

A Christmas Story

By Maggie Roach-Ganaway, Support Coordinator, Cape Breton

This is not the Christmas story about a Red Ryder BB gun or a lamp shaped like a lady's leg. This story is about family tradition and how important it is, especially for Caregivers.

I have a large extended family and we all have busy lives. It is important for us to get together each year around the holidays, and sometimes this is the only time we can all gather at the same time.

While looking at some pictures from past years' celebrations, I noticed how many of the people in those photographs are no longer with us. At first it made me sad. Then I remembered all of the great times we shared during our family gatherings. It also got me thinking about how we can preserve these memories and create even more. It is important to carry such recollections about them with us when people in the photographs—some of whom may be family members or friends for whom we provided care—are no longer here.

Here are a few ways a Caregiver, thinking ahead, can create and preserve memories of their care recipient. Sometimes, this could involve doing things together during the time while you are caring for that family member or friend, things that you can later look back on that will evoke reminiscences of earlier times.

Planning ahead while your loved one is still living, you could make a special ornament to put on the tree each year to cherish the memory of them.

A journal can be a wonderful source of future memories. Create one together so you can ask them questions about family history that maybe only they would know. It can provide hours of pleasant memories in years to come, and it can also be useful to other family members as well.

For someone with dementia, create a memory book to help you communicate with him or her while they are still here and to have and cherish after they are gone.

Collect some of their favourite recipes to pass along, so that every time you smell what is cooking, a smile will come across your face in remembrance. How often do people comment, "Do you remember the delicious molasses oatmeal cookies Aunt Ellen used to make?"

Family chronicles of significant events that happened in the past year with each member of your family can also serve as a nice way to remember times and dates for the future.

Through pictures and videos we can preserve the memory of a loved one, but it is important to *do* something with the pictures once you have them. Maybe make a special scrapbook with reminders of who is in each picture to pass along to future generations who may not have had the opportunity to know personally these relatives or family friends.

I want you to remember however, this does not have to be another great chore that you feel you have to do. It is meant to remind us of the great value our loved one has in our lives.

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