

## Fascinatin' Rhythm

By Tracy Ouellette, PAC Scheduling Coordinator

Rhythm is a very interesting word; it has so many meanings and ways to use it when referring to our lives. I will be the first to tell you I can't dance, I have no rhythm but I do



Tracy and Sir Great

have a lot of energy in the morning because of my circadian rhythm. My lifestyle is very relaxed, it has a very easy rhythm but the rhythm of my speech is very erratic depending on the state of my mind. Then there is the rhythm of your heart if we feel like diving into the medical dictionary. For this article, I would like to you to know two definitions of rhythm that I like.

The first is from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. "Rhythm: movement, fluctuation, or variation marked by the regular recurrence or natural flow of related elements."

The second is from The Urban Dictionary:

"Rhythm: special consideration. To give someone rhythm may be to give them a pass or go to bat for them because you know them or owe them a favor."

You are probably wondering why I chose two very different definitions. Well, for me the answer is simple – Dementia. The first definition explains that rhythm is more of a pattern, a natural flow that is followed because it just feels right, or it's the way things have always been done. Nice, in a perfect world.

The second definition is more valuable to me for it speaks to my heart.

The Six Pieces of the Puzzle are an amazing tool that help you navigate the waters on the journey of dementia.

According to the six pieces of the puzzle, three are out of our control: brain changes, the person's history, and the emotional/physical state of the person living with dementia (PLwD). The good news is the remaining three pieces can be used to create the memories that will last you a lifetime: environment, stakeholders, and time.

Sir Great was an amazing man, he lived with us for the better part of two years. A mechanic by trade, Sir Great had more energy than he knew what to do with. He kept a meticulous yard, his cars were impeccable, and he even volunteered at the local food pantry.

When Sir Great moved in with us, I was working full-time and my husband traveled Monday through Thursday, every week. I quit my job to be the primary caregiver. The moments of lucidity were many during the first year so I was lucky enough to start a job working from home, twenty hours a week. Sir Great would putter around the yard, clean the cars, sweep the floors and it was awesome having the extra help around the house. I would check on him periodically, make lunch for the two of us and at night we would sit and watch television together.

Fast forward to year two. He tired quickly and his processing ability was greatly diminished as well. According to the first three pieces of the puzzle, I could not change things, I just had to accept them and change with him as he was incapable of changing for me. The good news is, I still had the remaining three pieces. With these three pieces, I could change the rhythm of his day to create less stress and create downtime in the middle of the day without him realizing it. Oh my goodness, what a difference it made.

A now typical day for us would be breakfast, followed by a discussion about what was on the agenda for the day (yes it was the same conversation every day!) Next we would pick one project from our to do list to complete – I learned early in the process to just have two small things on the list. This was important as he had no idea when he was tired or weak and this would lead to falls. If I told him to rest, he refused; but if we built it in to the day's rhythm he did it automatically. We would watch an old episode of *Blue Bloods* or a war movie. Thank goodness for Netflix! We would go take a ride to pick up my grandson Kaleb and then a ride to bring him back. Every time Sir Great and Kaleb would nap. To end the day, he would sit at the counter and help me prepare supper and then clean the dishes. All in a day's work!



Tracy, Sir Great, and Family

The prior year both of us had different days. He would be busy ten hours out of the day, but now because of the new rhythm we established he was “busy” all day but not overburdened. I still managed to work my twenty hours but not like I used to. I would fit them in when I could during the week and, if need be, on the weekend when my husband would slip into the rhythm with his dad.

Sir Great passed away on January 29, 2017. I miss him every day but thanks to the rhythm we created, I smile when I think of him. Are you wondering why I like definition #2? PLwD deserve special consideration. They are the ones cycling through brain changes; they have no control over that. To give them a pass or go to bat for them because of their new normal is the least we can do.