

What spirituality has to do with
memory and brain wellness

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The Memory Hub

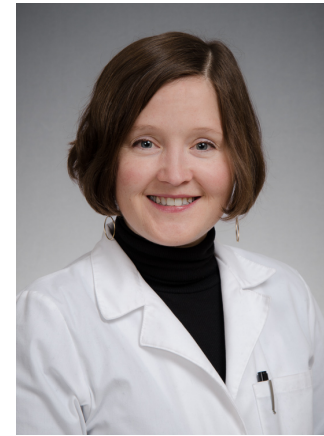
A Place for Dementia-Friendly Community, Collaboration, and Impact

My professional journey

How can I serve to help patients?

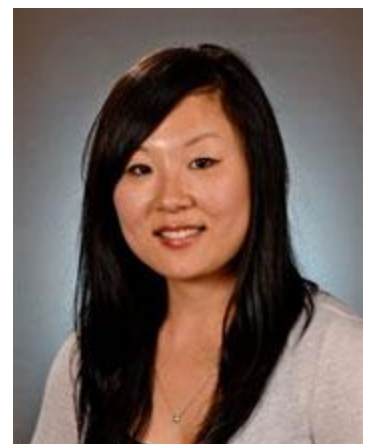
How does the brain work?

- I decided I could best serve by specializing in “behavioral neurology”
- Became a student of brain-behavior relationships
- Understanding why things go wrong with cognition in brain disease
- Interpreting this knowledge for patients in the clinic



UW Memory and Brain Wellness Center

We envision a world in which people with memory loss live well within a community of support.



In 15 short minutes

First part: Level-setting us on dementia

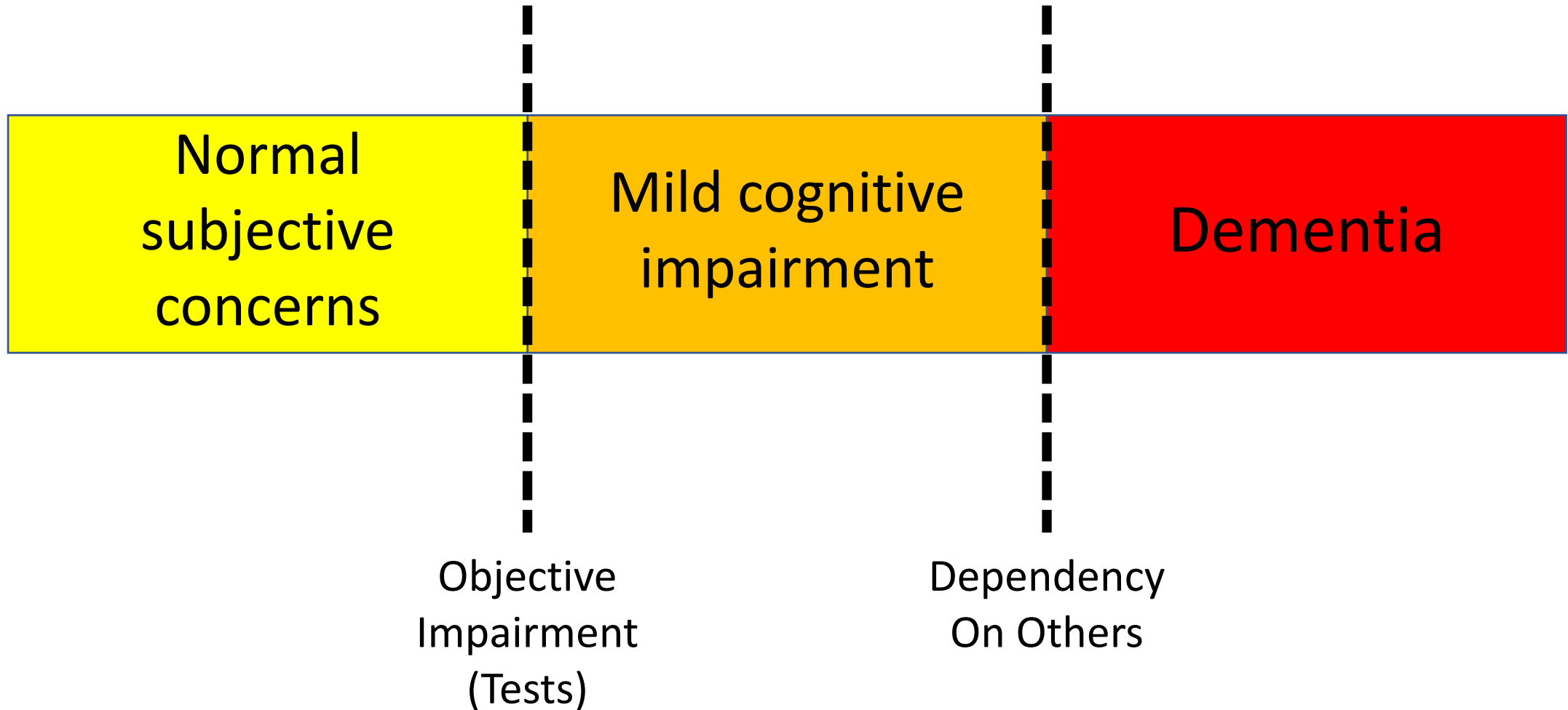
Second part: What about spirituality in dementia?

