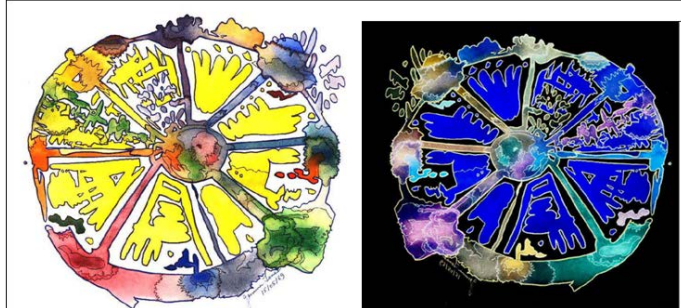


from 'TheWideSpectrum.co.uk' website  
**TAD (Thoughts About Dementia) Newsletter**  
By: Gemma M.M. Jones



**TAD 62** 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2020

**Ideas for 'table-top activities' - in times of self-imposed isolation – like during this coronavirus outbreak**

### **Related ideas for observations, reflection and research**

Can you recall some of the activities you did as a child, at a table, likely the kitchen table? These memories may remind you that, if you can hold onto these memories - you don't have to go very far to pass time pleasantly.

I recently overheard a person phoning their friend who was a family carer of a partner who had dementia.

The questions they asked their friend, – especially the idea of 'marking', or keeping track of time, seemed so helpful.

*How are **you**?*

*How are you keeping yourself, and your folks, occupied?*

*Have you made any preparations for today?*

*Are you recording what you're doing daily, somehow, to help you keep track of time, so you can remember later how resourceful you've been?*

Wouldn't it be nice for *everyone* to be asked these questions once in a while? I hope someone has asked them of you – even if it is you, of yourself.

Can you think of some 'table-top activities' that you could do with a person with dementia – a family member or another person?

Dear Reader,

*[**Personal Note:** After a few years hiatus in sending out the TAD newsletters, while I have helped care for family members with dementia and cancer, it's time to re-start them.]*

Since the monthly Alzheimer Café gatherings were postponed in March, 2020, (and will be postponed until after the 'self isolating regimen' is over), I've been speaking to various folk about how they are filling their days at home. Of great interest is what families who are caring for a person with dementia, are doing to structure their days and fill them, to keep the person with dementia feeling safe, and to keep all of them as healthy as possible.

The past few weeks, I've spoken with members of several 'family units' who are living together. All have been concerned about **'the Covid19 news' taking over their lives in some way** - often in the form of having the TV or radio news on frequently (sometime all day long), in the background. Of great concern to most of them, is that their family member who has dementia, is not able to understand and retain just what is happening, and are scaring themselves by repeating the headlines they hear, such as: - 'it's out there'; 'anyone could get it; 'stay indoors' and, 'save the NHS, and save the lives of others'.

For some people with dementia, those who are permanently disoriented in time, hearing these slogans and sound bites is even causing them to have flashbacks to the Second World War, and to the news stories about the Falkland's War. Some are becoming 'anxious' at the least, and 'panic-stricken/ terrified' at worst.

(One person with dementia has run out of their home and refused to re-enter, trying to explain to their partner that 'it could be anywhere, brought in by anyone; keep yourself safe.' To them, 'safe' means 'outdoors, in the fresh air', hence their refusal to re-enter their home. A routine has been developed to distract the person from these memories and strong, fearful emotions; it has to be long enough to walk past the pub, the shops and the park, and then re-enter the house under the ruse of needing 'a cup of tea'.)

This sort of fear and trauma has been acknowledged and described elsewhere. [1](#), [2](#), [3](#).

This TAD newsletter, is intended to offer some ideas to act as an antidote to listening to too much daily news about Covid19. It is about activities that can be done together at a table, likely the kitchen table. It gives ideas, and an example, about how to record these activities, daily, in some sort of notebook form. This recording can be an activity in its own right, as well as an instant source of details to share during phone calls, conversations and reminiscing.

