

## Offering Comfort During a Busy Time of Year

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As has been much advertised, music is so often a blessing and a gift when dementia is a part of life. It can offer comfort and connection for both the person living with dementia as well as the person trying to provide support and care.

Music during the holiday season can connect us to old routines and rituals. It can also bring forward old memories and relationships. These can create moments of remembrance and joy or cause feelings of loss and sadness (Sapphire, Diamond, and Emerald states). At some point in the condition, it can also result in time and space travel (Emerald state). A person can actually believe they are in another part or episode of their life and begin seeking out that which would have been present at the moment. For those who live only in moments of time (Amber state), the desire to repeatedly sing, hum, or ask for a certain song, hymn, or rhythm can be frustrating and overwhelming to others who remember it has been sung or played 10 times already (Sapphire, Diamond, and Emerald states). On the other hand, for those living later in the condition (Amber, Ruby, and Pearl states) music and song can be a strong and powerful way to feel the meaning of the holiday without understanding the facts or details around it.

As we close out yet another year, I wanted to make sure that we all recognize the difference between using music as a wallpaper or background to life and making it a centerpiece and valued tool for interaction and meaningful engagement. I also wanted to highlight the value of creating spaces and places for quiet and solace. A famous hymn, *Silent Night*, offered a Christmas Eve truce in 1914 on a battleground in Europe. It was a moment of peace and acceptance of another's humanity in the midst of World War I. It was the silence of the night and then the offering of the hymn that stilled the conflict and created the place and space for the two sides to come out of their foxholes and spend time with one another, seeing each other's humanity and personhood. In dementia, the skilled application of silence and sound can offer that same bridge across our differences to find common ground and acceptance of abilities.

In celebration of the season and of what is possible, I wanted to share some resources that are out there and available and can be tools that make a difference in abilities and affect, as well as offer care supporters opportunities to relax as well, or get something done while the person is engaged in their own experience.

Lynda Weston created [Luminotions](#). Lynda has been the Spiritual Care Coordinator and co-chair of the Palliative Care Committee at Spruce Lodge in Stratford, Ontario for the past 13 years. She has had a long, rich, and diverse history writing, creating, speaking, playing, directing, and collaborating. In her many roles, she has gained a deep appreciation for the value of combining visual information with auditory experiences to develop AV experiences that connect with people living with dementia in powerful and enriching ways. She has also created training resources to help family members and care providers gain the awareness and knowledge to use her resources

wisely and well. The various pages of her website will provide you with samples of the videos and soundtracks, information about how to use the resources, and more information about her background and how the videos came to be and have been used. Her unique use of unfamiliar melodies opens up different pathways in the brain and provides something unique in comparison to all other programs of music that are used elsewhere.

A second resource is music that has been enhanced to work with brain waves to create more potent connections and extended impact. [Alzheimers Music Connect](#) has several sets of music that have been designed specifically to appeal to listeners, both those with, and those without dementia. The recent additions to their library include classic country favorites, vocal standards, songs for the Christmas season, and a set for spiritual and patriotic enjoyment. The Altus Oscillation™ used to work with existing brain waves has actually shown evidence of making a significant difference in brain activity, affect, and responsiveness for people in mid to late stages of dementia. We have worked with the Alzheimers Music Connect team on the [Memories in Song](#) CD set. As part of that set, there is a DVD showing my use of the music with people living with dementia and their responses, as well as short information clips on the use of music with various GEMS® states.

A third resource was developed by Mary Sue Wilkerson. She is a music therapist who has written a book regarding the use of music with people from the earliest stages of dementia through the end of life. Her book is combined with a CD to help those less musically inclined provide the support and material that will foster engagement in song, movement, and dance. [Singing Heart to Heart](#) offers short videos and samples of her work.

The final resource that includes music or sounds in its plan is a guide book written by Drs Anke Jakob and Lesley Collier that is entitled *How to make a Sensory Room for people living with dementia*. You may download a copy [here](#). In this booklet, they discuss the environmental support that is more beneficial to those living with dementia and includes the use of nature sounds, instruments, music, and sounds combined with visual images that allow the person to enjoy another sensory experience and space. Their guide book can help families or professionals create a place of comfort and fulfillment that can be used even when physical bodies can no longer make a journey.

As we end another year, perhaps it's time to take a deep breath, pause, and consider what we want to do differently in 2017. What connections and interactions we want to experience or encourage those in our care to have available to them. And just maybe, we might also look in the mirror and consider for just a few moments what do we like, want, or need to fill our sensory bucket! Are we craving silence and space or would we be better served by gathering with others and lifting our voices in joyful sound? Do we want some of both? Consider what we can do, not what we should do, and TRY SOMETHING NEW! I can almost guarantee you things will be changing in 2017, so get ready for what lies ahead by celebrating what you have!