

Eldercare Story-Share

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Neither the authors of this book, nor its publishers intend this book as specific, professional consultation. Readers are cautioned that their own circumstances might require consultation with qualified professionals—which this book does not stand in lieu of.



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Foreword

This eBook provides a brief overview of activities for elders with and without dementia. Our focus, here, is on storytelling, and we provide four stories—two for high functioning persons and two for persons with cognitive impairment. More of our work is available through Clove Press, Ltd. at www.clovepress.com

About the Authors

Virginia L. Smerglia and Lauren Smerglia Seifert bring extensive knowledge and practical experience to their collaborations. Virginia has worked in the field of sociology for more than twenty-five years: teaching and conducting research—with a *focus on caregiving* for older family members. Her teaching and research experience in gerontology inform these pages as do her years of training under the tutelage of renowned gerontologist Charles Baressi.

Selected references to Virginia's work are:

- Seifert & Smerglia, 2012 (book)
- Smerglia, Miller, Sotnak, & Geiss, 2007
- Miller, Smerglia, & Bouchet, 2004
- Smerglia, Deimling, & Schaefer, 2001
- Smerglia, 2000
- Smerglia & Deimling, 1997

In previous books, Lauren and Virginia have written about eldercare activities, dementia care, and the psychology of aging. For more than twenty-five years, Lauren has studied memory, aging, and neuro-degeneration, and her work focuses on cognitive maintenance for elders with and without dementia. Since 1987, Lauren has devoted many hours to practical applications for eldercare in long-term residential settings, and her current work includes research on chronic disability. Reference citations for Lauren's work include:

- Seifert & Smerglia, 2012 (book)
- Seifert & Jones, 2011
- Seifert, 2009 (book)
- Seifert & Baker, 2009 (book chapter)
- Seifert, 2007b (book)
- Seifert & Baker, 2003
- Seifert, 1999

An Introduction to Elder Activities

Rapidly expanding in the field of eldercare activities is a person-centered approach that regards the specific needs of each person who receives care (Kitwood, 1997, 1993). Person-centered care attends to all aspects of the individual and to his/her unique needs and wants. So, it is vital to know the history of a person and to understand his or her needs: biological (e.g., overall good health versus Diabetes, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease), social (e.g., family, education, social class, race, ethnicity, and cultural influences), psychological (e.g., productivity-oriented versus relaxation-oriented), and other. It is important to acknowledge his or her desires, as well (e.g., wanting to "age in place" at home versus wanting to move in with an adult child).

Mutuality

So, person-centered caring takes into account the many different parts that make up a person for whom you provide care. We add to that the idea of "mutuality"—which means that a caregiver (whether professional or family) works to maintain a balance between him or herself, the person receiving care, and the "system" (the people, things, and events) in which both exist (Archbold, Stewart, Greenlick, & Harvath, 1992). Mutuality happens when we are truly "present" with the person for whom we care—communicating in ways that honor his or her unique needs and desires and keeping in mind that we, also, are people who have needs and desires (McKivergin & Daubenmire, 1994; Vaillot, 1966).

Seifert, Flaherty, and Trill (2013) have described The See-Saw Model of Day-to-Day Interactions. It provides a way to think about caregiver-elder exchanges. In the simplest version of the model, an elder is on one end of the see-saw and a caregiver (whether activity staff, nurse, nurse aid, friend, or family) is on the other end. Mutuality involves working to keep the teeter-totter in motion by attending to the biological, social, psychological, and other needs and desires of the elder(s) for whom you care. As care is given, a caregiver must also attend to his/her own needs and wants in order to monitor communication, maintain openness, and strive for true understanding and effectiveness. And caregivers should be mindful of the tasks which must be accomplished (e.g., bathing, eating, exercising, resting).

One way to work toward mutuality and to value the elders for whom we provide care is through storytelling (Seifert & Smerglia, 2012).

Basic storytelling, as a way to foster mutuality, involves:

1. Being present with a person (or persons) for whom we provide care.
2. Understanding who s/he is and what s/he wants and needs.
3. Knowing ourselves—our own wants and needs and those of others.
4. Striving for openness, justice/fairness, and humanity. In "openness", people accept opportunities to learn from their experiences (McCrae & Costa, 1987). When looking for justice, people work toward those things that help their community to function well (see Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). And when acting with "humanity", people act in order to "tend and befriend" rather than to "fight or flee" (Taylor et al., 2000).
5. Working to complete caregiver tasks while honoring others and ourselves with things such as kind words, gentle behaviors, and caring decision-making (after Seifert et al., 2013).

Storytelling as Exercise for the Mind

About cognitive maintenance and enrichment in eldercare—sometimes referred to as exercises for the mind—science is beginning to catch up to what we’ve all thought was true for a long time. **Exercising memory, thinking, and problem solving is probably a good idea! You can do this in storytelling activities as you strive for mutuality and as you work to help people “think smart”.**

We can all probably use some thinking exercises, but they are even more important for persons with cognitive impairment (e.g., from Alzheimer’s disease, from stroke, from Parkinson’s disease). For people who have memory impairments associated with Alzheimer’s disease, “subject-performed” tasks (i.e., those that involve active participation of the elder) are preferable (Rusted, Ratner, & Sheppard, 1995; Rusted & Sheppard, 2002). And active retrieval is better than just watching or listening as someone else remembers. Active retrieval involves coming up with the information on one’s own when given appropriate memory cues (Ebbinghaus, 1885/1964; Roediger & Karpicke, 2006).

“Cues” are hints that help someone remember things, and a cue can be as simple as a picture, song, or verbal clue. Examples of good subject-performed activities include guessing pantomimes in response to someone acting them out (Seifert, 1999; Seifert & Baker, 1998; Seifert & Baker, 2009); searching magazines and catalogs for pictures of particular things (Seifert & Baker, 2009); selecting pictures of world landmarks in a card game about world geography (Seifert & Baker, 2009); and learning to check one’s own calendar to find out what is happening today (Camp, 1999). Some activities lead to fairly quick maintenance and/or improvements (within six weeks or less; Baker & Seifert, 2007), while in other tasks, benefits appear later—appearing after six months or more (Seifert & Baker, 2009). For persons with cognitive impairments, some rehearsed activities will show improvement and others will not (Seifert & Baker, 2009). Note, though, that Herzog, Kramer, Wilson, and Lindenberger (2008) have cautioned that we do not yet know enough about cognitive exercises to make bold claims about their abilities to improve memory and thinking...especially in persons with dementia.

Repetition is helpful, but it should be *active repetition*, and that is one reason that storytelling works so well. It is naturally active, and stories can be repeated every once in a while in order to help maintain the memories associated with them. High functioning elders might like to revisit a story once per year, when its seasonal relevance is salient (e.g., stories about Christmas traditions). For persons with cognitive impairment, repeating the same story once every month or so can be helpful for engaging active repetition of the ideas in a story. Listeners can become participants when they are included in storytelling that is more like a dialogue than a monologue!

Guidelines for Storytelling

1) Pick good stories. They should be entertaining, and a story should have a theme (such as seasons, holidays, enjoyable activities, a mystery that is solved by the end of the narrative, or other people/things that are of interest). If a story is about a particular season or holiday, use it during that time of year to help orient people to the event. Avoid using it at a completely different time of year, in order to avoid confusion.

2) Know your audience. Striving for mutuality involves working to know the person/people for whom you help to provide care. If you are going to spend an hour in a storytelling activity about sports, then ask people who are likely to be interested in the topic. Asking a lady with mild-to-moderate cognitive impairment from Alzheimer’s disease, who would rather hear about gardening, to sit through an hour-long session about baseball is probably not a great idea. It indicates a lack of regard for her preferences and may very well leave her bored, asleep, or even angry.

3) Use sensory aids. Visual aids are the best ones (like beautiful color photos). Tactile (touch) aids can be excellent, too (like a velvety, plush stuffed animal that can be passed around). The other senses are tricky to integrate, because smell sometimes diminishes with age (Doty et al., 1984). However, decline in one's sense of smell seems to be heavily dependent on environmental factors (like one's occupation and/or exposure to substances that harm the nasal membranes; Hooyman & Kiyak, 2011). Interestingly, scents might be worst to use among persons with Alzheimer's disease, because smell declines early in Alzheimer's disease—making it an especially poor route to memory cueing in that population (e.g., Vance, 2002). So, for people with Alzheimer's disease and for people who have significant impairment in scent recognition [from things like being exposed to caustic detergents (in house cleaning or janitorial work, for example)], using scents in activities is probably not a great idea.

