

Re-wiring?

Startling, frightening or exceptional – these are the creators of new memories and can serve as a replacement when the dearest memories have been lost forever.

The difficult part is finding what it is that turns your loved one on! Sometimes it's music – I have seen a stroke victim open her eyes for the first time when Daniel O'Donnell music is played. I have seen another lady with quite advanced dementia sing along to The White Cliffs of Dover – but only to the two dolls she holds in her arms. Look deeply into someones eyes and tell them how lovely they look and the reward is joy when they remember your kindness the next time you see them!

Was dancing a favourite pastime? Indeed my own mother (91 with AD and Vascular) cannot forget a dance with Norrms and the only time they ever met was at Dementia Awareness Day in 2010! Her local memory is now around 3mins. Repetitive actions i.e. making pastry once a week – the memory stays because it is something the person has been proud of during their life – Exceptional pride in something can also be converted into "now-memory" an automatic process that does not rely on the part of the brain that used to know how and when pastry was made in the past. The memory will "kick in" as the flour and margarine is placed in front of that person. A brain can be re-wired with the right approach, at least to buy some time and dignity and, who can tell, maybe even stave off this despicable memory killer.

Sometimes it is just a great kindness that is remembered sometimes it will be a tragedy (like a fall) and the memories will stay.

It is our duty as carers to unlock these secrets and when you find a new memory together it amounts to healing the brain. This is why I cannot understand when a brain consultant says there is nothing else he can do. I say there is. Rehabilitation should be part of dementia treatment. Why does no-one speak of treatment? It's my experience that the brain CAN re-wire itself or at least repair some of the damage. I have seen it. It doesn't amount to a cure but for the person who suffers, it makes the nightmare more bearable. It gives dignity back, alleviates depression and raises morale. It also gives the carer something to focus on with a disease which often results in an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness.

Thoughts by Jane Moore

My mother says: "I had that Alzheimer's once, didn't I?" and I reply: "Yes Mum".