

# I Want To Hold Your Hand

I ran into a friend at a memorial service. I hadn't seen her in many years and when she asked how Bob was, I almost broke down. My eyes teared up and I could barely speak.

When I regained a bit of composure, I explained the Bob had a cognitive disorder brought on by vascular issues and he was dealing with memory loss and confusion. She seemed ever so surprised as she sees my Facebook posts with us taking walks, going to Balboa Park and the Beach, taking great-grandchildren the zoo and SeaWorld, hosting parties, going to church and movies, and traveling. Our life look really great and very normal to her through the eyes of Facebook. What doesn't show is that Bob often doesn't know the names of the friends and family that we spend time with, he doesn't drive to any of the places we go, and he doesn't remember what we are doing or what we have done from day to day.

At our family Christmas gathering Bob met a granddaughter for the first time (NOT!) and he thought she was really pretty and really nice. She handled this with such poise and gracefulness and responded that it was nice to meet him, too! If she was hurt by Bob forgetting her, she didn't make him feel that way. I love her even more for handling her grandpa as respectfully and kindly as she did.

A recent trip to a granddaughter's home had Bob meeting all sorts of "new people". What is surprising is that we had been to that same home three weeks earlier and had meet the same "new people" then. He didn't remember going there before.

A recent rip to Balboa Park had Bob all mixed up on the names of the local roads—especially Martin Luther King Freeway. He said that MLK was a famous soccer player and he was surprised that the road was named after him. He mentioned that there are lots of roads in San Diego named after Nat King Cole and

that makes more sense. I don't think we have any Nat King Cole Avenues!!

When at a recent walk at the beach, Bob pointed out the "rafts" (surf boards) and said that they didn't have those when he was young. I tried to refresh his memories of surfing as a young man with his oldest son Steve and driving an old hearse to carry the surfboards. His daughters have often told the stories of painting 70's colorful flowers on the hearse and that the SDPD even borrowed it for use in a drug bust! None of those stories jogged his memory and he just repeated that he had never had a "raft". I tried to smile as I moved on to a new topic but my heart hurt that he has lost those precious memories.

At a Christmas party with friends, Bob announced that he couldn't play the gift exchange game as there was STEALING involved! He further explained that he had taken a written oath to never steal when he went on the Police Department in 1962 and if he played this game and stole a gift that he could risk losing his retirement pay. He told this story loudly and repeatedly to everyone there. Most of the people who are aware of his cognitive issues made kind comments about how smart he was to not risk his retirement. The ones that had no idea of his mental issue really gave him some odd looks. That one might just take the cake for being the strangest comment he has made all month.

I recently told Bob that I wanted to watch a Christmas special on TV by Dr. Jeremiah (our pastor). He said that sounded great and asked if it was about my knee pain and possible knee replacement surgery! He had heard me say DOCTOR and went that direction. Our conversations are often like that.

So Bob tests my patience. I try my hardest to not correct him or try to tell him the real version of the story. I just nod and say "oh, that's interesting" or "that's cool". Any attempt to make him change his mind is met with a huge

objection and he insists that he is correct and I am just being bossy and a know-it-all!

So I think we are doing well considering the hurdles. We enjoy our time together, our time with family and friends, our times at the movies, our traveling, and church. I count our blessings daily. He has a good attitude, likes being around his family and friends, and finds joy in simple things. Bob's physical health is pretty darn good and he likes to get his 10,000 steps in most days of the week.

I'm reminded daily that Bob isn't behaving as he is to be difficult or to aggravate me. The changes are the result of damage to his brain and are beyond Bob's control. Even though Bob has changed dramatically, he is still a special and unique person. When I tell myself that piece of truth, it makes everything easier to contend with.

Sometimes our communication is hard but handholding is always easy.



SD Safari Park 2017