Hearing can decline, too—especially hearing someone's voice in a noisy environment (Bergman, 1971; Tun, 1998). So, take care to speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard, without shouting. If you wonder whether someone heard you speaking, you can always slow your speech, wait for some of the noise to stop (like door alarms, dogs barking, or other people talking), and re-state what you've said.

Food and good tastes can be great ways to foster activity and social interactions. However, when you are planning refreshments in activities, specific foods might not be permitted, due to some elders' dietary restrictions.

Some elders have sensory challenges (e.g., hearing impairment, poor vision, loss of touch sensation). However, it is very important to avoid perceiving a sensory challenge as a cognitive deficit (Baltes & Lindenberger, 1997). Just because someone has trouble seeing you or hearing you, it doesn't mean that the person has trouble thinking!

4) Read a bit, and then show a prop, like a relevant picture or item. In our book, *Telmia...Short Stories for Active Adults* (Seifert & Smerglia, 2012), we present stories with beautiful, full-color photos. Reading one or two paragraphs and then stopping to show a picture from the story can provide a useful break, and it can spur conversation about a story's characters, plot, location, and/or intrigue. In one story from that book called "The Mailman's Mystery", we found great fun in showing photos of tall buildings from the city where the story takes place (Cleveland, Ohio). This can prompt conversation about whether anyone (in a storytelling group) is from Cleveland or has visited the city. Likewise, showing a Cleveland sports team's pennant or jersey can foster conversation about the team, about a particular sport, and about athletic events.

5) If time allows, end with discussion about something from the story. One of our favorite techniques is to end with a trivia game (guessing words) in which participants are given hints as they guess words and names from a story. This is an especially good exercise for individuals with moderate cognitive impairments, but it might be too simplistic for high functioning participants. A fun activity for high functioning elders is to end a storytelling session with discussion about people's own experiences that relate to a story. Virginia has suggested asking questions that relate to events (like gardening, when a story is about the subject), people (like people with unusual jobs, when a story is about a specific occupation), or places (like San Francisco, California, when a story is set in that location). Use props and visual aids and ask people about their own experiences.

In one activity group that Virginia leads, the group is mixed. Lauren has previously reported that mixed (levels of cognitive functioning) can work in one group (see Seifert, 2007, 2009). Consider individual personalities and ask people to take part with other people and in activities in which they might share interests. Virginia's activity session includes people who are normal functioning, who have mild cognitive impairment, and who have moderate-to-severe cognitive impairments. One of the reasons the activity group "works" is that it is set in an environment of mutuality where everyone is honored as a unique and valued person. Virginia reports that in this specific group, the participants

enjoy discussions about history that are integrated with various stories. So, she might bring in items that are historically relevant to a story's theme (like a miniature spinning wheel for a story session about spinning yarn from wool). You, too, can integrate any number of topics (e.g., history, geography, art) that are relevant to story's theme.

Use the items and events in a story to spark discussion and to select props. In Virginia's story "Big Pumpkin" in this eBook, there are some key themes, like hats and the season (autumn). To build a storytelling session around one or both of the themes is easy. For instance, ask staff and/or family members to bring in favorite hats and model them. Or ask elders about whether they like to wear hats. Perhaps, each person could be asked to bring a hat to the session, or to pick one to wear from among some that you provide. Just take care not to lose anyone's hat during the activity, and be willing to "lose your hats" if you offer to let elders with moderate-to-severe cognitive impairment wear them. After all, once a person with memory loss has chosen a hat to wear, she or he might decide to "own it", and your begging to retrieve it might only lead to an argument!

Lauren (2007) wrote about a one-on-one activity with hats in her book, *Chasing Dragonflies*. She found note cards with photos of cats, and each feline wore a hat. They were adorable and funny, and the lady with whom Lauren interacted in the activity loved them! Even a search online can lead you to find some great visual aids, and if you have a computer, you can show them on your screen or on a big screen (Seifert & Jones, 2011). Building a PowerPoint™ (or similar) slideshow with great pictures of items from a story can give you a great way to spur discussion and interest in that story. [Check-out www.clovepress.com for availability of some cool photos and artwork! We even have some slideshows for use in eldercare.]

6) Monitor people's reactions. If a story seems to be bombing, then end it quickly and move on to another one. At one evening activity, Lauren experienced this situation. She was reading a story about the seashore to an audience of persons with mild-to-moderate cognitive impairment on a rainy day in northern Ohio. The group just could not get into the idea of being at the beach! So, she ended the story quickly and went on to one with a mystery about a monkey who kept showing up on a mailman's route (from *Telmia...*; Seifert & Smerglia, 2012). Once she got the mystery going and showed them a photo of the little monkey...they were hooked!

7) Finish the session on a happy note. Activities in eldercare are social, cognitive, and emotional. Don't take people into downers-ville. Uplift them!

Complex Stories

In this section are sample stories for adults who are normal functioning or who are high functioning with dementia or mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Visit www.clovepress.com for information about publications that contain more stories and activities for active elders.

A caregiver, activity-professional, or elder might use stories for:

- Personal enjoyment while reading alone.
- Reading aloud to an individual or a group.
- Dramatic readings with props and/or costumes.
- Providing copies to individuals to read on their own (without including pages like this one, which are instructions for caregivers/activity staff).
- Reading the stories and discussing them as part of a “reading group.”
- Building activities with themes, like a “Fall Fashion Show with Hats” that might be scheduled to coincide with a dramatic reading of “Big Pumpkin.”

The Stories

[Note that the following story is about a mystery that involves honoring someone who has passed away. Thus, the content might not be appropriate for some elders. The issue is handled with sensitivity, but it might be challenging for some persons who are grieving.]

An Old Car Goes South

by Virginia L. Smerglia

This story is about a husband and wife, Rod and Robin, who live in Michigan, near Detroit. Of course, Detroit is the home of big automobile companies. Their two sons, Ryan and Josh, are out of college and on their own. So, Robin and Rod have what's called an "empty nest."

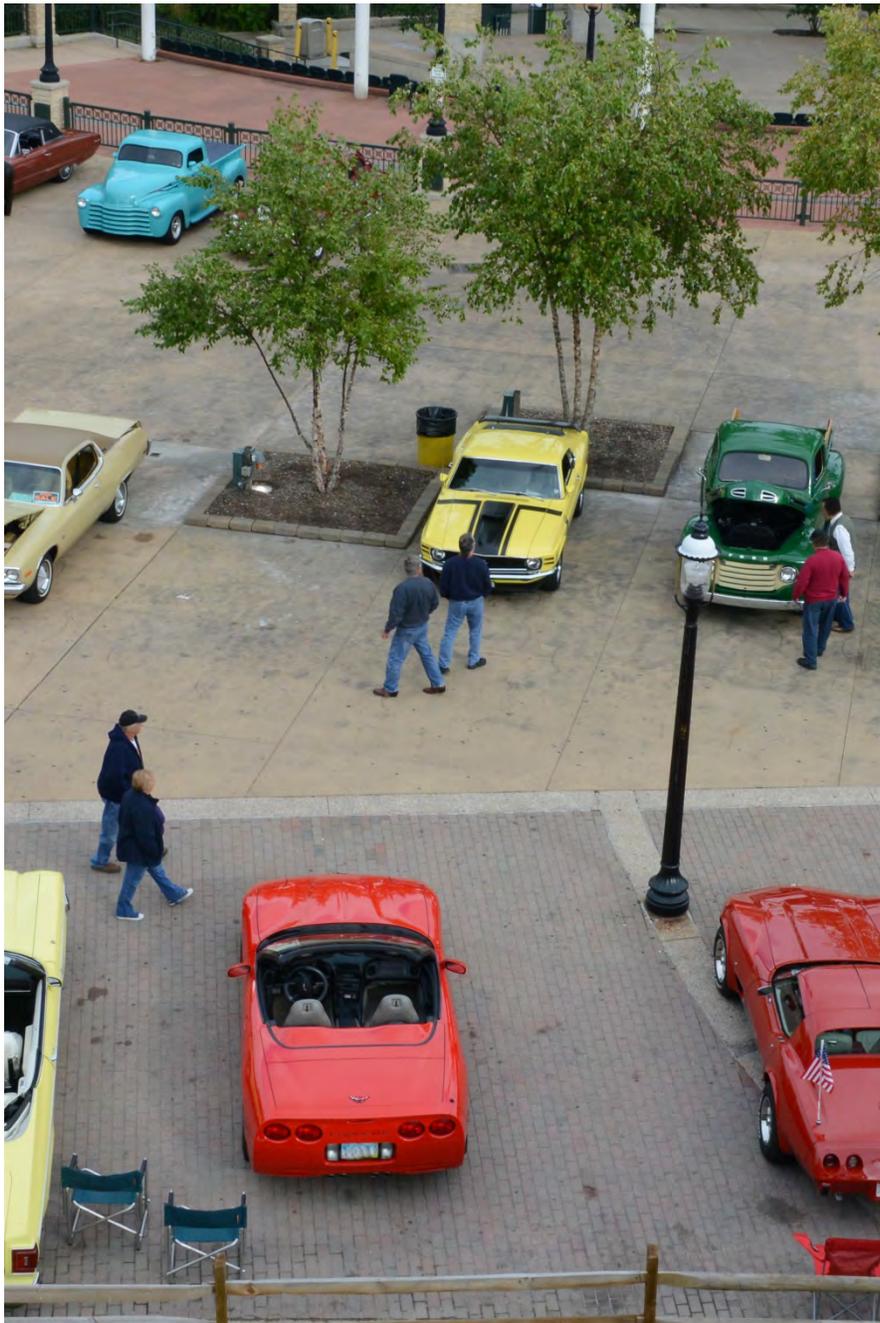
Rod is an engineer; he works for an automobile company designing brakes. Recently, Rod and Robin got a big surprise. Rod's boss called him in to say that he is being transferred to Tucson, Arizona. Imagine, Arizona, after living their whole married life and raising their sons in Detroit. It's a big thing to think of leaving friends, church, neighbors, Robin's teaching job, everything!

