



Exploring psychology

Exploring Psychology: Living with Memory Impairment 2

Jean: Well he would just forget things. I would ask him to do certain things. Perhaps do a bit of shopping, or to make a phone call, or somebody would ring me, and he'd forget to take a message. I mean, nothing mega. But there was obviously something very wrong. And if we were having a discussion with other people. He seemed sometimes to lose the thread of it. And it was obvious that it was more than just the natural aging process. Because he'd always been so quick and so literate really and suddenly his powers of discussion were not as great as they had been. He'd realise that his memory was not what it ought to be. And we decided we'd at least seek some advice about it.

Narrator: So you were told dementia. And then more recently the word 'Alzheimer's' has come into the picture. What did it make you feel when you heard the word 'dementia'? What did you understand by that?

Jean: I think if I'm honest, I would have preferred the term 'Alzheimer's.' It was obviously a blow, but not unexpected. I think Sam's behaviour had led me to believe that there was something radically wrong. And in a way, I suppose having a label for it, was rather comforting. Because we know it was a medical thing. And we spent a lot of time reading about it and reading the recent research and then of course, the clinical psychologist referred us to you and to your team. And we've found that very helpful over the period we had contact with you.

Researcher: So tell me a bit about your memory difficulties?

Sam: Suddenly, sort of having to stop. Because what I started to say seemed to have floated away. And I've lost it. And people were looking at me, in a curious way. Like 'finish it off.' And I can't. and I'd got to tell them. And that's very embarrassing. It's almost like somebody's turned your mechanism into the wrong wave. I can't understand this properly. Because it's just recently. I mean you think to yourself, 'Yes, I was coming for that book. What book was it?' And then you forget it's even a book. And that's most recently. And that's been the most threatening.

Jean: He can't cope with the video recorder now. Which is only on Video Plus. He can't cope with that at all. And he has difficulty playing tapes. Except on his own recorder. Which he has in his bedroom and he plays tapes frequently on that.

Researcher: Do you feel like as if you're not the same person as before really?

Sam: I am the same person. But I am not nearly as able as I used to be.

Jean: Well he certainly isn't as confident as he was. Anything like it. And he will do something, and he will ask me to check it. And quite often it doesn't need any checking. If he's doing a letter, he will ask me to look at it, and correct it grammatically. Which even a few years ago he would never have dreamt of asking me. He would have just done it. But his ability to construct a written sentence has really quite diminished. We still play Scrabble. And in fact only last week he got a seven letter word and won.

Sam: Recently I've also suddenly realised that too many people for too long makes me worse than what I am. And I have to go away, with an excuse. Well I think it's that way. I can't say for sure. But that's what it feels like. If only it was less frequent, and less packed.

Jean: For years and years and years I never actually physically paid a bill. A bill would come in and he would sit down, before going to work or what have you. And he would pay the bill by return of post. Now, that doesn't happen. I tend to do quite a lot of things in that area. But if I ask him to do a cheque to pay a bill, as I did last week. It will take him a long time to actually go through the motions of not writing out the cheque. But making sure he was paying it to the right person. So this has done nothing for his self confidence. But he is a fighter. He keeps on trying and he won't give up. Which is possibly part of the problem of course. Because if I try to help him, he resents the help, often. Unless as he says, he asks for it. But I don't always know whether he wants it or not. We've always had this idea of mutuality in our relationship. If a job's needed doing, it's doesn't matter who'd done it. It's usually been him actually. But we've never had specific roles. We've done what we've needed to do. Although he is still very good about the house. And doing domestic chores, like the things I hate doing. Like ironing and things, and so on. But we're not able to sit down and have the kind of conversations we used to have about things like politics. Which isn't to say he's not interested, he is. But we're not able to discuss in any great depth. Because I think he loses interest. He finds it difficult to follow an argument beyond a certain level. And I find this very frustrating. Very frustrating indeed.

Researcher: I know that you have got some memory problems, and that they do affect you, and what you can do. But I also know Sam, that you're very active. That you do still do a lot of things that you enjoy doing. And I thought it would be interesting just to talk a bit about that. About the things that you do still get involved in, and like to do.

Sam: Well what I do here for instance. I help with the group of people from round here. Go three times a year to clear up all the rubbish and.

Researcher: This is your woodland group.

Sam: Woodland. Yes. I was also an organiser for... we played the Boule game, the Boule. Petanque. I am quite a good player too. But one of my specialities was taking people who had never played before, and wanted to come to the hotel, to have a game of Boule beforehand. And this is the last one I haven't done. But I've been doing it for years. And I am very good at it. Some of the people you ask to take it and do it. And you can get 60 people there you know.

Jean: I was really quite pleased. And Sam's been very involved with the Woodland Trust. And last autumn, his group, of course of which he's leader. Was nominated by the Peterborough Evening Telegraph Environment Awards thing. And we had actually get the runners up. This conveys nothing really. Other than the fact that it does show, because you've got Alzheimer's, you're not totally without it.

Sam: Well the general thing is to maintain the activities I have. Which would be a bicycle. Making use of them. Crosswords. Now I do those again.

Researcher: So that's to keep your brain active.

Sam: That's right. It's not a very difficult one I do, but I just like to do it. Favourite music, I must do that. And that's just for keeping you nice and calm and so on. I will listen to a whole tape you see.

Researcher: So that's to relax you at bedtime is it?

Sam: That's right. And it works for me. I'm not saying it would work for anybody else.

Researcher: What other strategies have you noticed Sam developing, to try and cope with his memory difficulties?

Jean: Well he's always writing lists. He's an interminable list writer. And he puts notes to himself, pretty well everywhere. And that's fair enough. Things are colour coded. He'll put notices. I think he a put a notice for you on the back of our car today.

Researcher: Yes. That was very nice. To tell us we could park there.

Jean: Yes. But that is par for the course really. And he always has to try and get ahead of himself. So if he's going to a meeting. He will spend hours and hours and hours preparing for it. But then when he takes a meeting, and he chairs a meeting. You'd be hard pushed to know there was anything wrong with him at all.