The activities mentioned herein are described from the **viewpoint of family members who are living with, or frequently visiting a family member with dementia**. However, these activities, and recording them, could be adapted to fit other care (home) settings too.

If you are looking to add some novelty, structure, or time of reflection to your day, perhaps you can revisit some of those activities you did at the kitchen table as a child.

The example below reminds me of the idea of having 'five-a-day' helpings of fruit and vegetables – you can 'pick and mix' which activities suit you, and even do more than five a day.

Do something outdoors daily if possible (a walk, enjoy being in the garden, eat outside; observe, re-plant, trim, pot, or maintain something in the garden). Then, perhaps supplement it with these ideas.

**Idea: 'Five a day' table-top activities**

- 1 **communication**; a phone-call, email, letter, or conferencing video-call using *Skype, Whatsapp, Facetime, or Messenger*  
(Think of communicating in order to: - exchange information or a particular sentiment, offer a compliment, say thanks, reminisce, express an emotion, and/or a word of understanding, or share some humour)
- 2 **amusement**; activities/ game; (board game, card game, electronic game, word game)
- 3 **art / craft: make/ fix something**; (clean / convert / prepare / mend / repair / sew / sand) art for someone, such as a card, collage, picture, ornament, tool, object, textile, illustration)
- 4 **sustenance-related**; preparation and consumption of food or beverage/s
- 5 **make an observation** about outdoors - the nature you can see around you (perhaps even while sitting at your table)
- 6 **make the table look nice**: clear it off, add placemats or a tablecloth, fold serviettes, setting it; put a decoration, vase, or some other type of novelty or arrangement on it. Keep objects on tray if you need to clear the table quickly to use it for another purpose.
- 7 **(assemble) collection/s of objects** (e.g. feathers, flowers, leaves, moss, pebbles, seeds, pine-cones, fabrics, wool, twigs, that can be used to make things like a card, picture, centrepiece, ornament, table arrangement, later)
- 8 **reminisce**; it's easy to start with photos; labelling them, write little stories

<p>9 <b>music</b>; what did you listen to; did anything touch you specially today?</p> <p>10 <b>hobby-related</b>; do something related to your hobbies</p> <p>11 <b>miscellaneous: thoughts or dream/s</b>; what 'grabbed' or stuck with you</p> <p>12 <b>miscellaneous: sayings or quote</b>; what inspired you? A an apt or memorable saying (from your own mouth or that of a family member or friend, something from a poem, piece of prose, book, conversation, or programme)</p>
<p>Note: some trays, small containers and baskets will come in handy to do this</p>

If you'd like to try this, here is a blank template.

**Recording daily 'table-top activities'**

Table-top activities (Pick and mix whichever you wish)	Day number;	Date
1 communicate		
2 amusement activities / game		
3 art / craft make or fix something		
4 sustenance / treats		
5 observation		
6 table appearance		
7 collection/s, objects		
8 reminisce		
9 music		
10 hobby-related		
11 miscellaneous: thought / dream		
12 miscellaneous: saying / quote		

One family group, two adult children living with their 87-year-old father (who has dementia, and very limited mobility), have been self-isolating the past few weeks.

They started a notebook (using the above headings for table-top activities), and filled it out together, at the end of each day. This timing didn't work so

well since Dad was often tired by then, so instead they tried filling it in after breakfast, about things that had happened the day before, which was not always easy for Dad. After a few more days, they decided to leave the notebook on the kitchen table to write in it throughout the day. This worked much better – sitting and making little notes together was an easy focus and discussion point over a cup of tea or coffee. Doing this was much better than talking about or listening to too much virus-related news.

After a week, the siblings started using this ‘notebook format’ to reminisce with their Dad about what had been happening in recent days - especially when he asked them questions like; ‘what are we supposed to do now?’, ‘what’s happening?’, and ‘why aren’t you at work?’