Well, Robin and Rod are having feelings you might expect. Some days, moving to Arizona seems like a wonderful adventure; other days, it feels like the last thing in the world they want to do. But, they must decide. If Rod doesn't take the new job, he will have to look elsewhere for work. At the age of fifty-two, he is not anxious to do that. In the end, Rod and Robin decide that all of life is an adventure and this might be great. Warm weather and a new climate! Robin's doctor says this move may be good for her allergies. So, they're going. Their sons are in favor of it. Since both travel in their jobs, they believe seeing Mom and Dad several times a year will be a piece of cake!

By the way, Rod's hobby is refurbishing old cars, especially 1950's cars. He has four cars he has restored. He and Robin go to car shows where he competes with others in front of judges. The judges are looking for whether or not a car is authentic; is it as it would have looked when it was made?



Robin and Rod also enjoy going to “cruise-ins” where antique car hobbyists arrive in their cars—usually with a picnic supper. They talk about their cars in great detail. Even though it is mostly men who work on the cars, wives and girlfriends enjoy the get-togethers and make friends and share fun times.



Rod finds on the internet that there are many car shows and cruise-ins in Arizona, but he can't afford to take all of his cars. He decides to take his favorite, a light green and cream-colored 1957 Chevrolet two-door sedan. Rod does not trust anyone to transport his "baby"—the 1957 Chevy. So, he rents a special truck that has a flat bed where the car can ride without touching the road. He will drive the flat bed truck with the Chevy on it, and Robin will follow him in their mini-van as they travel from Detroit to Tucson.

In early April, they set out on the adventure of a lifetime, the move to Arizona. The trip is over 2,000 miles, and they figure it will take five days of travel. They hope to make it down through Ohio, Indiana and most of Illinois the first day. By 5:00 P.M., they do accomplish that and pull off the interstate for the night at a motel surrounded by good places to eat.

That was Rod's idea. He said, "Robin, let's be sure we stay somewhere near lots of restaurant choices so that we can have a great dinner." That's okay with Robin. Her priorities are pie and ice cream for dessert and a nice walk in the morning before they get back on the road. So, they check into the motel, safely park the truck and minivan and choose a restaurant they can walk to that advertises "great steaks from Chicago" and fresh trout. Yum!!!

It's a wonderful dinner! Rod has the steak; Robin has baked trout, and they try homemade blueberry crumb pie with vanilla bean ice cream for dessert. Then, hand-in-hand, they walk back toward the motel, happy that their first travel day has been good. Rod wants to check on the car. So, they swing by the parking lot and there they have a shock waiting. On the flatbed truck, next to the car is a huge crystal vase filled with yellow roses and tied with a beautiful yellow bow. They look at each other. Should they be pleased or disturbed? Who would put an expensive crystal vase filled with roses on a truck bed? What does it mean?



Robin laughs it off. She says, “Probably, someone who fell in love in a 1957 Chevrolet!”

However, this car is Rod’s baby! He is very concerned to think someone unknown was “fooling around” his car. You can probably guess that Rod does not get much sleep that night. In fact, he sets his alarm to wake him every two hours. He hardly needs it though, because his thoughts about the car keep him up. He has convinced himself that something is amiss with his car. Thankfully, morning comes, and there sits the car with the vase of roses still in the same place. The car is fine, and he must admit that the roses are pretty.

Robin asks the motel manager if she has any idea who might have put a vase of yellow roses on their car. The manager says, “Maybe your friends from back home sent flowers.”

“But, no one knew where we would be last night. Even we didn’t know where we’d stop.” Robin answers.

“Well,” says the manager, “I think you should take the beautiful vase and flowers and not worry about it.”

“That’s a good idea,” says Robin as she heads back to the motel room to pack up the expensive leaded crystal vase.

The next night is uneventful, and Robin and Rod stop at a motel in the middle of Oklahoma. It is definitely warmer and they realize that April in Arizona is going to be very different than the April snow in Michigan. They decide on a restaurant with southern fried chicken. Then, they turn in early.

In the morning, they go for a walk into the small town near the motel. It’s charming; the town square has beautiful azaleas of many colors. They are in full bloom!

“Azaleas won’t be blooming in Michigan for another month,” Robin remarks with surprise and delight.

They get back to the motel and resume their trip with their car safe on the flatbed truck and no sign of anything strange. They intend to drive as far as they can. They make it through most of Texas, almost to New Mexico on this third day. By then, the mysterious event of the first night—the vase of yellow roses being put on their car—is long forgotten. Robin and Rod enjoy the warm climate and new sights.

After they register in their Texas motel, Robin and Rod decide they want to try Southwestern food. The motel clerk recommends a place called “Longo’s.”

He says, “It sounds Italian, but it has every kind of taco and burrito in the world and it’s just a four-block walk.”

Rod and Robin have a great time at Longo’s. There is great food and a colorful band playing. They stop to see some pottery from Santa Fe in a shop as they walk back to the motel. Robin convinces Rod that they really should buy some handmade pottery for their new home. She sees a bowl with brilliant blue, orange, and gold flowery designs that she really likes. They purchase it and head back to the motel. They stop to check on their car, and guess what?

There, setting on the truck bed, right next to the car, is a pottery bowl, almost the same colors as the one they just purchased. Floating in the bowl are five large golden yellow roses as big as the Texas sun!



“I’m going to call law enforcement,” says Rod.

Robin teases, “Who are you going to call, Rod...the flower police?” Then, she continues, “Let’s look around the truck for clues first. You know, like they do on all those crime investigation shows.”

“We’re not detectives, Robin, and this is getting to be way too strange,” Rod says.

But, Robin looks around the truck for footprints anyway. She is convinced that she’ll find something to help them unravel this mystery of the yellow roses being placed on Rod’s car. Well, there are none because it’s a concrete parking area. She looks on the truck bed to see if anyone left a note, or paper from the flower wrapping. Then, she looks on the bottom of the beautiful pottery bowl for a label. There, she sees that the pottery is signed with the initials “B.T.”

“There!” she says. “See! It’s a clue.”

Robin heads into the motel office where she tells the motel clerk about the flowers on their car. She also tells him about the vase of flowers which they had found on their car two days ago in Illinois. He hasn't seen anything suspicious, but he does know what "B.T." stands for.

"B.T. is Bonnie Thuning, a local potter and a pretty well-known artist. She has a shop in town, but I'm sure the shop is closed now; the shops are only open until 6:00 P.M." he says.

Robin asks if the clerk knows when Bonnie Thuning's shop opens in the morning. He thinks she opens it at 9:30 A.M. Robin walks back to the parking lot to give Rod all this information. She would like to visit the shop in the morning.

"I don't know, Robin. I don't really want to wait that long to start on tomorrow's trip. We have to go through part of Texas and into New Mexico. It's a long, hot drive," Rod answers.

Robin says, "Here's what I think, Honey. Your boss has given you fifteen days to get settled, and the moving truck won't be in Tucson for another four days. We've settled everything on the new home in Tucson. Your company is having the house cleaned from top to bottom for us. We aren't traveling with kids who have to get settled in a new school. We're free as birds! Since this mystery with the car and the roses has one possible clue, why not start our trip tomorrow a few hours late and go meet Bonnie Thuning in the morning before we leave?"

Rod sees her logic and agrees. "Besides," he thinks, "I'm probably going to have another sleepless night watching my car."

