

# Talking To Mum...

Michelle Forster puts her family experience of Alzheimer's to positive effect

**M**y mum May was diagnosed with dementia at the age of 63. Quite typically for this type of illness, for a long time she wouldn't recognise there was anything wrong so by the time of the official diagnosis, five years after her first symptoms, she was very poorly indeed.

"She still recognised my two children, but had a problem remembering me or my poor Dad. Once, when he shattered his heel after an accident, my mum's shock triggered her illness quite severely and for six months she'd tell him she didn't know who he was and even physically manhandle him out of the house. Half an hour later she'd let him in and ask where he had been. He eventually had a stroke, brought on after the pressure of looking after her.

"Once we accepted that it was a terminal illness, it helped us all to better



May recognised her grandchildren, but not always her husband

**"There's a point where there is no recognition of people in photos. The books do help"**

understand the situation. And the experience I gained through my work with Pictures to Share ([picturestoshare.co.uk](http://picturestoshare.co.uk)) allowed me to discuss and learn about the illness with lots of experts in the field.

"During someone's illness, family photographs are fantastic. Family, carers and nurses can reminisce and have lovely conversations but there's a point where there is no recognition of the people in the pictures. It's hard to know where to start to chat and the person with dementia becomes more withdrawn. The Pictures to Share books have a little narrative with big, neutral images that provide talking points. It is all about

discussing them together.

"My daughter Millie used these books with Mum from the age of four. Mum read the books to her, then as her illness progressed, Millie took the lead. They'd spend hours together looking at the pictures when everything else no longer worked.

"It's a horrible illness and can be incredibly frustrating for family and carers. But it is a huge comfort to know I did everything I could to help my mum before she passed away in October last year.

"I'd recommend anyone to go to the Alzheimer's Society to find out more about the illness and what they can do for you. The local groups are fantastic, and it really helped

my dad to go along and talk to people. The charity has a 24-hour online forum where you can discuss things with people who understand what you are going through.

"Everyone is frightened by dementia but please support anyone suffering with it, or their carer. Both will benefit, even if it's only you popping over to say hello over a cup of tea. Worrying about dementia changes nothing. Talking changes everything."



Michelle with two of the books

To find out more about the Alzheimer's Society and join the conversation, visit [alzheimers.org.uk/TalkDementia](http://alzheimers.org.uk/TalkDementia)