

The Final Chapter of a Life is an Opportunity

The final chapter of a life is an opportunity ~ an opportunity to fulfil those dreams, hone those skills and live out all that may have been put on hold during a long, hard working life.

Caring for our elders, keeping them warm, safe and well nourished is of course very important but there is more. A life to be lived right up to the end. As Alan Kellehear said, 'It takes 25 seconds to die. The rest is life'. This is easily forgotten.

We all learn interesting and valuable skills over the years and these can enhance our later life and often be shared, especially with children to the enrichment of both, if we are given the opportunity.

'How did you make your oatcakes?' I ask sometimes. 'Did you also make lace?' 'Can you show me how please?' Happy conversations ensue as we compare recipes or get out some threads and bobbins. There is just so much living to do and it doesn't just stop because we are in a care home or walk with a walking frame.

Dementia is no barrier to these possibilities when we cease to resist the confusion and allow the light to shine through the chinks of clarity. A song can lift the spirits or a photo, elicit a memory and then a new journey of discovery can begin.

Television is often considered entertainment whereas it can kill conversation, encourage people to blank off and also become desensitized. Instead we can come in close, massage hands with fragrant oils, read a story or a poem. The simple tasks of living are what have made up a life and it is a tragedy when we can no longer participate in them; folding our underwear, make biscuits or stir the soup.

I see people on a regular basis, slumped in front of a TV screen waiting for the next 'fly cup' or toilet break to alleviate the tedium of a lacklustre day, when every one of them has a rich history and a story to tell.

Time and tenderness is all it takes along with empathetic listening and a compassionate heart. Only time is hard to come but without it, a disproportionate amount of our elders die without having fully lived their final days with that special attention and love that we all long for, young and old

Life enhancement, not just care; a fundamental difference.

Lucy Aykroyd ~ Life Enhancing Care Giver & End of Life Doula

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