So, the next morning, Rod and Robin walk into town, enjoy a Western omelet with all the trimmings, and "mosey" over to see Ms. Thuning. When they open the door to her shop, they are amazed. This is not the store where they bought their bowl last evening. This shop is barely noticeable, wedged between a donut place and a travel agency. But, when you walk inside, you see shelf after lighted shelf with the most amazingly beautiful pottery: vases, bowls, plates, and platters of every size. There are also sugar bowls and creamers, pitchers, and even huge outdoor planters. The colors are spectacular—especially the cobalt blues, the vibrant greens, the bright oranges, and golden yellows.

"Hello," says Robin, "anyone here?"

"Back in the corner," comes the reply.

Robin and Rod walk back through the pottery shop. They follow the sound and see a woman, perhaps eighty-five years old, of average height, with lovely skin. She is sitting on a stool, painting a delicate pattern on a platter that must be for the biggest turkey you could imagine. She says she is indeed Bonnie Thuning. So, Rod tells her the whole story, all about the crystal vase and then her bowl, both filled with large yellow roses. He shows her on his cell phone a picture of the bowl of roses setting on his truck bed.

“Oh, yes,” she says. “I sold that bowl late yesterday; the young woman who bought it had a bouquet of yellow roses with her. Let me see. I don’t usually divulge customers’ names, but since she put the bowl on your truck bed, I guess you have a right to know her name.” Bonnie quickly goes through her sales from the day before. “Here it is. Her name is Lindy McCann and she was staying at The Canterbury Inn.”

“But, that’s where we’re staying,” Robin says. “Let’s get back there right away, Rod, and see if she’s still there.”

They thank Bonnie Thuning, run all the way to the motel, and ask the clerk if Lindy McCann has checked out. Of course, he says he can’t give out that information.

Rod replies, “But we’ve found out she purchased the bowl that was left on our truck. Surely, that entitles us to talk with her.”

“Hmmm, I guess that makes your case,” says the clerk. “She is that blond young woman out there putting her bags into her trunk.”

They race outside. Rod is very anxious to set this person straight. Robin sees her and recognizes the softness in her demeanor. As soon as she sees them, she obviously realizes who they are and why they want to talk with her. As they approach, they see she has tears in her eyes.

Robin says, “Lindy, I’m Robin and this is my husband, Rod. Can you tell us why you’ve been placing yellow roses by our Chevy?”

Lindy wiped her eyes with tissues. “I’m sorry if I’ve disturbed you,” she says.

“Disturbed us?” Rod says. “You’ve cost me two nights sleep!”

At this, Lindy begins to tear up again. Robin looks at Rod sternly. He’s used to raising boys; he can be pretty blunt. Robin says, “Lindy, let’s go over to that patio, get something to drink, and talk.” And, so they go.

Robin sits beside Lindy and holds her hand. “Tell us!” she says simply.

Lindy begins, “I’m traveling from Chicago to Phoenix for my father’s funeral.” Rod’s look softens when he hears this. “I wanted to be there before he died, but I couldn’t get a flight and then I talked to Mom during the first afternoon out and she told me he was gone. That was the night I put the vase of roses on your truck.”

“But why?” asked Rod.

“My father had a green and cream 1957 two-door Chevy sedan exactly like yours. He worked on it for years and was so proud of it. Then, Mom was forced to sell it because of his medical bills. He never knew because he was bedfast. In the last week of his life, Mom contacted the new owner. He was shipping the car to Miami the following day, but he agreed to bring it by before so Dad could see it. The new owner never mentioned his purchase of the car. Dad just thought Mom found someone to get it out of the garage and drive it.

When I saw your car in the motel parking lot the evening of the day my dad died, I had the feeling that if I did something special, he would know. I felt he would be here on the trip with me. And, then it just happened that I was making about the same time as you, I guess, and last night, I came into town and saw your car again. Daddy loved the beautiful Southwestern pottery and he grew yellow roses. So, I went into Bonnie Thuning’s shop and bought the bowl.”

Robin and Rod were stunned. Robin took the lovely young Lindy into her arms and hugged her for quite a while. “Lindy, when is your dad’s funeral?” she asked.

“The day after tomorrow,” Lindy answered.

“Well, Rod,” Robin said, “I think your baby—your light green and cream 1957 Chevy sedan—has a command performance in Phoenix before it moves permanently to Tucson.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Rod said. “I think we would like to make a detour to Phoenix and drive you and your mom to the funeral in my Chevy, Lindy. But, what would you think of that idea?”

Lindy nodded and her smile was evidence enough of her agreement and her gratitude. So, within two days, Robin and Rod drove in their 1957 Chevy and helped Lindy McCann and her mom. It was a sunny day in Phoenix, and it was a very special remembrance of Lindy’s dad and his beloved Chevy.

May Day Mysteries

by Lauren Smerglia Seifert

Island life is different. To live on a tiny piece of land, surrounded by water on all sides, leads a person to be accustomed to the wonder—and to the dangers of it—from an early age. Islands on large lakes are similar to those on ocean coasts and seas, because life must revolve around the weather and what the water might do next.



On the Island of Birds, children know about clouds even before they can name them: cumulous, cumulonimbus, cirrus, and stratus. Kids learn to sense foul winds...sometimes, before they can walk or talk. This is as it should be. When one's well-being depends on it, he or she must understand how to stay safe on a tiny piece of isolated earth.

Island life is not all bad; otherwise, people wouldn't reside there. A quick look at real estate prices on residential islands tells the story about their popularity. They can be marvelous places, and boating, swimming, fishing, lighthouses, and more attract islanders and landlubbers, alike. Psychologists and anthropologists tell us that people on tropical islands are some of the happiest ones on the planet. They have plentiful fruits and delicious seafood to eat, and the sea breezes are heavenly.



The Island of Birds is just such a place. There are myriad freshwater fish, and chefs in the Island restaurants cultivate savory recipes to showcase the varieties. In the middle of a large lake, the Island of Birds has all four seasons, with eleven full weeks of warm summer and about eight weeks of cold winter. In between summer and winter are the balmy days of springtime and fall. Fishing and tourism are the primary businesses on the Island, and children learn

about both, because Islanders are especially concerned about preserving their way of life. They do this by making money from the fish and tourist trades. On the Island of Birds, people have lived in the same ways for hundreds of years, and their home is named for the sight that settlers witnessed when they landed there: flocks of seagulls everywhere! It is believed that the first settler, Jonathan Milford, exclaimed, “Look at all the birds! This is a bird’s island.” Thus, the location’s name was immediately established.



