



AnnMcGillPotentialist
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The Gift of Alzheimer's - The Language of Love

by Ann McGill - Potentialist

My Dad has Alzheimer's. It has been a tremendous gift to both of us. Naturally I wish he didn't have the disease. Since he does, all we can do is to accept what is and focus on the good news side of the illness, which I fortunately discovered to exist.

This current experience once again confirms my long-standing belief, espoused by numerous spiritual philosophers, that **there is always a positive side to every negative event.** I've found **these inherent gifts can be easily missed, unless we consciously open our hearts and minds to allow them to reveal themselves.**

My Dad's memory is deteriorating. He no longer recalls what he read last night. He's forgotten he sold his business and is no longer boss. He can't remember who got married or moved. This absence of history creates an inability for normal conversation. As a result, our relationship has improved. Significantly. We're actually talking for the very first time.

It's not that we had a bad relationship before. It was just flat. Almost non-existent. No meaningful conversation. While I "knew" my Father loved me, I didn't get to "experience" it on a visceral level. Now, **Alzheimer's is teaching my in-his-90's Dad and my never-felt-adequately-loved self to speak the language of Love.** Isn't that wonderful?! Aren't you glad for us?! How fortunate we are to at last be tasting this everyone-deserves-it experience, before he moves on and out of this world.

What do we talk about, now that my Dad doesn't remember much of anything? How he is feeling right now. What is on his mind at the moment. His worries and fears, which he never used to share. What's most important now is simply being together. Sharing a sunny day, enjoying a walk. Chattering about something silly we observe, discussing what we'll have for lunch.

It seems the less my Dad's mind works, the more his heart opens. He now experiences and expresses great joy when I come to visit. Naturally, this leads me to still more effusive expressions of my own love, which further fills the empty spaces that his lack of memory leave.

Everyone deserves the experience of love. How fortunate my Dad and I are that we didn't miss out on the experience after all. We have the Alzheimer's to thank for that. Now that my Father is unable to think clearly, we focus on matters of the heart. We say I love you a lot.

How often do you tell those you love why and how much? What do you suppose would happen if you said it a lot more, with much more obvious enthusiasm? Do you tell stories that convey how grateful you are, why you appreciate someone?

These are the kinds of conversations we are having more and more, as my Dad's condition deteriorates further. The worse he gets the closer we become. The Alzheimer's triggered a degree of intimacy that had always been missing. Now there is a sense of connection, a speaking plainly and honestly, saying whatever we want, no inhibitions. I feel truly blessed.

P.S. It's more than a year since I wrote this piece. My Dad has worsened, as you might expect. His exchanges now are a half-and-half mixture of reality and dreaming. It's getting so he is unable to carry on a connected conversation.

When my Dad can't find the words or the thoughts he wants to express, I've found there is always one thing I can say that will pull him out of confusion, cause him to smile, leave him feeling better, and that's to tell him how much I love him. **I'm learning to say it in a million ways.**

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“Chaucer” Phillips, my Dad, passed away Thanksgiving day 2002.

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