

Sleep Tight!

Do I really want to know what is going on in Bob with 1 o's head? It's so hard to know what he's talking about a lot of the time. He either mumbles, uses incomplete sentences, or just mixes things up. He's super repetitive, his comprehension is slow, and he's more and more forgetful. I know none of this is his fault and he can't help it. He's worried as he now notices how hard it is for him to remember anything or even carry on a conversation. But I feel like I'm making huge strides in having compassionate conversations with him.

These are some of the techniques I have learned and some examples.

- **Don't argue.** If Bob says he played professional football for the Raiders and the Chargers, I just go along with it. I say that I bet it was fun and I hope they won lots of games!
- **Don't try to reason.** If Bob says that he was in the Marines for 20 years and the Police Department for 50 $\frac{1}{2}$ years, I don't try to tell him the actual years and try to reason that what he is saying is an impossibility. Especially if you fit in all the college ball and pro football he played! I just say how happy I am that he liked his careers.
- **Don't confront.** If Bob tells a story about meeting my dad in WWI and saving his life, I just roll with it. I want to scream when he tells me this story and calls my dad Joe (which is his dad's name) but I just smile and say, "how interesting" or "thanks for saving his life".

What I do instead is to try to distract him with a different activity. When he tells me that there are wild animals on our street, I respond with "Do you want some ice cream". That usually get him away from staring out the front window at the

wild beasts.

Often, I will have to just leave the room to avoid any confrontation. That's my technique when he's telling me how to set up the Mr. Coffee for the 10th time in just a short time period.

I try to remain cheerful and smile at the stories. It must be pure craziness going on his head to pull together some of the tall tales he tells. I might as well grin and bear it. Who else has a husband that knows everyone he meets on the street or passes in the store? Bob thinks everyone is a past football teammate, fellow cop, or high school buddy. Even if they are in their 20's, he greets them and tells them that he hasn't seen them since college and it's so good to see them again. How can I not smile and enjoy this friendly guy? (as long as he doesn't try to get close and shake hands with them!)

The best technique is to respond to the feeling instead of his words. This is a whole new technique for me, but it works well at times. If Bob tells me that his dad and mom (both long deceased) are coming here for dinner, I don't challenge that idea but switch the conversation by saying "I bet you really miss your parents", "I wish I had met your mom", or "I remember your dad was super friendly". The goal is to redirect and discuss the emotions and not the words. It doesn't work 100% of the time but it really can help.

His reality is so different than mine and I can't control it. I can only control how I react to him. I'm working on being patient, reassuring, and agreeable. I have even been known to accept the blame for something even if I am not wrong. That's new for me!

I'm finding that Bob is more agitated and frightened these days. He wants to be reassured that I am right with him and that he can go with me. We are attached at the hip!

I often stay up and watch TV or movies after Bob goes to bed. Last night he really wanted me to come to bed when he did, so I went ahead and joined him in bed. He was so pleased. He gave me a lesson on how he folds the blankets, and which pillows he likes just like it was the first time I've shared his bed. I just rolled along with this lesson—even as he showed me the TV remote control and explained what it was for. I start my Prime Video Movie (A Night in Miami is very worthwhile viewing) and we settled in.

What happened next is one of those things that just comes out of nowhere. There is no way to be prepared for the roller coaster of emotions of living with a husband with dementia.

Bob: Do you have plans for breakfast?

Me: No, we can talk about it in the morning.

Bob: Well, I have \$104.00 in my wallet that I've had since I worked for the police. Can you call YOUR WIFE and I'll call MY WIFE and we can see if they want to meet us for breakfast?

Me: (silent gulp) quiet response—Yes, that sounds good.

So, who did he think I was? What was going on in his head? Who did he think was sleeping beside him in his bed? Had he been confused all evening and was that why he was explaining blankets and the remote? Is there a time coming soon that he will not know who I am?

Well, I'll never know. I tossed and turned a ton thinking about how "interesting" our lives have become and how going with the flow is going to need to become my permanent style. Bob seemed to have slept like a baby and he woke this morning with no plans for breakfast.

So, the final thing I must learn is to NOT TAKE ANYTHING BOB SAYS OR DOES PERSONALLY. I've been reminded over and over that once someone is diagnosed with Dementia that they are

excused 100% of the time.

So, I wonder who will be sleeping with Bob with 1 o tonight.

I surely hope it's me!



Bob with 1 o January 2021