The siblings said it was also useful to have some tidbits of daily news at their fingertips, for when speaking to family and friends on the phone. Their phone-calls were more frequent now, since they couldn’t visit, but they were also becoming somewhat repetitive. When asked, “How are you, and what have you been doing today?”, the siblings could prompt their Dad to relate some specific details from the notebook, rather than say, “I’m fine, same as always.”

Most recently, Dad has started looking through the notebook when he’s sitting alone at the table, sometimes making ‘doodles’ and drawings on the blank sides of the pages and margins, and writing some words. The siblings know he can read some phrases, but they aren’t sure how much he can read of all that’s written there - but - he certainly enjoys looking through the notebook. That gave them the idea to leave a mug full of pens, pencils, and some colouring pencils, on the table, so they’re always within Dad’s reach when he wants to write or draw something. (They’ve been talking about continuing with daily notebook entries when the times of home-confinement are over.)

**See below - for an example below of 8 days of notebook records** of the table-top activities. (To save space, they have been typed up with two entries per page. In practise, one page per day is most likely legible when hand-written, especially since, like ‘Dad’ mentioned above, someone may use it to doodle, draw and write on.)

Best regards, and wishing you patience and strength in these unusual times,

Gemma Jones

P.S. A reviewer of this newsletter said they’d like to try this idea themselves, instead of doing spontaneous diary entries.

## Recording our daily 'table-top activities' – first 2 days

('P' and 'F' refer to the siblings; 'D' refers to their dad)

Table-top activities (Pick and mix)	Day 1; Sat. March 14, 2020	Day 2; Sun. March 15, 2020
1 communicate	. phoned next door neighbour; are they OK? . phoned cousin Dot, who has no computer or email	. phoned D's grandchildren . P and F learned to use SKYPE to do a video call to friends in New Zealand
2 amusement activities / games	. prepared the sheets and started recording our days' events in this book	. F & D played cards: 'Solitaire for Two' also called 'Double Solitaire'. (D won; this helped his mood a lot)
3 art / craft make / fix something	. made some ornaments (gifts for grandchildren), from felt, ribbon, pinecones and paint	. repaired the potholder; added a new outer edge to the pot-holder, to replace the worn part
4 sustenance and treats	. made oatmeal cookies	. tried making pancakes with yogurt instead of milk
5 observation	. saw first bumble bee of the year	. saw first butterfly of the year; a large yellow one
6 table appearance	. used tea-light candles on table for the evening meal. D liked it.	. found tray to put under candles
7 collections, objects	. found small boxes to put objects into, for making cards and decorations with	. did some cut-outs from old cards and an old calendar to use for making cards
8 reminisce	. remembered the feeling as a child of staying home from school, with a cold; being a bit spoilt; would like to feel like that now	. remembered doing paper-craft at school, especially cut-out figures and snowflake shapes
9 music	. we still have a small collection of old cassette tapes and a tape recorder to play them on; tried them to see which still worked and all they did; D was delighted	. played more tapes; listened to two of D's favourite ones, then switched to a classical radio station
10 hobby-related	. F did a small picture/painting of kitchen window; D was amused.	Read through some of our favourite poems. Will try this again!
11 miscellaneous: thought / dream	. P dreamt of being late for an appointment; was in amongst a large crowd	. all dreamt but no-one could not recall anything  . How bad were things during the Spanish Flu, after WWI, when no one knew what was happening to anyone else?
12 miscellaneous: saying / quote	'Necessity is the mother of invention' Plato How apt for us now – as always.	"Tell a story a day". This was P's quote and idea for an activity. Let's choose an object a day to tell a story about – even if you have to make up the story entirely! (Maybe we can even write them down.)

