



TIPS TO KEEP A LOVED ONE CONNECTED TO THEIR OWN LIFE STORY

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The deepest way to keep your loved one with cognitive impairment connected to this world is to continually remind them of and celebrate their uniqueness. The more closely you reflect on their life story and incorporate that information in your quality time together, the more attentive and connected they will be. Deep seated memories, skills, interests and talents will emerge increasing their enjoyment in the moment. Pull out their own memories and honor their own feelings and opinions. Do not correct them or chastise them if their memory is poor. Just share impartial sources of information along with your own thoughts, memories and opinions.

1. Chose a time of day when your loved one is alert and can focus at least for a brief amount of time.
2. Smile and relax. Then go through the attached Life Story Questionnaire with your loved one, recording their responses. Stop when they can't continue. Continue another day.
3. If you loved one can't or won't participate in the process complete the questionnaire for them and reflect on their uniqueness. How can you tap into their gifts, interests and experiences?
4. Some suggestions:
 - a. **Connect to objects:** Search around their home for meaningful objects from their past eg. a violin, a Christmas stocking, a book, a rolling pin, a picture, a tool, some wool and knitting needles, a crochet hook or a handmade item. Where possible, with permission, either bring the object closer to them or bring them to the object. Ask them to tell you all about the item...how it makes them feel, etc. Write down what they tell you. Tell them what the object means to you. At a later date if their memory is not as accurate read their own reflections back to them and share your own memory and feelings.
 - b. **Connect to personally meaningful places:** Places they went to school, lived, worked, or travelled to on vacation or otherwise enjoyed can be brought to life by pulling up photos

and YouTube videos on a cell phone, tablet or laptop computer. These can be viewed online or, in the case of photos printed and shown to your loved one. Ask others for help with this if necessary, eg a relative or neighbor. Watch your loved one's body language for signs of recognition and emotions. Talk about their memories.

- c. **Connect to personally meaningful activities:** Images of others participating in activities that your loved one once enjoyed can trigger a flood of memories. For example, go online and find a picture of the dance hall they attended. Next pull up a video of dancers dancing the dances they danced to the music they enjoyed. If they loved fishing, search for online videos of fishermen fishing in their favorite lake!

If your loved one once enjoyed a favorite movie or radio or TV program or performer, seeing them again on a computer screen can bring the memory to life. If their memory is vague, mention some options eg. for movies mention Mary Poppins, Sound of Music, My Fair Lady, the King and I, Mama Mia, Oliver Twist, South Pacific and show them some videos or have them listen to a few songs. Watch for signs of recognition and celebrate. Sing a few songs and "dance" to the tunes...

If they loved to bake, give them some play dough or real dough, a rolling pin, a spatula, cookie cutters and a baking sheet. Make some buns or cookies while discussing any favorite recipes and sharing yours and looking for pictures online.

If they were an avid sportsman, read up on their sport online and talk about exceptional players and the rules and events they recall. Ask what equipment was used in those days and if they have special memories of winning or losing or of friends they played with. Share your memories of your favorite sport.

