



The ending of a year, the ending of a decade, brings for me a time of reflection. As well as the far too frequently pondered “where did the time go?” I also overuse rose coloured glasses as I reach for the nostalgia and comfort of what once was. There is a joy for me in remembering the Christmases of a Grandfather in a paper hat singing, ' I’m dreaming of a White Christmas' magnificently off key and the really really bad jokes that we laughed at solely due to his enjoyment in telling them. I miss it, and then steady myself finding a quiet serenity in the thought, also often repeated, that I have today – that is all any of us have – and that I can create a celebration of connection, caring and cheer despite times changing.

It can feel so hard to build such a foundation with a loved one living with dementia – we long for the old jokes, the old ease. Once we acknowledge our longing, we can turn our resources to finding a way to the spark of meaning and love that is very certainly still there. One way of creating a pathway of sharing, a communication bridge, is via sensory stimulation. Stimulating the senses of someone living with dementia fits into the person-centered approach Care Partnerships Australia is so highly regarded for; we don't ‘treat the condition’ we reach the person, respectfully enabling and empowering all present in the dementia team. There are many inexpensive sensory ideas, easy to personalise for you and yours. Take that troubadour of a Grandfather of mine. A snap lock bag further sealed by insulation tape filled with an inexpensive hair gel , a little water, and food colour (he likes blue) into which are suspended a few meaningful items: – a fishing lure (oh the stories of the one that got away), a laminated playing card that may provide a gentle link to memories of family afternoons spent playing rummy, and a set of washers for the handyman that helped us all. His hands press on the bag providing tactile input, and the objects move slowly into the visual field. Whether he talks, or quietly watches, we have acknowledged who he is, and his part in our lives.



Sometimes we quietly talk about what we see, one at a time, sharing. Taping the bag onto a stable table (yes, they are still around) provides an additional gentle weight on the lap aiding a sense of physical security that results in increased focus. We found the stable table needed a little more weight, easily achieved by inserting small weights into the bean bag. Grandpa



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doesn't like having his hands massaged (though so very many do) but gains a tactile calm by rummaging through a container of assorted balls – one of which plays Christmas Carols when squeezed (auditory stimulation) and the laughter, for all of us, feels new each time. There is a ball of soft fake fur, a massage ball with gentle spikes and a squashy stress relief ball. We have found that if the stimulation becomes too much, we remove all but one ball – often the softest one – and quietly and calmly using few words and gentle touch, help Grandpa organise his world.



Although the sense of taste has waned, the sense of smell has remained for my loved one – and the savouring of a piece of Rum and Raisin dark chocolate continues to delight. Although he may not always know who we are, we are always offered a piece and the ritual is now special for us too. We don't need words for this, we can just be.

Whether the coming weeks are a time of gift giving for you and yours, or you have other ways of marking this time of the year may there be a sense of peace flowing about you.

May we end with my Christmas thought 'You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving'.



Merry Christmas from the Team at Care Partnerships Australia

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