

# GIVING THE BEST PRESENCE

No, that's not a misprint in the title.

'Tis the season for giving presents. Holiday shopping ads, Black Friday sales, and longer store hours send us the yearly message that everything we want is in a store somewhere. But sometimes the best thing you can give may be something you can't find in a store: the gift of yourself.



Chances are that someone on your gift list is living with memory loss - a parent or grandparent, a friend or neighbor. Many of them are losing more than just memories: some of them may have had to give up their homes, or stop driving their cars, or drop out of activities in which they can no longer participate. It's often difficult to understand what to give to persons in these situations. An apron for Grandma, a tie for Grandpa, a book about sailboats for a weekend boater? While these might have been thoughtful and appreciated in the recipient's earlier years, they may not be as appropriate now, and can sometimes even serve as a sad reminder of what once was.

What we need to keep in mind - what people who live with the disease have clearly told us - is that they don't want a bunch of new gee-gaws or the latest gadgets. They want human connection - meaningful, one-on-one, in-the-moment time with a loved one.

It's not as easy as it sounds. We live in a fast-paced society, and it seems to speed up during the holiday season. We are busy, rushed, in a hurry. There's lots of hustle and bustle, more coming and going, constant decorating and wrapping, extra noise and little quiet. All of this is stressful for a person with memory loss. So in the midst of all this hubbub, look for deliberate ways to slow down with your loved one: a stroll down a quiet street, a leisurely chat about what's on their mind at the moment, an hour or so working on a puzzle or listening to familiar holiday music, a companionable cup of tea and a cookie while watching the birds on the feeder - each of these could serve as an oasis of calm in a sea of

confusion. Conversation is nice but not required. The goal is simply to be alongside.

The benefits of Being Present aren't limited to those with the disease. Caregivers are feeling the same stress as everyone else this time of year, and a couple of hours of quiet time would go a long way towards helping them cope with the demands of the season. A few caring questions ("How has this been for you?" "What's the hardest thing you're dealing with now?") over lunch would be sweeter than dessert, and have a lot less calories!

This is not to say that there are no good gifts for those living with the challenges of memory loss. Quite the contrary. But do not underestimate the value of your undivided attention. Your presence could very well be the best present your loved one receives.



*"Wherever you are, be all there."*  
- Jim Elliot

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