What is dementia?

(And how is it different from Alzheimer's?)

Cognitive diagnosis

“What’s wrong with memory and thinking”

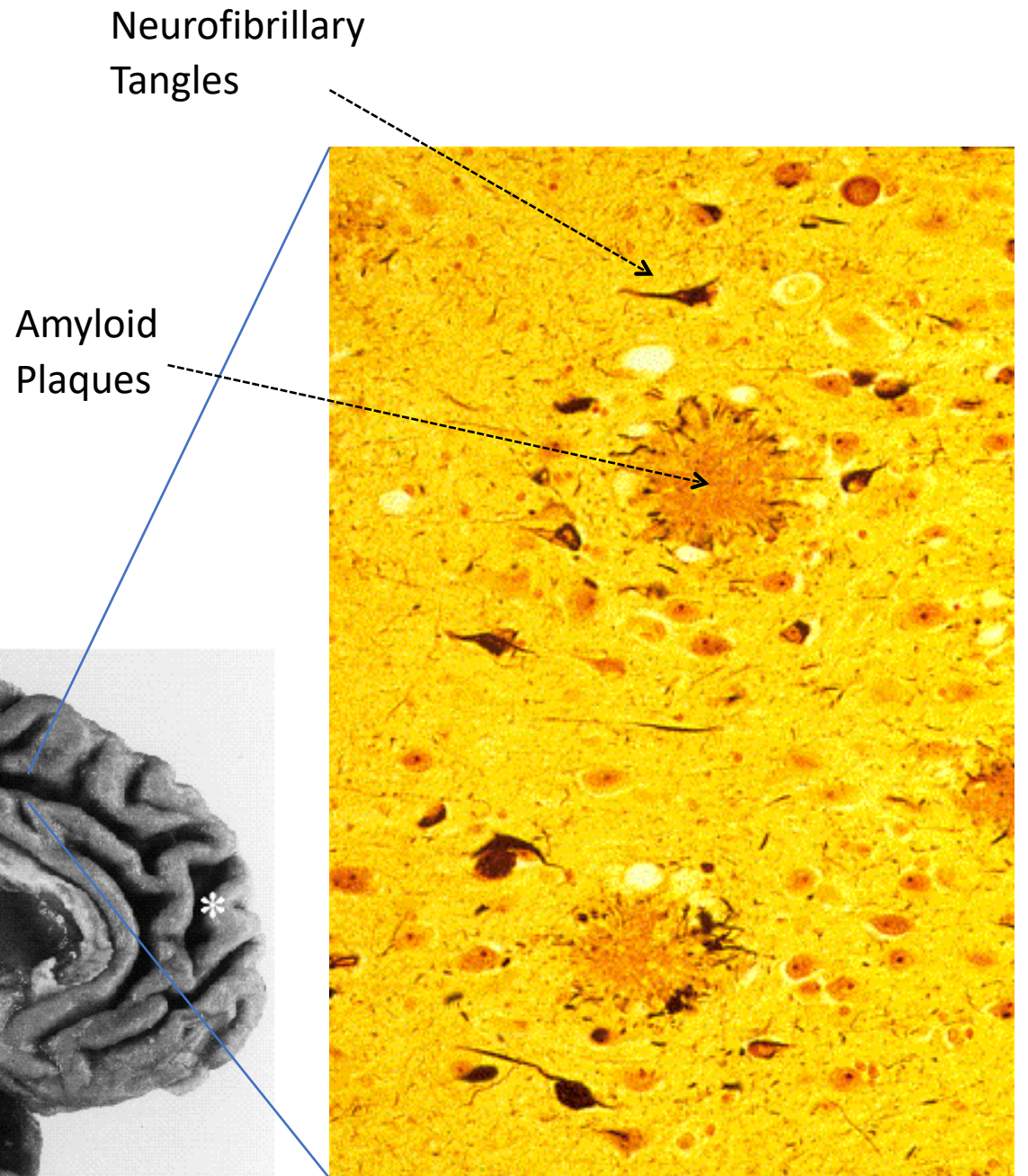
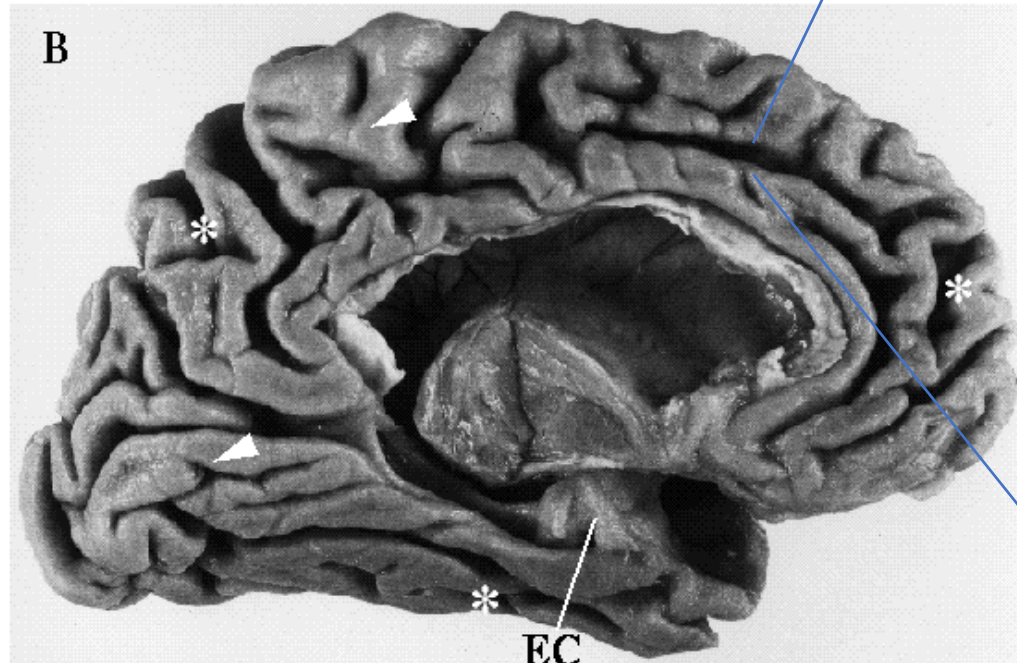