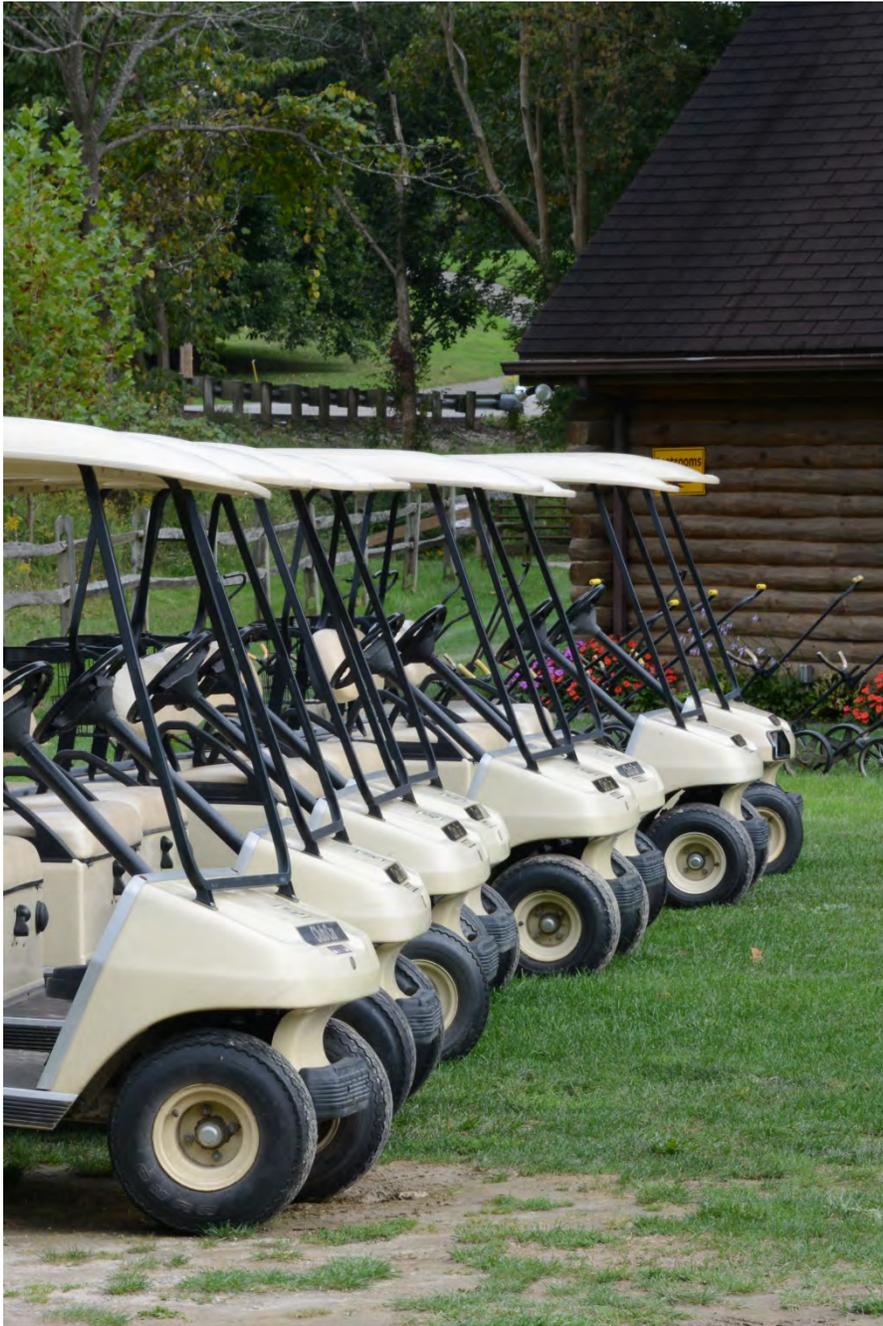
This story is about one May Day when ten-year-old Dino and his sister, eleven-year-old Mattie, solved some mysteries which had affected the Island of Birds that morning. Dino’s name was really “Dillon” but his grandfather was also “Dillon”. So, in order to avoid confusion, Dino had been identified as the younger Dillon’s nickname—even before he was born. His parents knew from a sonogram that he would be a boy, and they planned to name him after his mom’s father. Thereafter, they referred to him as “Dino”. About Mattie, her name was really Matilda, but when he was little, Dino could not say, “Matilda”. He started calling her “Mattie”, and the moniker stuck.

On this particular May Day, everyone on the Island was preparing for the May Day festivities. The Island’s schools were always closed for this day, and the celebration was so well known that people would take the morning

ferry from the mainland in order to share in the fun: a parade, scrumptious food, games, prizes, and fireworks. The last ferry of the day, at 11 P.M., would take the many mainlanders back home again before midnight. Some of them would stay overnight on the Island of Birds in one of the six bed-and-breakfast inns that were run with pride and excellence by Islanders.

Two other kids on the Island of Birds were the Milford Twins. They were 5 years old, and they were descended from Island founder Jonathan Milford. Everyone looked out for the Twins—Jared and Emily—because they were prone to seek and become engulfed in mischief. It seemed as if someone was always rescuing them from one predicament or another. As May Day started, their mother was calling them, because they had run off to the west beach after breakfast, and she wanted to be sure that they would play in a spot where she could see them. The country kitchen of the Milford Restaurant looked out over the beach, and she could prepare for the lunchtime crowd while keeping an eye on the Twins as they romped in the sand.

This particular May Day started with rain which had followed thunderstorms, but by the time the sun came up, things were drying out and Islanders were in a flurry to get back on track with their day of fun. Paul Barber was in charge of tourist welcoming, and he headed down to the pier in order to set up streamers, balloons, and the golf cart station. That's right: golf carts. On the Island of Birds, cars are restricted. So, most people have golf carts, and the Island Council (with the entire Island being a single municipality of about 8,000 residents) had come up with a great idea to help raise money for Island upkeep: a golf cart rental station at the ferry pier. Tourists could rent a golf cart for one or more days, and this gave them a way to get around. In addition, Paul Barber and his wife had a bicycle rental stand. Thus, for tourists who wanted to pedal the Island, renting a bike was grand!



Paul Barber was Mattie and Dino’s maternal uncle. He and his sister, Theresa, were native Islanders, who had met their spouses while in college on the mainland. After marrying, each had brought the spouse home again to the Island of Birds in order to help with the family businesses (Barber Bike Rental, Barber’s Bed-and-Breakfast, the Cheese Shop, and the Yum-Yum Ice Cream Shop). Theresa and her husband (Dan) took over the ice cream parlor, Paul and his wife (Sharon) ran the bike rental, and both pitched in to help their parents with the inn. So, the main characters of this story are Dino and Mattie, their mom and dad (who are Theresa and Dan), and the kids’ Uncle Paul and Aunt Sharon. In addition, are the 5-year-old Milford Twins and their mom (Mrs. Milford).

On this morning, Dino and Mattie skipped along the gravel road from the inn toward the bike rental stand. Uncle Paul was already at the pier when they arrived, and they could tell that something was wrong. He was shaking his head and wiping his brow. As they approached, Paul exclaimed, “I just do not understand what has happened!”

Looking down at the bicycles, all three of them could see that half of their bikes were damaged. Their tires were flat!

“Well, Kids, we had better get to work trying to pump up these tires, so that we can figure out whether the inner-tubes are damaged or not,” Paul proclaimed.

An hour later, Uncle Paul, Mattie, and Dino had pumped up all the bike tires, and they appeared to be holding their air. “I guess it was just a weird coincidence that they all went flat at once. Maybe there was some strange change in barometric pressure during the storm last night that caused them all to lose air,” Paul said.

Uncle Paul was relieved, and he urged the kids to be on their way back to help their parents at the inn. “There will be a big crowd for the evening, Kids,” Uncle Paul instructed them. “Your mom and Aunt Sharon would probably love to have your help getting ready.” As Uncle Paul gave the kids instructions to help their mom and aunt at the inn, he headed up to the Cheese Shop to help open the place.

Dino and Mattie ran off to help at the Bed-and-Breakfast. They were excited, as they raced along the path up the inn’s front porch, but they stopped short as they approached. Their mother and their aunt were standing up on the porch with their hands on their hips, shaking their heads.

“I just don’t understand this!” Theresa exclaimed.

“What could have caused it?” Aunt Sharon asked.

As they climbed the steps to join the two women, Dino and Mattie could see the cause of all the fuss. All the lovely white wicker chairs and tables which usually lined the porch were toppled and strewn—as if a strong wind had come through and knocked them over.

“Were there strong winds last night?” Sharon continued.

“There were wind gusts, but they were certainly not strong enough to do this!” Theresa responded. Then, she beckoned to Dino and Mattie to come up and help them, saying, “Kids, help us re-arrange the furniture, and then we’ll go inside to have a mid-morning snack.”

As the four worked feverishly to correct the appearance of the inn’s porch, Mrs. Milford wandered up and asked, “Theresa, Sharon, have you seen the Twins? I can’t find them anywhere.”

Sharon answered, “Yes, indeed. I ran into them when I walked over from the ice cream parlor earlier this morning. I said, ‘Hi,’ but they just ran off without even saying. ‘Hello’.”

“How odd,” replied Mrs. Milford. “They might be mischievous, but I can’t abide it when they’re rude! I must have a talk with them about minding other people and about being polite!” Mrs. Milford walked away to continue the search for her children, and she resolved to have a discussion with them about ignoring their elders! The time was approaching for the ferry to arrive with mid-morning guests. People would be hungry for lunch, and Mrs. Milford was beginning to fret that she couldn’t find the Twins. She would need to return to the Milford Restaurant and serve lunch to Island visitors, but where were her 5-year-olds?

Dino and Mattie finished their work on the porch and went inside the inn with their mother and their aunt. They helped to tidy up the parlor, and their mom gave them a plate with cookies and two glasses of milk. They sat on the back stoop and ate.



Uncle Paul approached from the cheese shop with a frown on his face.

“Kids, where’s your dad? I need some help,” he stated.

“He’s at the ice cream shop, opening up the place,” Mattie responded. “What’s wrong, Uncle Paul?”

“Well, when I got to the cheese shop, all of the rain barrel chairs on the back patio were tossed about in the grass. I’m just sure that the weather last night wasn’t bad enough to do that, and I’ve just spent an hour trying to get them re-arranged. Some barrels rolled down into the gully, and I need your dad’s help to get them out,” their uncle answered. As he spoke, Dino and Mattie’s dad walked up to him.

Dan looked at his children and at his brother-in-law. Then, he asked, “What’s all this about wicker furniture strewn about the inn’s porch?”

