

Communicating Memories through the Canvas

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Introduction

Working in long term care for twenty years, I have had the opportunity to work with many long term care residents. Many favorite populations to work with are by far dementia residents. I learn so much from these residents; it amazes me how the brain functions. I have been lucky enough to work with many different methods and had many successful interactions over the last twenty years.

I would have to say that my greatest achievement is working with an art group. I was taught how to help dementia residents express their thoughts through watercolor with the help of the Alzheimer's Association. The program is called *Memories in the Making*. It amazes me how residents who could not express themselves otherwise are able to put what they are feeling into their paintings.

Artists are given a blank canvas of white paper to begin. They are given colors to choose from and chose colors they feel to paint. The paintings become works of art most of the time. Stories of their lives flow on to the paper. I have had artists who have not been participating in other programs feel comfortable in this program. Residents in all stages of dementia partake in this program. Communication is made possible through these paintings.

The stories the artists share bring tears to the eyes of their families and become a wonderful outlet for the resident to work through their end of life review. It is a way for a resident to share their story and for a family to have a wonderful story to share in the future. It is a process that produces a product which can be a keepsake for the family. For more information about *Memories in the Making* please visit www.alz.org

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