

Celebrating the Gifts We Are Given

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This is the time of year that many of us are busy finding gifts for the people in our lives. We try and be creative and thoughtful about these gifts based on what we know about the person, the relationship that we have, and what we think might make them happy. Gifts usually bring joy to both the person giving the gift and the one receiving it. Think of a time when you were given a gift that made you happy—one that held personal meaning and showed you how connected you were to the person giving it.

Maybe you knew how much effort was put into the gift or the time or money that it took to give it to you. Perhaps it was special to you because of how much thought was put into finding the *just right* gift or one that had special meaning. These gifts are ones that we cherish and that bring us joy. Some of them come in beautifully wrapped packages but others do not because while some of us think that the package is important, others do not.

When someone living with dementia is in the Pearl GEMS® state, the wrapping might not look as pretty as it used to, just like the shell around a pearl might not look so pretty. However, when you open the shell of a pearl, you can find the beautiful gem inside. There are times when people living with dementia have moments or *windows* that open to us, and we can see the person inside—just as when the shell of a pearl opens to reveal the beautiful gem inside.

These moments when we see the person inside of the shell are gifts that we are given all throughout the year. It is the same gift that we give to one another when we give the gift of ourselves. This gift of self requires being willing to share in a way that can make us vulnerable, and it requires us to be open, honest, and fully present to the other person. We usually only do this when we feel safe and supported, and this will be true for people living with dementia.

During this time of year when many of us think about sharing gifts with one another, look for the opportunities to share the gift of your *self*, and look for ways to open those shells to reveal the pearls inside.