“What?” queried Uncle Paul.

“Well, I understand that there were numerous flat bike tires at the dock this morning, and we’ve had some trouble here, too, with furniture thrown hither and thither on our porch. Now, I hear that you’ve had a bit of bad luck over at the cheese shop, as well. On top of that, I had to hose down the tables at the ice cream shop, because they were covered with sand!!!!” said Dan. Then, he continued, “These are bad distractions. They have kept us from being in tip-top shape for all the tourists on May Day. How can we keep all of our businesses going strong when we are struggling to un-do someone’s mischief?”

Dino asked, “Dad, do you think that someone did these things deliberately?”

“Yes. I do,” answered his father. “Without good tourism and the money we make from it, we cannot keep this Island’s economy going!” Dan and Uncle Paul continued to chat as they walked back toward the cheese shop to fetch the barrels out of the gully.

After they left, Dino and Mattie sat on the back porch at the inn and worried aloud. “What if this ruins our May Day and leads us to have a terrible tourist season?” Mattie said.

“Oh, no!” said Dino. “We might all have to leave the Island, while our parents try to find jobs on the mainland. Any more of this type of stuff could lead our Island businesses into bad times!”

As Dino spoke, he heard a whimper under the back porch where he was sitting. He looked down and heard crying. “Who is under there?” shouted Mattie. “Come out! Come out, right now.”

Two little faces appeared under the steps. It was the Milford Twins, and they were both filthy. They were absolutely covered with sand, and tears were pouring down their cheeks.

“We didn’t mean any harm!” cried Jared.

“We were trying to help. We were just trying to help!” sobbed Emily.

“Trying to help?” exclaimed Dino. “How is it helping when you cause damage that ruins everyone’s morning and that puts the May Day holiday in jeopardy?”

“What were you thinking?” Mattie asked.

The Twins were distraught and it took a few minutes for Mattie and Dino to calm them down. Mattie said, “Look. You’ve got to stop crying, so that you can explain why you did these things. Did you really disrupt the bike tires and the furniture out front of the inn, the ice cream shop, and the cheese shop?”

Emily was now calm enough to respond. So, she said, “Yes. Yes. We did all those things, but we weren’t trying to hurt. We were trying to help.”

“How is that helping?” Dino questioned.

“Okay. Okay. Listen.” cried Jared. “When we were going to bed last night, we heard our mom and dad talking. Daddy said that everything was ready for May Day. We thought that was a good thing, but then Mommy said it wasn’t

good. She said, 'It's not good to have all the work done. After all, what would we do, if life were easy? We'd probably go batty from boredom.'"

Emily chimed in, "We don't know what it means to 'go batty' but we thought that sounded very bad. We couldn't imagine what would happen if everyone on the Island of Birds went batty. So, we decided to make sure that everyone had plenty of work to do this morning. We got up early and went around making sure that everybody would have lots of stuff to do to keep busy. We wanted to be sure that nobody would 'go batty!'"

As the Twins explained their bizarre behavior, Dino and Mattie briefly smiled at each other. Then, being aware that this was going to be viewed as a very serious matter by the adults, Dino made a stern facial expression and said, "Well, this is a very disruptive thing that you two have done, and you will have to confess and face the consequences. Come on, right now. We are going to see your mother!"

Dino and Mattie marched those two mischievous twins right over to their mother at the Milford Restaurant. After she heard their tale of misadventure, she frowned at them and sent them off to their rooms so that they could spend time alone. "I want you to think about what you've done, Children. It is never alright to damage people's property, and if you were worried about what it might mean to 'go batty' then you should've asked someone to explain it to you."

When Mrs. Milford visited Paul, Theresa, Sharon, and Dan to explain what had happened, they had a good chuckle. After all, there was no real harm done. As usual, the Twins had caused some relatively harmless mischief...and all because they were worried that everyone would 'go batty from boredom'!

In the end, Uncle Paul summed up the situation, "If the worst trouble those two little munchkins ever cause is this, then I think we'll be okay. Just think. They probably stayed up all night trying to figure out why bats would be flying around just because all the work was done!"

Everyone laughed and agreed that the minds of a pair of 5-year-old children can yield some funny logic. Thank goodness that there was no real harm done!

3

Straightforward Stories for Mid-Level and Lower-Functioning Individuals

This chapter contains some sample stories for individuals who have moderate to severe neurocognitive impairment or dementia. Typically, moderate-to-low functioning cognition and memory are indicated by tests like the Mini-Mental State Exam (MMSE; Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975). We regard scores *under 15* to be typical of moderate-to-low functioning. The stories in this section are simple enough in their narrative and subject matter to be suitable for such folks.

We approach activities for persons who are low functioning—as we approach care of all persons—from a perspective that seeks mutuality. Know the individual; honor that person (Simard, 2009). Even with severe neurocognitive impairment or with dementia an elder *is still a person* (Kitwood, 1993). She or he may still find enjoyment in books, in music, in artwork, in watching sports or favorite movies, and in other things. Storytelling for persons with neurocognitive impairment and/or dementia should include repetition and numerous memory cues (as mentioned in Chapter 1). Keep language simple, rather than using compound and complex sentences, but don't talk down to an elder, and do not use baby-talk (unless, of course, it is typical of a particular elder to use baby-talk or to like to hear it!).

Even if a person leaves your storytelling activity without remembering what was said, it doesn't mean that you haven't had an effect. Even simple ideas can uplift someone's mood and leave him/her smiling. For example, Virginia read aloud an Iroquois legend about songbirds and how they got their songs. The group who listened were of mixed levels of cognitive functioning—some higher and some lower—but good props (like a Native American headband made of beads with an eagle in the pattern) and a simple theme (songbirds) helped everyone to enjoy the session! Lauren likes to wear shirts with a popular mascot on them when she visits a specific long-term care facility to shepherd an evening activity for persons with dementia. On one evening, when Lauren had neglected to put on her mascot shirt, a lady with Alzheimer-type dementia looked at her and said, "I can't see you. Your shirt is wrong." Even though the lady reported that she didn't know Lauren, it seems that she had some familiarity with her appearance and the fact that she always wore a particular type of shirt. So, repetition and cueing are key!

Big Pumpkin

by Virginia L. Smerglia

Charles Humdinger [That's correct; his last name is "humdinger"], is the president of a company that makes hats. One problem Charles and his company have is that wearing hats is sometimes in style and sometimes out of style, especially for women.

Men are a different story. Even when men's dressy hats are out of style, most guys still wear baseball caps, hats to protect them from the sun, work hats like the straw hats that farmers wear, or the hard hats that construction workers wear. So, Charles Humdinger and his employees can depend on producing a steady stream of men's hats. In fact, they are really busy all year making hats for men who are out in sun, rain, and snow and hats for men who are sports fans or who play sports, like golf.

On the other hand, Charles' company, which is called **Humdinger Hats**, isn't busy making women's hats. Way back in the 1940's, when Charles' grandfather, Herb Humdinger, founded the company, there was a very great need for ladies' hats. Back then, girls wore hats all the way from childhood through adulthood. They wore pretty hats to church, to the movies, and to restaurants. In those days, girls and ladies even wore hats to go shopping! Most women had whole wardrobes of hats to go with their outfits. If you look at movies from the 1940's, you will see women in stylish hats most of the time—unless they were at home.

Today, it's another story indeed. Women don't usually wear dressy hats when they go out. In fact, the only women's hats Humdinger's makes a lot of are sun hats. Everyone seems to know about protecting their skin from dangerous ultraviolet rays that come from the sun. Also, women nowadays wear more casual outfits, with pants instead of skirts. A dressy hat doesn't go well with a casual outfit. And a woman might worry about messing up her hairstyle with a hat—very often going without one in order to keep her hair-do. So, there are not as many occasions for women's hats as there used to be!

Charles Humdinger thinks women are especially pretty, even downright glamorous with just the right hat. He has an album filled with pictures of ladies with fashionable hats made by Humdinger in the 1940's, '50's, and '60's.

There were feathers and flowers, ribbons and sequins, veils and bows, all kinds of colors and fabrics...and even the use of straw. Right now, he is trying to figure out what he can do to make wonderful ladies' hats so women will want to buy them and wear them. He sees that the fashion designers are showing more hats, but that hasn't "trickled down" to his sales yet. If and when it does, he can hire more workers and make the world a more attractive place.

Charles decides to hire a fashion expert to help him. He interviews quite a few people who have graduated from college with degrees in fashion design. In the end, he chooses a forty-two-year-old woman named Cassie King, because she has a lot of experience designing women's clothing, and she is known for her whimsical and interesting hats!

