

Friends, Family and Neighbours

One thing you quickly come to realise when a relative such as a lone parent develops Alzheimer's, is that the people that you have been friends with for years, the neighbours that you have known for many years and your relatives, suddenly don't really want to get involved. This may not be the universal case but tends to be so if none of your friends, neighbours or relatives have come into close contact with Alzheimer's before. To some extent they are put on the spot and embarrassed for themselves because they just don't know how to deal with it and build up a subconscious animosity towards the person acting a bit 'bonkers'. They may not bother to visit again or get involved. They may or may not phone or tell me how my mother has been faring and possibly the odd things she has been doing. A person with Alzheimer's is still a person and you can have a continuing relationship with them as long as you learn to press the right keys as that person is not longer living in the normal memory based world.

One example was my mother's next door neighbour, Mrs F..., who had lived next door to my mother for at least 50 years and still insisted after all these years in talking about my mother, only using her surname. You would have thought she might after all those years have shown some kindness and understanding towards my mother, but no, all she could do was to criticise her. We did in fact give Mrs.F... a spare front door key which was useful when my mother locked herself out of the house, which she did on a few occasions. However, she was more concerned about my mother leaving the gas on and blowing up the house so she did complain several times and on one occasion we know about, got her daughter's boyfriend to come in and turn the gas off at the mains.

Before my mother developed dementia, she was a regular church goer at Alan Road Methodist Church in Ipswich. On occasion I wrote to the Rev. Bingham to ask if he would visit my mother from time to time as I am sure she would have enjoyed that but no, he visited once at her home and once in the Care Home, but he was quite happy to visit my mother's sister, who had osteoporosis problems, regularly.

My mother worked for Marks and Spencer for most of her adult life and naturally made a few friends that she kept in touch with and visited after she retired. It seems that my mother did most of the visiting and made the effort because when I wrote to her friends and explained that she had dementia but would very much like to have visitors, they just made excuses and never turned up that I know of. I also tried the M&S retirement club to see if they made visits to retirees who couldn't get to their meetings but no joy there either.