

Roles and Reminiscing Without Words

*Using Rhythm and Ritual
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Since the beginning of time a woman's role has always been uniquely defined. Some say nurturer, mother, daughter, wife, leader, and the list goes on. So how does this relate to a dementia setting?

Is a female role model the epitome of being a woman today? Society may define it by the level of education, social status, or the amount of success. In a dementia setting I've seen this translate into several different things. The well educated becomes the educator, the well cultured becomes the socialite, and the mother becomes the kind lady next door. The roles beg the question, I am who I was but I'm a little different now, so how do we tap into that without using words, instead using rhythm and ritual?

Get to know the person. Did the person enjoy classical, rock, country, or rhythm and blues? Music can be an excellent instrument in reminiscing using rhythm. The iPod Project "Alive Inside" is a great example. Music has the ability to extract the most intimate emotions. Another method to reminisce is by using a drum circle., Playing a variety of instruments can be a powerful way to convey feeling and to go back in time.

Current emotions and thoughts are a great way to start. If a person feels good then let them play that feeling, however it may sound. Let them feel it and hear it. Playing emotions and thoughts are a warm up for the ritualistic travel through time. Next, begin with a song heard, played, and/or danced to throughout childhood and let the journey begin from there. Let the rhythm and music slowly progress through life to songs in junior high, prom, college years, and possibly a wedding day. This journey could travel through the life of a person's child or their own major life experiences.

What were things like in the early 1930s? Creating a collection of old logos from Sears Roebuck & Co, Woolworth's, Eckerd's, and Plymouth etc. You can create an activity that includes visual items like a butter churn, iron comb, and possibly a typewriter. The visual items could be set up in chronological order throughout a person's life.

If the sun sets at 9 o'clock and the temperature is 88 degrees outside and you live in Florida, then you know its summer! Mom waking up at 6 o'clock in the morning to begin baking the bread, along with asking for your assistance to set the table in anticipation for a holiday brunch or dinner. The seasons are a natural way to reminisce. The weather, visits from family members, pumpkin and cinnamon flavors filling the air, embrace our senses, and allow us to go back in time naturally. It can also lead to some unpleasant memories, but be aware that this could happen, and validate the individual and redirect them to something else that is positive using a positive approach.

As time flies by, we can all recall the indelible influence a female role model has had in our lives. Maybe it was your first grade teacher, minister, grandmother, mother, or a friend. She does well to create and sustain memories in every life she touches, so this holiday let us all learn a lesson from the incredible women in our lives!