## Recording our daily 'table-top activities' – days 3 & 4

Table-top activities (Pick and mix)	Day 3; Mon. March 16, 2020	Day 4; Tues Mar 17, 2020
1 communicate	. send get well card to friend, Lucy . phone grandkids; what did they do instead of being in school?	. email a fool-proof recipe for chocolate cake in a mug, to family and friends- after doing a trial run
2 amusement activities / games	. played Dominos	. tried to play game 'Uno' <i>online</i> with the grandchildren
3 art / craft make / fix something	. made 'get well' card for Lucy	. made a 'summer' collage of cards from this past year
4 sustenance and treats	. tried new type of herbal tea	. we made chocolate cake in a mug (used on-line recipe) will recommend it to grandchildren
5 observation	. neighbour's pink cherry tree in bloom	. blue tits nesting in bird box under the eaves
6 table appearance	. floated a camellia blossom in a eggcup, instead of using a vase	. found an old small cloth/doily, made by gran, to put under the vase
7 collection/s, objects	. started assembling coloured paper, pens, scissors, glue, acrylic paint, brushes etc. to make cards with . put things into a box; made clear label "For crafts" on it so that D could read it easily, and not try to unpack it and put things away.	. found more things to add to the 'craft box'
8 reminisce	. last year, this time, we had a BBQ	. looked through several family albums today
9 music	. started listening to CDs of Easter music	. listened to Desert Island Discs – an archived programme (with John Cooper Clarke interviewed)
10 hobby-related	. Found favourite book of poems; read some to D, by Pam Ayres. This amused him, and hearing the rhyming, got him going repeating some rude limericks from his army days.	. looked online too see which poems were most popular; printed two poems off, in large print, for D to add to this notebook . may try to write a poem with D soon
11 miscellaneous: thought / dream	. D dreamt about a lot of cats trying to get into the house (versus out of the house) – but had no idea or insight as to why. Very amusing – but neither did we.	. "Each month, 55 million people Google ' <i>how to be happy</i> ', says Tim [Knox]. But it's well documented what makes us happy -- we find it in each other. ... smiling ...is an environment that can change our experience of the world in a positive way." 2014, Photographer
12 miscellaneous: saying / quote	D surprised us by recalling a saying from his Dad we hadn't heard before "There's always one more - until there's no more". He continued by saying "Be careful with your things, especially food."	"Times like these make you think about what you really need and what you can do without." We noted this during dinner, when we ran out of ketchup, and made a joke of it.

## Recording our daily 'table-top activities' – days 5 & 6

Table-top activities (Pick and mix)	Day 5; Wed March 18, 2020	Day 6; Thurs March 19, 2020
1 communicate	. send a birthday card to Fred . phone Sue to see how she is	. send a thank you card to neighbours for picking up the prescriptions and groceries . email a joke to friends and family
2 amusement activities / games	. try write a sentence with each word having the same starting letter; try the letter 's' today. ("Silly songs-birds sang slowly – shunning softer sounds - soaring skyward such sonorous, sympathetic sonatas.")	. card game: Double Solitaire D is not good at losing. It takes some skill to let him win at this game. <i>[Note: Will try other games to see which work best, so he too can enjoy the feeling winning, not all the time, but often.]</i>
3 art / craft make/ fix something	. polished the brassware together . made a picture for the neighbour children, who made a picture of a rainbow for us	. sewed on 3 missing buttons on shirts . found box of 'orphaned socks' and matched some of them up
4 sustenance and treats	. made a "cheese and onion omelette on a bun", named it a 'egg and bunion lunch'	. made 'fridge clearance soup' and had it with grilled cheese sandwiches
5 observation	. a green 'treehopper' bug flew into house today; will try to identify which one with help from the web later on (have photo)	. the squirrels are eating the buds on the maple and magnolia trees
6 table appearance	. found a tray, put LED tea-light candle onto it, beside the flower	. found a piece of bark with some lichen on it, by the outside door; added it to the tray
7 collection/s objects	. started a collection of small feathers and nature objects; found a dozen little ones by the doorway	. started a collection of small wires, strings, and ties – for making cards and sculptures
8 reminisce	. looked through other family albums; D amused; wants to do this again soon.	. tidied the sewing box; found old scraps of fabric, zippers, buttons, eyehooks from great-grandmother
9 music	. listened to music on the radio	. listened to some cassette tapes of the 70's; he sang / hummed a lot of these melodies later during the day
10 hobby-related	. P took a photo of the treehopper that flew inside onto the table	. F started a novel he's had for ages, and read us some passages
11 miscellaneous: thought/ dream	"On the few occasions when I've tried total isolation, I've groveled my way back to the company of others. Partial and limited-time isolation, on the other hand, is how we re-set the compass of our souls." R Genn, 26 Mar. 2013	. P dreamt about being locked in the supermarket with F overnight; no one noticed and they couldn't get out. (Likely a reflection of what was on the news tonight. There lots of food around, just not on the shelves, so you can't get it to your home.)
12 miscellaneous: saying / quote	D said "Times like this make one think of what's most important in life...to still be together somehow."	We wondered what our parents and grandparents would have done in these times. D said they will have played lots of cards and made lots of biscuits.