After Cassie has been working at Humdinger's for a week, Charles calls her into his office and says, "Cassie, do you have plan?"

She says, "Why yes, Mr. Humdinger, my plan is to go sit in a pumpkin patch." You can imagine Charles' surprised face and you can probably imagine what he is thinking. He believes that Cassie has a very strange plan for designing hats. Charles thinks, "What can Cassie accomplish in a pumpkin patch?"

Charles is an extremely polite man, and he always gives people the benefit of the doubt. So, he says, "Cassie, tell me more!"

Cassie responds, "Tomorrow, I plan to get up at dawn, put on my jeans and go sit in a pumpkin patch that my farmer-friend owns. Then, I'll get back to you."

Charles Humdinger is not only a very polite and courteous man, he is a very good businessman. So, he says, "Cassie, I want you to take our staff photographer, Eric, with you, just in case you need some pictures taken."

"Okay," she agrees, "please, ask him to meet me at 6:20 A.M. in the parking lot."

The next morning, at 6:20 A.M., Cassie drives into the parking lot, Eric jumps into her car, and they take a ten-mile drive to her friend's farm. When they arrive, Cassie pulls out an old blanket, a note pad, a thermos of hot chocolate, and some buttered raisin bread toast. She sees that Eric is reluctant to just walk out into the farmer's fields, but she assures him that her friend knows she's going to be here. It has all been arranged beforehand.

Just as the sun comes over the hill, they reach a sandy area on the edge of a huge field and Eric sees the beautiful orange pumpkins of every shape and size, some small and round, some long, some with funny shapes. In the

center of the field, there is a huge pumpkin that must weigh two hundred pounds. Eric decides he likes this assignment just fine.



Cassie spreads the blanket on the sand and gives Eric a cup of cocoa and some raisin bread toast. They sit there munching for a while and, finally, Cassie pulls out a note pad and pencils. She begins to sketch while Eric enjoys the wonderful early fall air and the beautiful sight of a field of pumpkins ready for harvest. At mid-morning, the sky becomes a brilliant blue and Eric remembers again from his classes on color that orange and blue complement each other. He can't resist getting out his camera and taking some shots of this beautiful field and the crystal clear sky.



Soon, Cassie begins to pack up. Eric says, “Are we going?”

“Yep,” she responds.

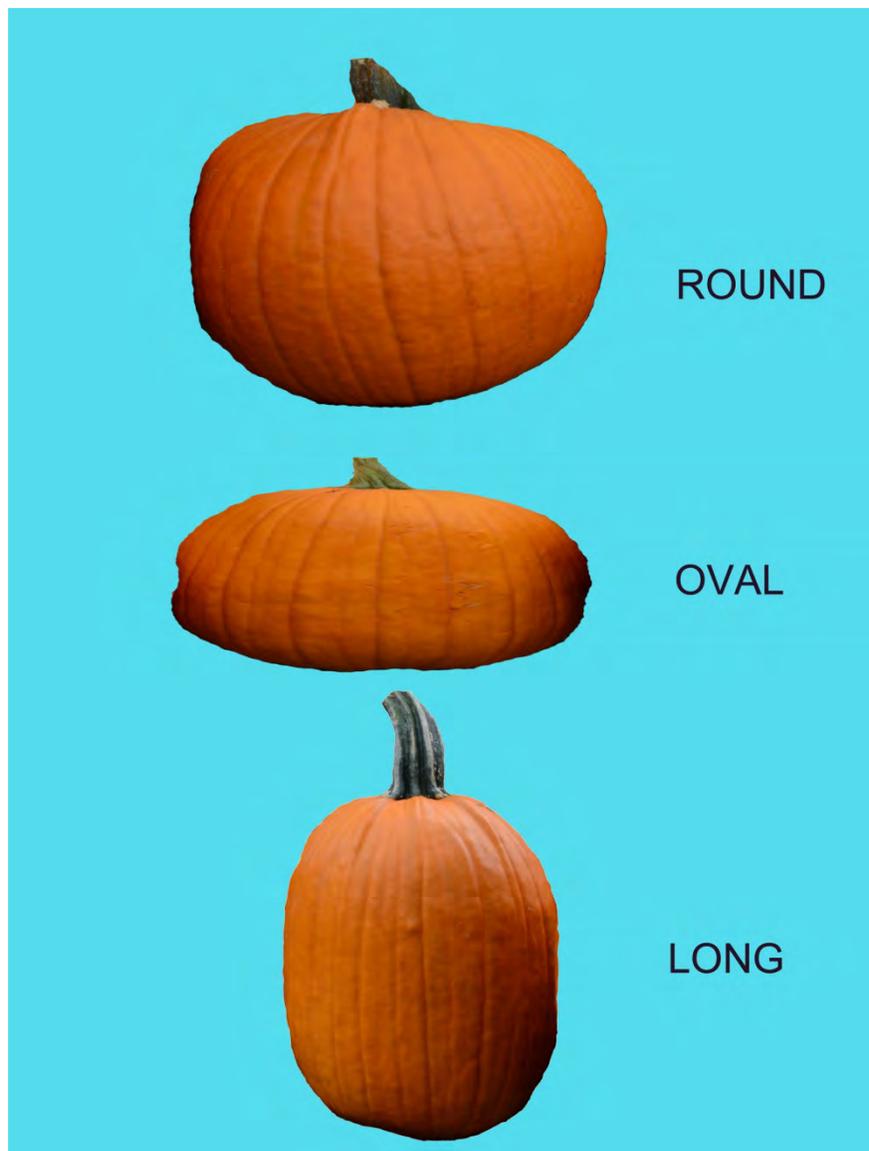
“But, I haven’t taken many photos yet, Cassie,” he says.

“Well,” Cassie answers, “Did you have a pleasant morning, Eric? Did you get some good shots of this glorious fall pumpkin field?”

“Yes’ to both questions,” Eric responds.

“Well, then, my work is really done here,” says Cassie.

A few days pass; Charles is anxious to have a report from Cassie. But, remember, he is both courteous and a good businessman. He figures that he has evaluated Cassie's abilities well and he'll hear something soon. So, he is patient. Finally, the next Tuesday morning, Cassie knocks on Charles' office door and goes in with a portfolio of hat designs. He is amazed as he views her pictures. Instead of the usual perfect-looking models he is used to seeing in fashion magazines, he sees "regular" women like the ones you might see in any store, in any park, at the library, or at church. Cassie has designed hats for women based on the shapes of their faces. He sees that whether a woman has a round, oval, or long face, or a long or short neck, she will find a hat that looks very good on her. Whether a woman's face is thin or chubby or in between, there will be a hat that makes her look lovely.



Charles is very pleased. He sees that Cassie does not want to show one style of hat and expect every lady to love it and look good in it. He thinks of the hats he sees in stores and how there are not many choices of shapes. Then,

he pictures Humdinger Hat displays with pictures of real women: teachers, mothers, nurses, grandmothers, businesswomen, and cashiers—women who look very different and not like the cookie cutter look of models and actresses with all their imperfections removed.

Charles says, “Cassie, you are inspired! You’ve shown that you care about giving women hats which will make them lovely!”

Cassie replies, “You see, Mr. Humdinger,” I sketch the pumpkins and then I sketch hats on them. I figure if I can make a hat that looks good on every pumpkin shape, then it will be a piece of cake to make hats for women, who also come in many shapes and sizes. A woman who is short with a round face will look like a birthday cake with some types of large, frilly hats. On the other hand, a tall woman with a long neck and prominent cheekbones will look like a champagne bottle with a fancy cork in some hats. I believe women will feel a personal delight in the hat designed just for them. And, they deserve a hat that makes them look attractive.”

sample sketches



ROUND



OVAL



LONG



Charles says, “Cassie, thank you! I’m pretty sure our female customers will love these special hats. I just have one question. What hat did you design for the big pumpkin in Eric’s photo of the farmer’s field?”

“Oh, that was the easiest hat of all, Mr. Humdinger. She got to have a crown. I designed a beautiful tiara of red fall leaves for her. She is the queen of pumpkins you know, and the queen always gets to wear a crown!”

Ladies at the Lake

by Lauren Smerglia Seifert

Lake Anna is a beautiful place in the city where Faith works. She is a secretary at a church that looks out over the Lake. In summertime, Faith frequently takes her daughters, Claire and Lena, to work with her. Because the girls—who are 6 and 10—are on summer vacation from school, they can help Faith with office tasks, play outside, run around in the yard, or play in the church’s playroom. On some very special mornings, when they arrive at the church office, Claire and Lena are allowed to walk to the bakery for doughnuts. The bakery is behind the church, and the sweet aroma of cakes, bread, and brownies wafts over the two buildings.



