StoryCorps*, Page 15A)



MONKTON RESIDENT LORRAINE Hoag, left, chats with Anne Lindert of Elderly Services after her StoryCorps interview Tuesday.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

StoryCorps

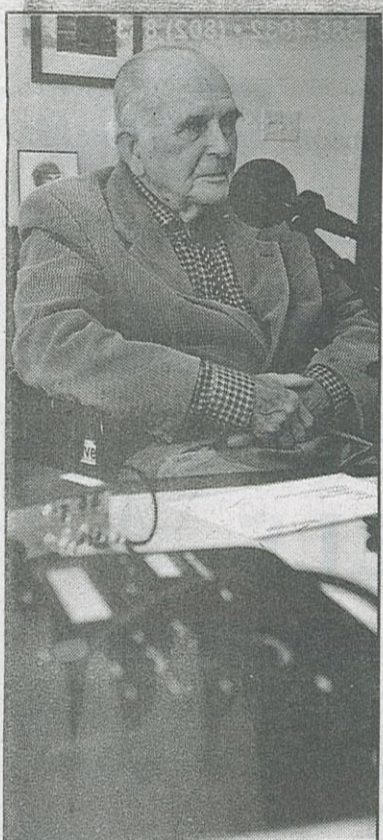
(Continued from Page 1A)

someone listen to them, makes them feel like their life has mattered."

StoryCorps called Elderly Services back in November to propose collaborating on the interviews. StoryCorps is also taking part in a thematically related exhibit at the Shelburne Museum (slated for opening in May) that will feature quilts made Alzheimer's patient caregivers. Organizers want to include in the exhibit an audio component generated by seniors. Some of Tuesday's recorded features are likely to be played as part of that exhibit.

When established six years ago, StoryCorps limited its interviews to folks in New York City. But the organization went national in 2005, and has logged almost 30,000 interviews with people from all walks of life, including teens and senior citizens.

"We are really committed to the diversity of our archive,"



MIDDLEBURY RESIDENT RICHARD Saunders was one of six local senior citizens interviewed on Tuesday for StoryCorps.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

said StoryCorps Facilitator Matt Herman, who was helping produce the recordings at The Lodge at Otter Creek.

Listeners of National Public Radio have heard condensed, two to three-minute versions of StoryCorps interviews aired weekly on the show "Morning Edition." The full interviews take around 40 minutes, touching upon many facets of a person's life. All of the interviews are archived with the American Folklife Center at the National Library of Congress, where they can be accessed by researchers.

"We think it is going to be an amazing resource for anyone who is interested in what life was like, to listen to it and hear it," Herman said.

INTERVIEWED BY A FRIEND

Participants are interviewed by a friend or a loved one, to help put them at ease. The conversation is meticulously recorded by StoryCorps workers in a setting that must be devoid of all extraneous noises. Donnan noted officials at The Lodge agreed to temporarily turn off appliances and divert of mute ventilation, elevator and heating systems in the vicinity of the apartment in which the six county residents were interviewed.

"They have been great in letting us borrow their space," Donnan said.

One by one, the interviewees — accompanied by their interviewer — filed in for their recorded sessions. Discussion topics included love and relationships, growing up, marriage, employment, religion, illness, family heritage and military service. Organizers stressed, however, that the conversations often take spontaneous, delightful detours into poignant subject matters.

While interviews were closed to observers due to sound interference concerns, some participants offered some sound bites of what they shared with StoryCorps.

Lorraine Hoag, 78, of Monkton recounted how she had grown up in Bennington, working on the family farm. She also talked about her love of singing and her brief adventures in the U.S. Air Force, based in Cheyenne, Wyo.

"I talked about my family, helping

to milk," Hoag said.

"I guess it will be interesting to some people," she chuckled about her story.

Richard Saunders, 90, of Middlebury shared some of his experiences in World War II — particularly an event involving an escort aircraft carrier, the USS Kadashan Bay, to which Saunders would later be assigned as a U.S. Navy serviceman.

"The ship was hit by a kamikaze plane," Saunders recounted. "When the plane hit, it went into sick-bay, where there wasn't supposed to be anyone. The bomb exploded, and it turned out later there had been a pilot asleep in sickbay, and he was blown out through the side of the ship. His life vest expanded, so he was floating, and he was picked up (alive) by a destroyer and returned to the ship."

The carrier was brought into port, repaired and re-stocked with personnel, including Saunders. The carrier was on its way to Japan when the war ended, Saunders recalled.

"I was no combat hero," Saunders said with a smile. He spent his professional life as an educator in the medical field.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Herman said many of the StoryCorps interviews — like Hoag's and Saunders' — have yielded some interesting, dramatic and heartwarming facts and anecdotes that cause listeners to pause, reflect and marvel. Herman recalls one interview, in particular, with a 16-year-old girl who had been born blind.

"The way she was able to talk about living with her disability and how she did everything a 'normal' 16-year-old did," Herman said. "She rode her bike and liked to go hiking. The most interesting part about it is when she talked about colors — she learned about colors through those markers that you smell."

Indeed, the power of stories dispels all stereotypes, Herman noted.

"I am surprised almost every day that I do this," Herman said. "You really learn that no matter how someone looks or what you think they might talk about, you always get surprised."