

The River: A Story of Dementia

Adapted from Dementia Friends Minnesota

For every human being, life is like a river. The constant flow of water represents our daily experiences—from routine and familiar to those that take us by surprise. If we are lucky enough to live a long life, we will experience the river in each of the four seasons—spring, summer, fall, and winter.

Spring is early childhood, when the river is new to us and we are just learning about all the fish, birds, and animals that connect with it. **Summer** is our experience from childhood to adulthood, when we transition from relying on others to navigating the water and harvesting for ourselves. **Fall** is adulthood, when we know the river and its resources and dangers well enough to provide for others, raise children, and chart our own course in the world. **Winter** is elderhood, when we have acquired the deepest knowledge and wisdom, but also start to experience changes from the aging of our bodies.

Dementia is like a brutal blizzard. Blizzards can come in any season, although they are most common and most severe in winter. The wind and snow mute the sight and sound of the water. Everyday experiences—the natural flow of the water—become harder to appreciate and navigate. Thinking activities that used to be easy, like planning a fishing trip, buying bait, planning meals for the day, and reaching out to others to join the activity, become increasingly difficult. However, even at the onset of the blizzard, emotional experiences and feelings remain strong—the love of fishing, the memory of the sunlight gleaming off the rippling current, and the joy of company, for example.

The progression of dementia is like experiencing a growing blizzard without end. The prolonged exposure to cold starts to freeze the river. The everyday flow of experiences beneath the surface is increasingly difficult to reach and navigate without help. Eventually, even deep and lifelong emotional and spiritual connections are harder to access through the thickening ice.

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT_2CZ89TZY&feature=youtu.be

*This analogy of a river in a blizzard helps explain the experience of dementia.
Facts, recent memory and complex thinking become hard to reach in the ice.
Emotions and feelings remain longer, but the prolonged exposure to the blizzard
can eventually freeze those as well.*