

EIGHT CAREGIVING MAXIMS FOR DEALING WITH PERPLEXING BEHAVIOURS

By Barbara Pointon

Barbara and Malcolm Pointon both lectured in music at Homerton College, Cambridge. At the age of 51 Malcolm was diagnosed with an atypical form of Alzheimer's disease. Barbara cared for him at home until he was placed in a nursing home in 1998; she later brought him home again to be nursed in his own familiar environment. They were the subjects of the award-winning documentary, "Malcolm and Barbara...a Love Story" shown on ITV in 1999.

"Over the years, I've arrived at eight care giving maxims – I only wish that, as a new carer, someone had given them to me from the outset. Similarly, all those who offer care at home or indeed in any care setting might find them useful.

- ❖ Don't try and stop people with dementia from doing something just because it isn't being done "properly". Give them time to do things in their own way at their own pace.
- ❖ People with dementia understand far more than they are ever given credit for. Take care what is said in their presence and don't exclude them from conversations or decisions.
- ❖ Bossiness is Just Not On. It's very easy to confuse "caring" with "controlling" and nothing winds up any one of us more than the sense that someone else is controlling our lives. And if someone can't find the words to protest, then resistance or aggressive actions will ensue.

POINTON B. (2001) Whose service is it? A pressing need for change. Journal of Dementia Care Vol 9 No 5 Sept/Oct 2001 p. 23-25.

- ❖ Ask the question, “Who is it a problem for – us or them?” If it’s us, we should be old and ugly enough to let things ride. Does it **really** matter that he wants to go to bed with his trousers on, doesn’t want a wash right now, eats mashed potato with his fingers, says there are little green men in the garden? Don’t scold, argue or contradict. **Go With the Flow**, however bizarre it seems.
- ❖ Preserve their autonomy for as long as possible by giving them choice (e.g. in what clothes to wear) and celebrate what they can still do, rather than bemoan what they can’t.
- ❖ There is always a reason for agitation – often something or somebody in the environment. Try to spot the cause and change it if possible.
- ❖ If they can’t enter our world, we must enter theirs and affirm it. Forget reality orientation – what day is it, where are you, who’s the Prime Minister – who cares? Enjoy fantastic adventures with them in their “real” world instead. Be prepared to time-travel backwards into their personal history.
- ❖ Look behind the illness and reach out to the frightened person still in there who needs to feel secure, respected and cherished.

POINTON B. (2001) Whose service is it? A pressing need for change. Journal of Dementia Care Vol 9 No 5 Sept/Oct 2001 p. 23-25.