## Recording our daily 'table-top activities' – days 7 & 8

Table-top activities (Pick and mix)	Day 7; Fri. March 20, 2020	Day 8; Sat. March 21, 2020
1 communicate	. phoned grandchildren to see how this week at home went.	. phone some of the other couple who attend the Alzheimer Cafe
2 amusement activities / games	. played card game: 'War' D won. He wanted to do a second game and put money on it.	. played 'Jenga' game (stacked wooden rectangle blocks) . D enjoyed it; must remember to do this with the grandchildren when they can visit again!
3 art / craft make / fix something	. sanded, oiled and polished the old wooden ornamental bowl . helped give each other a haircut	. polished all shoes and boots . picked first dandelion in garden, put in small vase to mark 1 <sup>st</sup> day of spring
4 sustenance and treats	. oatmeal raisin cookies were a big hit with D; not sure we should make them too often because he ate them till they were all gone.	. for lunch: made 'mini pizzas' out of toasted bread with cheese, ketchup, olives and tomatoes – then grilled them. D was impressed.
5 observation	. leaves on the 'pieris' shrub' (also known as Piraeus), are turning bright red/pink now.	. the spider-web outside the widow has caught a large leaf; wonder if the web is repairable? Will watch it.
6 table appearance	. replaced the old flowers with some coloured leaves	. found some small feathers by the door step; add to table centrepiece
7 collection/s objects	. Found coloured elastic bands which would make a good 'line' to put small bunting flags on to.	. D sanded some blocks of wood today, to start making a 'bat box', like the one he'd seen on a TV show
8 reminisce	. Made a list of all the DIY projects that D had done in his life, starting with 'shop classes at school' – as far as we (all) could recall. He was very proud of this.	. D wanted us to help him make a list of all the vehicles he's ever had to add to this notebook.
9 music	. no music on today; D says he liked the quiet	. D wanted to listen to classical music in the afternoon
10 hobby related	. wrote a poem together to go in Easter cards for D's grandchildren	. started knitting a scarf to use up leftover wool; wants to make a new one for each of us
11 miscellaneous: thought/ dream	D thinking a lot today about children being shut indoors. He was thinking about music groups who couldn't practice together also. "We must all work to make this world worthy of its children." Pablo Casals	. celebrated the first day of Spring by reading some poems online about spring.
12 miscellaneous: saying / quote	"Each kindness shown to birds or men is sure to flutter back again" source unknown	Discussed that being alone in the house together, does not feel like being lonely. Wondered how many people are alone in a house. We're doing fine together still; we hope others are too.

**What can a table centrepiece look like**, after one week of putting various bits together - on a tray, on a tablemat, and onto a placemat? Surprisingly fun.



## References

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**Feedback:** We are not yet set-up for feedback, but hope to be.

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