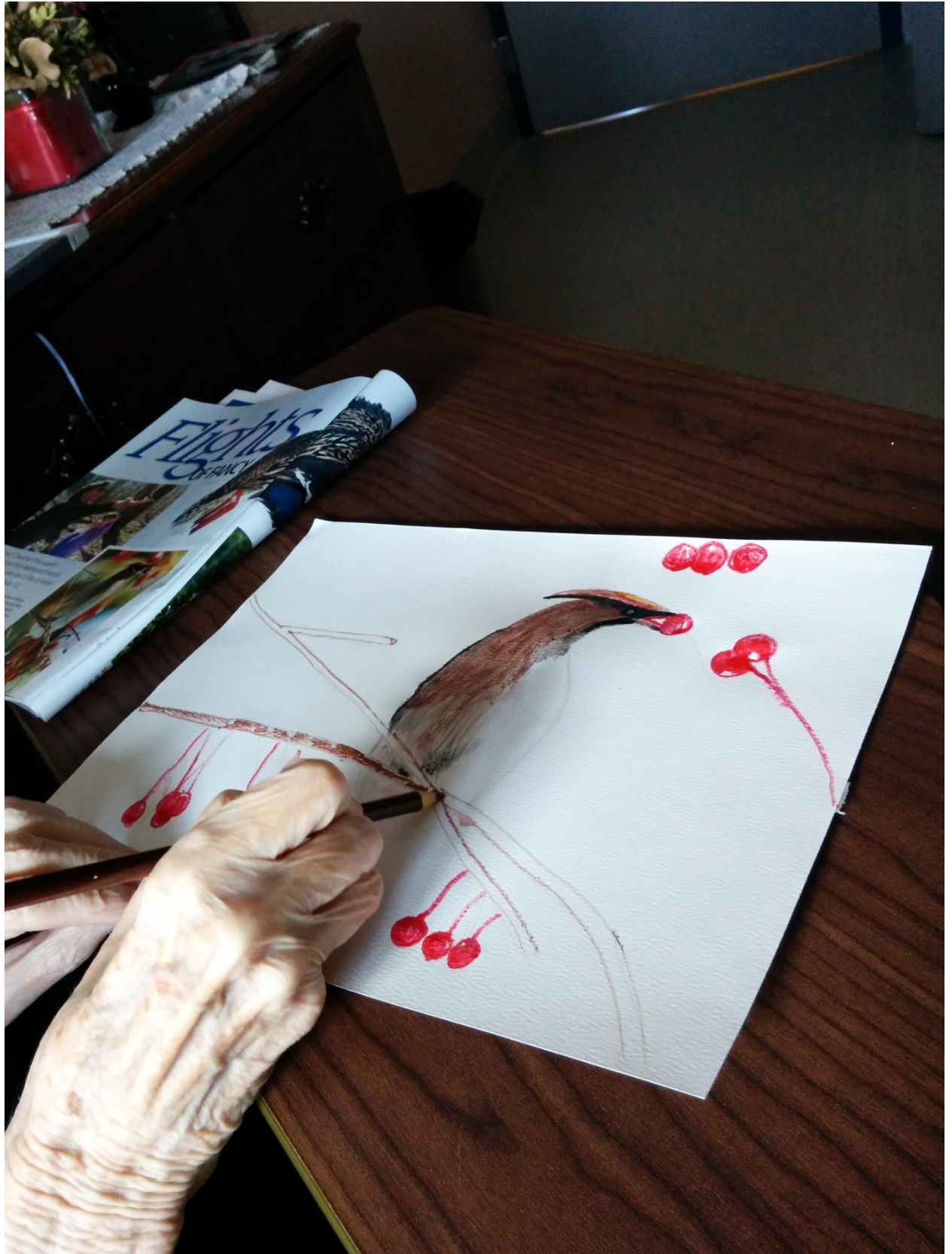
If they loved shopping for clothes, show them a fashion magazine and have them select their favorite outfits, accessories and colors. Talk about their favorite stores. Mention a few names. Cut out the items and make a collage.

If they loved to sing, find their favorite songs being sung online or on a CD and invite them to sing along. Show them how to move to the music and sing and move with them.

If they loved to walk, take them on a walk around their current environment, while asking them what they wore (type of hat, shoes, jacket, sunglasses) and who walked with them (eg. eg. their dog) and where they liked to walk to (the store, the river bank, the park, a friend's).

If they loved to garden, show them a gardening book or engage them in a simple planting activity, make a collage of flowers or homegrown vegetables. Talk about the names of each and the conditions they need to grow. Look up more information online if necessary.

If they once loved to do art, take turns with them creating a picture. Use water color pencils. If they need support now, outline an image. Have them fill in specific areas with colorful strokes. At the end have them dip a paintbrush in water and “paint” the picture. Demonstrate.



- d. **Connect to family:** To supplement a discussion of their family described in the life story, use their photo album to refresh their memories of family members and past important life events. In their current residence also use framed photos and recent cards to enrich the experience. Make a family tree. If they are interested and able help them search for long lost relatives using websites such as ancestry.ca . Search online in Google or Facebook for more information on family members as well as pictures.

- e. **Connect to language of origin:** Provide materials so your loved one can teach you. If they know another language, search online for simple words in that language and their English translation. Make up pairs of association cards...one set of a specific color in English, another corresponding set of another color in the other language they know well. Have them teach you how to pronounce these other words and how to match them with the English counterpart. Play a memory game with the cards pre-matched then scrambled and placed face down on the table.

- f. **Connect to their other memories:** If they remember their first car, look up the color, make, model and year online and show them the picture. Find information on the price.

If they have a general idea of what their pet looked like, ask them the color of fur and size and search out images online until they recognize one. Make up a story with them starring their pet. You can be the scribe and start the first line of the story. Have your loved one tell you the next line while you write it down. Continue to take turns until you agree the story is finished. Read the story aloud and enjoy!

Use water color pencils and jointly sketch a picture of their pet. After, have your loved one paint the fur with a water dipped brush. Label the picture with the dog's name.

Sketch a picture of them doing a favorite activity in the past, asking them for details about their hair color, their clothing etc. Sketch a picture of the home they remember as a child, asking them for details on the location, type and color of the front door, the chimney, the porch, the windows etc. Ask them for details on any garden, lawn, sidewalk, driveway or garage, and trees in the yard. Who would have been standing in the windows, what color of curtains? What was the number on the house? See if you can find the house on Google Earth or Google maps.