

Memory Loss Connection

Editor's Note—This is a new monthly column provided by the Big Stone County Memory Loss Connection Committee.

By Mary Ross

SHOULD I VISIT?

Maybe you have an old friend, a grandparent, a brother-in-law, a cousin. Maybe they now have dementia. Maybe you know you should stop and visit. Maybe you're reluctant, scared, or busy. It's awkward. You don't know what to say. They won't remember you were there anyway.

John Dunlop MD, in his book "Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia" Hopkins Medical School, Geriatric adjunct faculty in bioethics, and the son of parents (both of whom had Alzheimer's disease), writes this to his family in the event he eventually gets dementia progresses, "As my dementia progresses, I hope you will be willing to spend time with me, and even if you think I might not remember the time we have together, realize that I will have enjoyed the moment."

I have heard profound sadness in the voices of primary caretakers whose family/friends fail to stop by. Loneliness. Their loved-ones lives matter to them. They want them to matter to others as well. A visit not only can brighten the day of a person with Alzheimers, it bolsters the resolve of the caregiver. It can give that caregiver courage to persevere.

Maybe you need some kind of strategy to make that visit less intimidating. One friend, whose uncle had dementia, told me that when she visited her uncle, she challenged herself to answer him in some new way every time he repeated a story. It made the visits more interesting to her. And surely to her uncle.

Maybe you could bring some old photographs and just start talking about shared experiences. Instead of starting a conversation with "remember when..." (which may increase stress) just launch into what YOU remember about an occasion. Maybe you will be surprised with the interaction it prompts. Maybe you'll get a smile. Maybe you will bring momentary joy.

Maybe you can stop by the Ortonville Library and check out a Memory Packet. Was he/she a mechanic? Farmer? Seamstress, or cook? Did he/she love traveling? Hunting? There are packets available based on a few dozen themes. These can provide prompts that ease your anxiety and can often start meaningful conversations.

Maybe you have failed to step up many times before. I have. Maybe you can do better. Maybe you can make that visit after all.

This is for informational purposes only. For medical advice or diagnosis, consult a professional. AI responses may include mistakes.