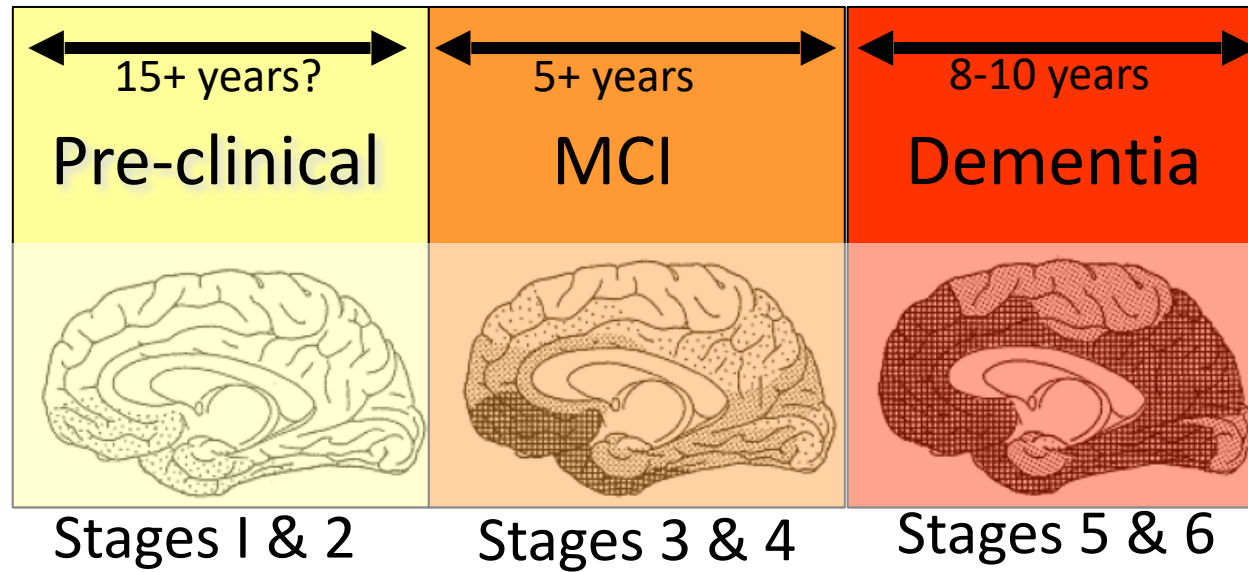
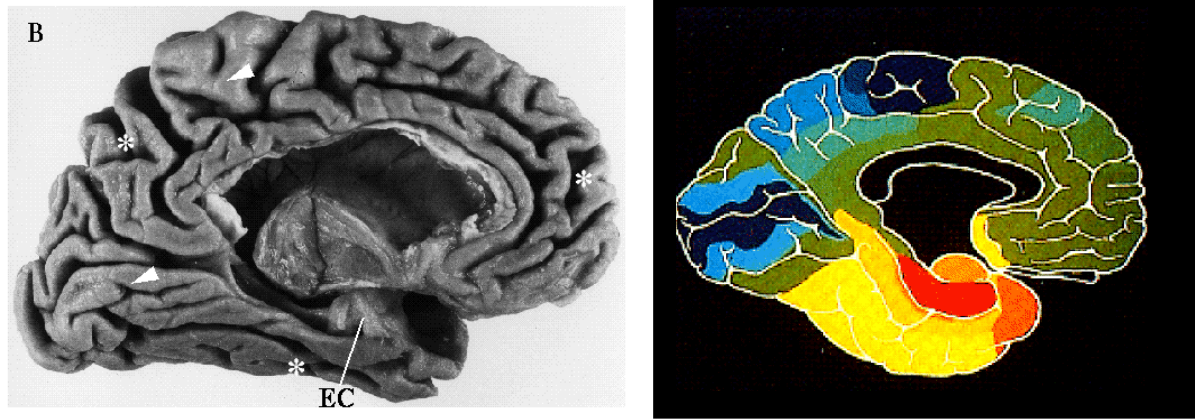
Causal diagnosis

