

## FORGET-ME-NOT SPOTLIGHT

### TALKING TO ALZHEIMER'S

#### Simple Ways to Connect When You Visit with a Family Member or Friend

By Claudia J. Strauss

A review by Shannon Nosbisch, C.D.P., co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness

Visiting with someone living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia can be difficult, frustrating and uncomfortable. *Talking to Alzheimer's* is a book that is designed to help family members, friends, professionals and volunteers have rewarding visits and warm relationships. The author started out volunteering in a secure unit and noticed how few visitors there were and how the few that did come were uneasy and struggling with what to do and what to say. After speaking to people who work in Alzheimer's homes, family members and others, she wrote this book.

An important note is that Ms. Strauss defines a "visit" as taking place in the home setting as well as in assisted living homes, memory homes, etc. Caregivers in the home are often doing the everyday chores – household chores, meeting the loved one's needs as well as their own, etc. – and communication takes place, but it is not quality communication. If you can stop for a few minutes, several times a day, and think of your interaction as a visit and communication as a conversation, you will find that, with practice, you can have a good connection or a moment of joy together.

There are eight short chapters to this easy read. In these chapters, Ms. Strauss discusses being emotionally prepared and having a comfortable, meaningful visit. The important thing to remember is to think about the person, not the disease and to treat them with dignity or how you would like to be treated. If you can enjoy the visit and leave feeling revived, then, most likely, they have enjoyed the visit, too.

She talks about how to deal with the different aspects of Alzheimer's such as repetition, redirection (turning the conversation), knowing how to ask a question, ways to encourage action, etc. She also discusses some possible painful emotions a person living with Alzheimer's can have and how you can help.

In another chapter she talks about responses you can give to questions often asked by a person living with Alzheimer's. Chapter 4 "Do's and Don'ts – Learning the Language of Dignity" discusses how to ask questions that a person living with Alzheimer's or related

dementia can easily answer and other things you can do – bring music, a photo album, garden catalogs, pets, etc.

The title of Chapter 6 is “Moving Toward Joy” and discusses visits from children and how to help children have a comfortable, meaningful visit with their grandparents. It may take only a hug, a smile, holding their hand or just listening. The visit should be about happiness and fun.

A review by Kara Ray, Director of The Meadows Program (an Alzheimer’s care program) sums up this book. She says “Strauss’ book is all about hope. It reminds us to look at the person with Alzheimer’s disease holistically and not focus only on the dementia. She offers suggestions that will enrich people’s lives and preserve dignity.”

*This resource is available at the Effingham Public Library, Flora Public Library, Evans Public Library, Newton Public Library, Greenup Township Public Library, Shelbyville Public Library and the Mattoon Public Library in the Forget-Me-Not Resource Center. If you do not have a library card, ask at the main desk how you can check it out.*