“Please. Please, Mom!” begs Lena on some days. “Are we allowed to go to the bakery today?”

Smiling gently, Faith will reply, “Okay. Today is a good day for a doughnut, but don’t buy too many, because that would be too much sugar. Just buy one for each of us.” As Faith hands some money to the girls, they skip through the courtyard from the back door of the church office and around to the bakery’s front door. A day with doughnuts is a wonderful summer day!

On occasion, Lena and Claire walk to the library. It, too, overlooks Lake Anna. So, Faith watches as her daughters walk to the library and back again. When the day is sunny, the girls play outside. On very special days, they pack a picnic lunch and eat on the grassy bank above the very round lake. It's true; Lake Anna is shaped like a circle. In addition, there is a circular, pathway all the way around the Lake, which is very nice for people who want to take an afternoon or evening stroll.

One starry Sunday evening, Faith planned a surprise for her girls. She asked them whether they would like to go to work with her the next day, and they both said, "Yes!" Secretly, each of the girls was hoping for a trip to the bakery in the morning but had no idea about the special day Faith had planned for them.

When Monday morning dawned, Faith awoke her girls with a call from the kitchen, "Lena! Claire! Oatmeal!"

Lena sat up in bed and breathed in the wonderful scent of oatmeal, raisins, and cinnamon. Her mother had cooked it on the stovetop, and its pleasing aroma had filled the house. As Lena jumped out of bed, she heard her sister moan. Without another second, Lena jumped onto her sister's bed and exclaimed, "Claire! Claire, get up. Mom is taking us to work with her this morning."

Thirty-five minutes later, the three girls stepped out onto their front porch. Then, Faith cried, "Oh, dear! I almost forgot." She ran back into the house and fetched the cooler. It was a steel ice chest, which they usually took with them to family and church picnics. With a shiny metallic outer shell, it was painted aqua.

Claire asked, "Mom, why do you have the cooler? What are we going to do?"

"Be patient, Claire. You'll see," Faith replied with a smile.

When the three reached the church office, Faith left the cooler in their locked car. The day wouldn't be too hot: just 76-degrees. That's about 24-degrees on the Celsius scale. Faith thought about the conversion from Fahrenheit to Celsius, because she had been trying to learn how to go back-and-forth between the two temperature scales. In school during the past year, each of the girls had been learning about the Celsius scale—which is typical around the world, but not in the USA.

Now, Faith had parked under a tree. So, she was confident that the car and the cooler would remain relatively unaffected by the sun's heat. Once they were inside the office, Faith could see that her morning would be busy. Pastor had left a number of messages for her, and she would need to type the church newsletter. Worried that her girls would be bored, Faith suggested that they walk to the bakery and buy three brownies.

"We have already had breakfast. So, let's not have doughnuts today, but wouldn't it be nice to have some brownies for later?" Faith asked. Her girls nodded enthusiastically, and Claire took two dollars from her mom's outstretched hand.

Lena jumped up and down and quickly whispered, "Best mom ever!" Then, she clapped and called to her older sister, "Claire! Claire, hurry!"

The morning was busy for Faith. She had many important things to do. Her girls had returned from the bakery with the amazing brownies for which the shop was so well known: 2-inch squares, fudgy, with chocolate frosting on

top and granulated sugar on the bottom. Yummy! After their excursion to the bakery, Faith suggested that her daughters go to the church playroom. This would be a good way for them to exert some energy and develop a hunger for lunch.

At 11:30 A.M., Faith asked the church janitor, “Plummer” to bring the girls back over to the church office from the playroom. That’s right, the janitor’s name was “Plummer”, and he was just about the funniest and nicest guy around. He would sometimes put a nickel in the soda machine and buy the girls a bottle of red pop. Because the bottle held 16 ounces, the girls would share it. The girls would ask Plummer why they had to share the bottle of soda, and he would reply, “Because that is too much soda pop for one little lady!” The pop was inexpensive, because the church subsidized the cost from its refreshments fund. This helped people who were using the church’s basement for evening meetings: like a gathering of single moms and the local support group for people who are trying to stop smoking.

BOTTLES OF SODA



When Plummer arrived at the church office with the girls, Faith was standing at the back door with the ice chest on the ground beside her. She was smiling, and she bent down to give each of her girls a big hug. Then, she inquired, “Did you have fun?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes!” hollered Lena as she jumped around on the squares of pavement outside the office door. “What’s next, Mom? What...is... *next*?”

As Plummer said his good-byes, Faith answered Lena’s question. “Well, I think it’s lunchtime. Claire, would you help me carry the ice chest? Let’s walk to the Lake.”

Faith picked up her beach bag. She had set it next to the cooler. It was filled with a number of items, including her favorite blue-and-white, gingham-checked tablecloth.

As the three walked toward Lake Anna with the cooler, the sunny day cheered them. They looked for the pair of swans who spent their days floating around on the water's surface, and Lena recollected, "Hey, Mom, remember the time that one of the swans ran up on the front porch of the church's office and scared you?"

Faith did remember it well. Her desk was situated so that it looked out over the front porch of the church office. She could see Lake Anna from her desk, and one day a swan was flapping its wings wildly and running around. It even flew up onto the front porch of the church office. Faith had been afraid of it. Before that time, she hadn't realized how big a swan really is when it has its wings spread. And the noise! Swans make a very loud honking sound!



As Faith and her daughters approached Lake Anna, they looked for a grassy spot. "Let's make ourselves a picnic lunch on the grass, Girls!" Faith said as she pulled the gingham-checked tablecloth from her beach bag.

Spreading the cloth on the ground, Faith and Claire set the cooler down. Then, they opened it, and the girls gasped. Lena exclaimed, "Wow, Mom! Look at all these goodies!"

Inside the ice chest were pretty blue dishes filled with celery, carrot sticks, pickles, and olives. The dishes were plastic, but they were translucent and sparkled in the sunshine. So, they looked like glass. In another container was some salad dressing into which the girls could dip their celery and carrots. Next, Faith removed several items that were wrapped in foil. She had made green gelatin with marshmallows in it—one of Lena's favorites! In addition, she had made ham salad sandwiches on whole wheat bread—something that Claire especially loved to eat. Another dish contained applesauce. Finally, there was the white bag from the bakery. Faith had put it into her beach bag, but she

hadn't taken it out yet, because she wanted to be sure that the girls ate their lunches before being reminded of the temptation of the fresh brownies.

The three lovely ladies sat on the bank of Lake Anna eating their picnic lunch in the warm sunlight. Lena munched on carrots—downing them so quickly as to reveal why her sister and father sometimes called her “Bunny-rabbit”. Claire and Faith enjoyed their ham salad sandwiches and smiled together as they watched Lena chomping away on carrot after carrot. Looking out across the water, Claire felt happy and said, “Mom, on a day like today, I just don't think you could ask for more!”

Faith replied, “No, Honey. It just doesn't get any better. Does it?”

Just then, Lena frowned and said, “I could ask for more.”

Her mother and older sister looked at the pretty blue dish, which had held enough carrots for all three of them to share. It was empty. Lena had eaten every last carrot! Apparently she still wanted more. Realizing that Lena had eaten most of her sandwich and about a pound of carrot sticks, Faith asked her younger daughter, “Lena, why don't you take some bread crumbs and throw them into the water, so that the ducks and swans can eat lunch, too?”

“Okay,” she replied. Then, she walked down to the water's edge and tossed crumbs at passing water fowl, who honked and dunked their heads into the Lake as they battled over the pieces of bread. After a few moments, Lena came back up the bank to the picnic spread. “Mom, I still do want more. I'm hungry.”

Looking at her six-year-old daughter's spindly legs and pudgy belly, Faith smiled. She suspected a growth spurt was on its way, because Lena seemed to be eating more, lately, and she usually grew during the summer months. As Faith mused about whether Lena was getting ready to grow, she was roused from her daydream by Lena's whining, “Mom. Mom. Mom. Claire said we couldn't ask for more, but I want more. So, I'm asking!”

Faith and Claire looked at each other and laughed. They realized that Lena didn't understand that saying, “I couldn't ask for more,” is just an expression people use when feeling content.

Faith answered, “I'm sorry, Lena. I understand. You're still hungry.”

Faith reached into her beach tote and pulled out the white bag from the bakery. Holding out a brownie to Lena, she said, “I don't have any more carrots. I guess you'll have to settle for a brownie.”



Lena beamed and said, “Thanks, Mom. A brownie will be just fine.”

As Lena happily munched on the baked good, Claire pointed at her sister and the brownie she was eating and said, “Well, Mom, I guess that even when you think you’re perfectly happy, things can still improve!”

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