

visiting Gran's new home

by Virginia Ironside



Jack loved visiting his gran. She was cuddly and jolly and often gave him pocket money, always had time to play and sometimes sang him old songs and talked about the old days.

She would take him to the park, and to the swings, and, when he was very young, taught him how to catch a ball.

Jack and his mum often visited gran – sometimes taking her the newspapers and groceries.



But, recently, Jack noticed that his gran was becoming more unhappy and forgetful of the stories she used to tell him. “One day, she rang me and called me by the wrong name!” said Jack.



Today, when mum said that they were going to visit gran, they didn't go the usual way.

"Gran's moved," said mum. "She's now in a care home." "But she already has a home," said Jack.

"This is a new home," said mum, "but it's a special home where there are kind people to take care of her all the time."

"But we could look after her all the time," said Jack.

"I'm afraid we can't," said mum. "Gran's memory isn't good and now she needs to have people to give her the special care which we can't give her."





When they got to the new home, Jack didn't like it. It wasn't like gran's old house, the garden was different and there were lots of strange people walking around.

"This isn't like gran's house!" said Jack, looking around, and scratching his head.

It was very hot and he felt a bit frightened of all these new people. He didn't know whether his gran would like living here.

Then a kind lady came over and said: “Hello, I’m your gran’s carer. This means that I help to take care of your gran.”

She seemed a nice person and shook Jack’s hand. “I know you from the photograph which your gran has in her room!” she said. And Jack felt a bit better.

“Those are lovely chocolates!” she said.

“Yes,” said Jack, “they’re gran’s favourite!”



Jack held mum's hand and they went into gran's room.

Gran was sitting in a chair watching the birds on the bird table outside.

"Hello," said mum, in rather a loud voice. "It's me, your daughter, and Jack come to see you!"

"She knows that," said Jack. "You don't have to tell her."

"Sometimes, she forgets," mum said. "She's losing her memory."





Just then, the kind lady came into gran's room to help her with something, so Jack and mum waited outside until they were finished. Jack was glad because he had some questions for mum.

"Why has gran lost her memory?" asked Jack. "Can we help her find it?"

"The reason she is losing her memory is because she has something called dementia," said mum.

"What is dementia?" asked Jack. He was rather frightened that he would get dementia too.

"Dementia is the name which the doctors give to the illness that gran has. It is why she forgets things," mum explained. "And, no, you can't catch dementia from gran – it's not like the flu!"

Mum and Jack went back into her room, and gran smiled. Jack gave her a big kiss. Later, the lady came in with some tea, and Jack gave gran the chocolates.

“I brought you some chocolates,” said Jack. Gran nodded and smiled again. Then, she chatted about her garden.

Sometimes, gran repeated her words two or three times, and Jack couldn't understand what she was trying to say.





Suddenly, Jack felt sad. The person in the chair did look like gran, it's true. But this wasn't the old gran he knew. And yet, there were lots of things which he recognised in her room.

There was the photograph of mum and dad getting married and the little silver box where she kept her earrings.

And there was a pile of books, and the little lace tablecloth which gran had been stitching a long time ago, with the red pattern on it.

Suddenly, gran shouted in a very loud voice: “WHERE ARE MY BISCUITS!” and Jack jumped.

“Don’t worry, Jack,” said mum. “You see, now is the time when we have to look after gran, rather than her looking after us. Why don’t you do some drawing while we talk?”

And she got out some paper and felt pens from her bag.



Slowly, Jack got used to the change in gran.

Around gran’s new home he saw lots of other ladies and gentlemen. Some were cooking and eating in the kitchen with their carers. But some smiled and waved and Jack waved back.





Then Jack saw the kind lady again and had some questions for her, too.

“Is dementia why my gran sometimes does silly things?” asked Jack.

“Yes,” said the lady, “but your gran doesn’t think these things are silly. She just does them because she has dementia. The silly things make perfect sense to her.”

“Is dementia why gran gets cross sometimes?”

“Yes, that’s right,” she said. “Your gran sometimes gets upset because she can’t remember things. It’s not your fault!”

“It doesn’t happen very often, but when it does, we cheer her up by talking to her and showing her some of the old things she likes.”



When he got back to gran's room, he asked if she remembered the old songs they used to sing.

When he started singing, his gran's face lit up and they sang together.

After a while, mum said: "We must go."

“Goodbye gran,” said Jack, and gave her a kiss.

Gran said: “And who are you?” but Jack just laughed and gave her another kiss and hug. And then gran laughed and gave him a great big hug back. “Come and see me soon!” she said.

“We will!” said mum and Jack. Jack was already looking forward to next Sunday, when they would take gran to their house for a visit.



In the car on the way back, Jack had more questions.

“Why has gran got dementia?” he asked.

“No one knows,” said mum. “But it has something to do with a part of gran’s brain not working properly. Sadly, doctors can’t make everyone better, though they try hard all the time.”



“Although doctors are trying to find a cure, they haven’t found one yet, even though lots and lots of people have dementia.”

“Will you get dementia, mum?” asked Jack.

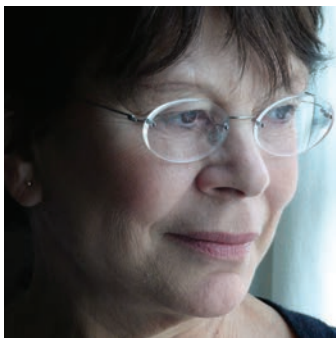
“No, I don’t think so,” she said. “Don’t worry.”

“I do worry,” said Jack, “because gran used to remember things and now she is different. But I am glad the kind lady and all the other carers are there to help her.”

“In fact, I like gran’s new home,” said Jack, as they drove back to their house. “When can we come again?”

You can use this page to draw a picture of your family!

Photograph: Catherine Shakespeare Lane.



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