

Creativity and connection in dementia

As I read Philip Larkin's poem 'Solar,' a hush fell. I looked round the group. Many had their eyes closed, faces turned gently upwards, smiling softly. Silence remained for several moments. Then, conversations flowed – one asked for a line to be read again, to revel in the phrase; others spoke of sunshine, or of summer days.

The group is called 'Lunch Breaks', and is attended by people living with dementia, and carers. The programme offers a range of activities to suit varying interests. Connectivity grows over the shared meal, and the activities.

Creativity opens ways to connect. *A Pocket Guide to Arts Activities for People with Dementia* notes: 'Research has shown that encouraging people who are living with dementia to take part in regular creative activities significantly enriches and improves their quality of life, helping many to live well with their condition.' Perhaps most widely known is how powerful music can be for engagement, joy and connection for people with dementia.

Poetry can bring such connection too. A rhythm felt; a sense experienced; a verse learned by heart long ago, recited; a response sparked by a word or phrase or metaphor, where imagination, memory or emotion lead, unfolding within the person exactly as they are, in the here and now. The poet Deborah Alma says, about her work with people with dementia: 'Always importantly it [is] about the present moment.'

Inspired by poet John Killick, who writes poetry with people with dementia, in Lunch Breaks we have written group poems. Participants loved putting their own ideas into poetry after Edwin Morgan's 'Foundation', a wondrous poem imagining what to put into a foundation stone for future generations. 'Variation on Foundation' is made of the participants' own words, phrases, senses, memories and imaginations. With poetry, there are also often unspoken responses – perhaps tears; a smile; a touch; a laugh; a spark of recognition; a sense of stillness.

The practical theologian John Swinton writes: 'the sacrament of the present moment... can be spoken in a myriad of different ways – through a touch, a gesture, a fleeting look... To be with one another in the present moment is to allow our souls to touch... to be open to surprise, new possibilities, and the kind of hidden experiences... vital in understanding the experiences of people with dementia.'

The present moment is sacrament: creativity, perhaps, or another form of bread and wine.

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For more information about John Killick visit dementiapositive.com or [The Gift of Years resources](#).