“What’s wrong with the brain”

(If you could look under the microscope)

Alzheimer’s disease





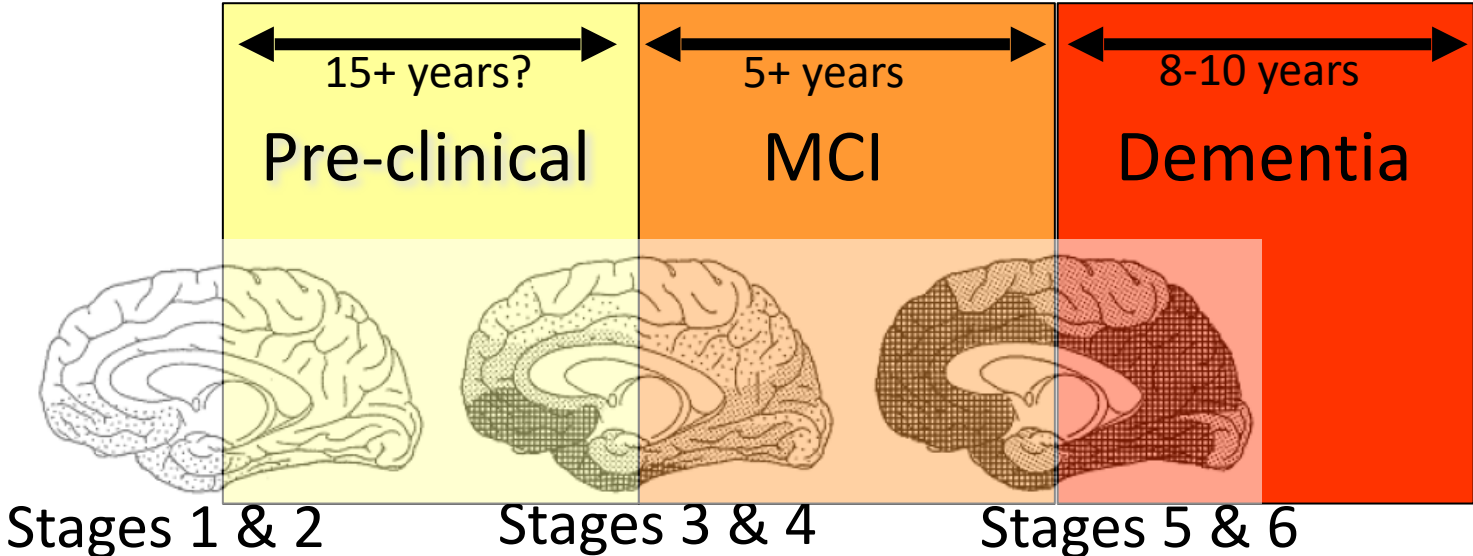
How/why does dementia affect people differently?

