

In some of our workshops we have brainstorming sessions to help gather information about the life story of a person with dementia. We often learn important pieces of the story from the person, staff, family members and friends. As we continue to sharpen our detective skills, we will have a variety of helpful ways to retell and connect to the full, rich lives of our elders... even as personal memories fade.

Here is an example assignment for the break-out groups:

Let's say Bill has dementia, and he is someone you have just met. You know that he likes ice cream, was a car repairman, and he used to collect, tumble and polish rocks. Based on 3 pieces of information, what might we do to trigger Bill's brain and create a flash to memories from the past?

Here is a list of the ideas we gathered in a two minute brainstorming session:

To trigger memories of his life as a car repairman:

- ♦ “When a car makes a noise like ‘blumb blumb,’ what does that mean?”
- ♦ “The alternator is out on my car. What should I do?”
- ♦ Take in old, familiar tools
- ♦ “Do you like cars?”
- ♦ “What is the worst car you have ever worked on?”
- ♦ “What is your favorite car?”
- ♦ “How many years of your life have you worked with cars?”
- ♦ “Did you own your own shop?”
- ♦ Go out to the parking lot together and look at a car
- ♦ “What was your first car?”
- ♦ “Did you ever have to fix your car?”
- ♦ “What is your favorite color of car?”
- ♦ “Did you have a special repair you were really good at?”
- ♦ Take in a model car
- ♦ “What city did you work in a car shop?”
- ♦ Take in a small engine to examine



To trigger memories of his love for ice cream:

- ♦ “I’m hungry for Baskin Robbins. Mmmmm... Chocolate!”
- ♦ “What is your favorite ice cream?”
- ♦ “I like vanilla ice cream with sprinkles. How about you?”

- ♦ Set up a miniature bar of ice cream toppings and enjoy dessert together.
- ♦ “I used to drive my car to get ice cream and it broke down.”
- ♦ “Do you ever make homemade ice cream?”
- ♦ Make homemade ice cream together
- ♦ Take the person to eat ice cream
- ♦ “What are your favorite ice cream toppings?”
- ♦ “When do you like to eat ice cream?”
- ♦ “Do you like sundaes or shakes?”
- ♦ “Where is your favorite place to go get ice cream?”
- ♦ Show pictures of ice cream cones
- ♦ “Do you prefer waffle or sugar cones?”
- ♦ Build ice cream floats together
- ♦ Invite grandkids over for an Ice cream social



To trigger memories of his hobby with rocks:

- ♦ “Do you know what kind of rock this is?”
- ♦ “I picked up some agates on the Oregon Beach. Have you been there?”
- ♦ “What was the biggest rock you tumbled?”
- ♦ “When you used to tumble the rocks, did they ever break?”
- ♦ Crack open a geode together
- ♦ Sort rocks
- ♦ “Where did you collect rocks?”
- ♦ Bring in magazines on rock collecting (National Geographics maybe)
- ♦ “Have you always collected rocks?”
- ♦ “Have you ever polished rocks?”
- ♦ Show a video on the subject of rocks and geology
- ♦ Show them jewelry
- ♦ Take in a bag of unpolished rocks to look at together
- ♦ Take in polished rocks
- ♦ “What is your favorite kind of rock?”
- ♦ “Did you ever display your rocks?”
- ♦ “What kinds of rocks do you collect?”
- ♦ “Did you have a lot of equipment for tumbling rocks?”
- ♦ “Did you make rock jewelry?” “How long did it take you to make a pair of earrings?”

The more we know about a person, the easier the interactions. So, what if Bill’s daughter comes to visit and tells us he also loves construction and fishing? We get to brainstorm new triggers!

To trigger memories of his experiences with construction:

- ♦ “I love power tools. Do you have a favorite?”
- ♦ “Did you operate any heavy machinery?”
- ♦ Bring in a hard hat and ask Bill to be our supervisor for the day of a particular project
- ♦ Bring in flash lights, tape measurers, levels, clamps, screws, paint brushes, drills, bits, lunchboxes, hammers, work boots, carpentry belt, toolbox, overalls, blueprints, chalk, plumbing line, etc.
- ♦ Ask Bill for his help. You are needing a piece of wood sanded down for a project. Would he wear some gloves and sand the wood for you?
- ♦ Bring in a construction worker and help Bill and the visitor strike up conversation
- ♦ Ask Bill to help you by sorting some nuts and bolts, washers
- ♦ Create an activity board with hardware on it, latches, holes, etc.
- ♦ Provide magazines (architecture, construction)
- ♦ Find interesting films on construction (maybe of famous sites)
- ♦ “When you were building houses, did you ever just hope it would rain?”
- ♦ Provide rollers and paint... see if Bill will help paint a room or an object
- ♦ “Did you work inside or out?”
- ♦ “Did you do any foundation work?”
- ♦ Show pictures of log cabin houses. “Have you ever built anything like that?”
- ♦ Clean tools together... get some rags, a small bucket of water, etc.
- ♦ “Was it tough getting building permits?”
- ♦ Bring in grandkids and children from the community. Let Bill explain and interact with their construction toys... he can TEACH them
- ♦ Create a WORKBENCH... his own place to tinker with random scraps and safe tools
- ♦ Bring in BINOCULARS so Bill can look out the window and see what the locals are up to... how the buildings are coming along
- ♦ With a level, ask Bill to see if any floors of the building are not done well

To trigger memories of fishing:

- ♦ Offer him a Missouri Conservation Magazine
- ♦ Flip through old photos of him with friends fishing
- ♦ “Do you have grandchildren?” “Did you ever teach them how to fish? I bet they learned from the master!”
- ♦ “What kind of fish do you like to fish for? Salmon, trout, halibut, bass, cropie, catfish, bluegill?”
- ♦ “I like packing good snacks when I go fishing. Did you ever take lunch with you?”
- ♦ “Did you ever catch a trophy fish?”
- ♦ Hang a rod and reel on the wall for Bill to interact with
- ♦ Bring in a jar of worms and talk about the little creatures
- ♦ “Have you ever mounted a fish?”
- ♦ “Do you own a boat?”
- ♦ “Did your wife go fishing with you?”
- ♦ “Where did you learn how to fish so well?”
- ♦ Get great fishing films and watch outdoor network on television
- ♦ “Is the afternoon best for fishing? Or morning?”

- ♦ “The sun can burn you bad if you’re not careful. Do you normally wear a hat when you fish?”
- ♦ Create a fishing tank to observe and ask Bill to help feed the fish
- ♦ Talk about fishing companions
- ♦ “Do you like cleaning the fish? That has always looked tough!”
- ♦ “Do you prefer fresh water or ocean fishing?”
- ♦ “Ever win a fishing contest?”
- ♦ Bring in fishing lures, hooks, bobbers, line, etc.
- ♦ “What was the biggest fish you ever caught!?!?”
- ♦ Go fishing!
- ♦ Show pictures of fish
- ♦ Bring in a tackle box and see if Bill would be in charge of organizing it.
- ♦ Bring in reels, lures, bait, make bait, etc.
- ♦ “What is fly fishing, anyhow?”
- ♦ “How do you like ‘em cooked?”
- ♦ Build Bill a boat bed, oars on the wall of his room, etc.
- ♦ Bring in River water
- ♦ “Can you show me how to cast this fishing pole?” Cast off the back patio deck.
- ♦ Bring in a fishing reel with a badly tangled line... ask if Bill would help untangle this mess!
- ♦ “Who bites on what? What do catfish like?”
- ♦ Read current event articles involving FISHING
- ♦ Go dig NIGHT CRAWLERS outside

