

## Finding Joy

By Ann Carroll - Unpaid Carer.

'Kiss the joy as it flies' wrote William Blake many years ago. Many carers of people living with dementia may wonder if that's possible, living in the confusion of "another world." My husband of over 60 years lives with Alzheimer's disease and in his world, John Howard is still Prime Minister, Queen Elizabeth is safely on her throne and the children (long flown the coup) are safely upstairs in bed. Everything seems less complicated and life flits past somewhat boringly at times.

A life without joy cannot be - I decided somewhat peremptorily and permanently and so I am on a quest for joy every day. Hopefully this can include my partner - a man losing everything I found most attractive but nevertheless still the essence of the person he always was - that complicated mixture of traits that make up the human being - some loveable but many annoying and downright irritating! Dementia has the nasty habit of accentuating the more difficult aspects of life like anxiety and obsessions.

And so, the quest for joy can be simple and just for me - a quick coffee and natter with a mate, a phone call from a caring significant other, a plunge and a few laps in a nearby swimming pool, an enjoyable game of Bridge or a glass of beautiful pinot. Mostly I can keep before me the heaps of good things in my life. My children and grandchildren bring spadefuls of never-ending joy just by being part of my life. My husband needs to be prodded to find the joy - but it's there waiting to be discovered - it's there in the doing of easy crossword puzzles and jigsaws - it's there in a shady spot in the garden with a coffee and sweet treat - it's there viewing much-loved movies from the past-in a phone call to a very old friend-and lots and lots of his favourite music. He finds it delving through old photos evoking old memories and reliving bygone happy times. His recalls are often confused, and the people are all muddled up - but what does it matter? Easier by far to enjoy the moment of joy.

I recently noticed he was struggling with showers - the whole effort was just too much. Muttering nonsense about water flow and temperatures I gained access to his private space - soon he was sitting on a chair I had the handheld shower going all the while singing [untunefully] "Raindrops Keep Falling on Your Head" and the mission was quickly and happily accomplished. We've turned this into a regular routine which he really enjoys because the task has been made easy and fun! It's a joy! Music and singing help even though he definitely doesn't know who Taylor Swift is! Now Frank Sinatra, that's another story.

Sometimes joy bolts out of the blue - a renewed friendship from the past bringing great pleasure and joie de vivre - a treasure indeed. Realistically, I get it that my life caring for a husband on the slippery slide of dementia is never going to be a bed of roses, but I'm determined to keep looking for the joy.

I take heed of the words of Oscar Wilde: "When it rains look for rainbows, when it's dark look for stars."



[Photo of Ann with her Husband]