Dementia is so variable in the clinic

- It depends on the parts of the brain most affected
 - Different patterns for Alzheimer's, vascular brain injury, Lewy body disease
 - And even within Alzheimer's disease, the pattern can vary
 - Many patients have a mixture of causes
 - The strengths that people retain also vary
- It depends on background health
 - Heart disease, vascular disease, stroke
 - Sleep apnea
 - Depression and/or anxiety

Resilience

Education and cognitive habits
Social belonging and purpose
Regular exercise



It depends on individual values, self-concept and psychology

- Value of cognition
- Self-efficacy

How do you notice the impact on caregivers?

How do you notice the impact on caregivers?

- Dementia affects the entire family
- Uncertainty is a stressful factor. Change will come inexorably in most cases, but there are surprises, pace is hard to predict, and dark scenarios are dreaded.
- Caregivers are typically more objectively aware than patients of dementia and its progression
- Paradoxically, dementia brings a steep learning curve for caregivers
- All that said, we know it is possible to help people and their caregivers to live well

The limits of neurology

- In a way, the medical provider shares the burdens of the caregiver, and also struggles with the losses, uncertainties, and learning curve around each individual patient

**Reframing a positive,
scientifically grounded,
forward-looking
view of brain health**

Building resilience to dementia: *Lifestyle factors make years of difference in one's "tipping point" for brain changes to become symptomatic*

Strengths-based reframing: *Understanding AD across all its stages and the abilities that a person retains in the midst of them.*

Dementia-friendly community: *Where people with memory loss and dementia are understood, included, and empowered so as to live well & to their potential.*

What role do you see faith and spirituality in your vocation and/or lives of your patients?

Faith worked out in service

- An impulse to utilize my abilities and the opportunities to develop them, for the good of those in need
 - Authoritative interpretation of symptoms and prognosis, limitations and strengths someone may have, is enabling to patients/caregivers
 - Grounding in the clinical work is part of my identity – keeps a focus on what is really important, how to explain it to people, how to communicate support
- More deeply, I'm grateful for the opportunity to grow the capacity for compassion for patients.
 - Dementia can only be understood in each patient's life context, and I have to get to know them. I enjoy this aspect of my work, the "privileged view of humanity."
 - At the same time I have come to be aware I'm on the same road with everyone else, if things were just a little different, it might be me on the other side of the examination room.

Spirituality and the neurologist

- Neurology and neuroscience tend to a reductionist view of the mind and brain, and indeed I also ponder the evidence that brain damage peels apart pieces of our humanity. Is it like an onion?
- But at my natural level I know that the wonderful fact of my existence at all means that God exists, and I have come to be careful not to confuse mind and self.
- In this context I'm grateful for the revealed good news that we are created in Gods image, and of the incarnation of Jesus, who shares our human mind and brain, confirming there is more to us.

A deeper basis for strengths-based reframing

- Our ultimate value is not in our mind or brain, but is inherent in our created nature.
- We have strengths and indeed a self that dementia cannot take away.
- Everything done to help people made in God's image and reduce their distress is worthwhile.

My patients

- I have stories of people living with memory loss whose faith remains a core strength.
- People who have oriented their own such that they can be a strong partner for loved ones with dementia.
- People believe that life is worth living to the end, and care is worth giving to the end.
- And indeed our program has benefitted tremendously from the lived experiences of caregivers who have shared their learning curves.



QUESTIONS?