


visiting Grandad's new home

by Virginia Ironside



visiting Grandad's new home





Emma loved visiting her grandad. He was cuddly and jolly and he often gave her pocket money, always had time to play and sometimes sang her old songs and talked about the old days.

He would take her to the park, and to the swings, and, when she was very young, taught her how to catch a ball. He had a little garden and he never got cross.



Emma and her mum often visited grandad – sometimes taking him the newspapers and groceries.

But, recently, Emma noticed that her grandad was becoming more unhappy and forgetful of the stories he used to tell her. “One day, he rang me and called me by the wrong name!” said Emma.





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

"Grandad's moved," said mum. "He's now in a care home." "But he already has a home," said Emma.

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

"But we could look after him all the time," said Emma.

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



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

"This isn't like grandad's house!" said Emma, looking around, and scratching her head. It was very hot and she felt a bit frightened of all these new people. She didn't know whether her grandad would like living here.





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

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

“Those are lovely flowers!” she said. “Yes,” said Emma, “they’re roses from grandad’s garden!”

“We’ll get a vase of water for them straight away!” the lady said.



Emma held mum's hand and they went into grandad's room. Grandad 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 Emma come to see you!"

"He knows that," said Emma. "You don't have to tell him."

"Sometimes he forgets," mum said. "He's losing his memory."





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

"Why has grandad lost his memory?" asked Emma. "Can we help him find it?"

"The reason he is losing his memory is because he has something called dementia," said mum.

"What is dementia?" asked Emma. She was rather frightened she would get dementia too.

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



Mum and Emma went back into his room, and grandad smiled. Emma gave him a big kiss. Later, the lady came in with some tea and a vase for the flowers.

“I brought you some flowers,” said Emma. Grandad nodded and smiled again.

Then, he chatted about his garden.

Sometimes, grandad repeated his words two or three times, and Emma couldn't understand what he was trying to say.





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

He was sitting in his favourite chair and on the wall was a picture of mum and dad getting married.

And there was a pile of books, and a lovely little plant just like the one that used to be in his kitchen.



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

“Don’t worry, Emma,” said mum. “You see, now is the time when we have to look after grandad, rather than him 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, Emma got used to the change in grandad. Around grandad’s new home she saw lots of other ladies and gentlemen. Some were cooking and eating in the kitchen with their carers. But some smiled and waved and Emma waved back.





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

“Is dementia why my grandad sometimes does silly things?” asked Emma.

“Yes,” said the lady, “but your grandad doesn’t think these things are silly. He just does them because he has dementia. The silly things make perfect sense to him.”

“Is dementia why grandad gets cross sometimes?”

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

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





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

When she started singing, her grandad's face lit up and they sang together.

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



“Goodbye grandad,” said Emma, and gave him a kiss.

Grandad said: “And who are you?” but Emma just laughed and gave him another kiss and hug. And then grandad laughed and gave her a great big hug back. “Come and see me soon!” he said.

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



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

“Why has grandad got dementia?” she asked.

“No one knows,” said mum. “But it has something to do with a part of grandad’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 Emma.

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

“I do worry,” said Emma, “because grandad used to remember things and now he is different. But I am glad the kind lady and all the other carers are there to help him.

“In fact, I like grandad’s new home,” said Emma, 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.



Virginia Ironside has been a journalist and problem page editor all her life. She now writes a regular agony column for the Independent, and a column for the Oldie. She's written several books, including seven for children. She has two grandchildren.



[www.barchester.com](http://www.barchester.com)

At Barchester Healthcare we pride ourselves on all our care and support. Living in one of our *Memory Lane Communities* enables people with a dementia to experience life in the fullest way possible. Our care is 'person first' in its nature and philosophy. That is to say, we continue to see the person before we see their dementia.

Barchester Healthcare is pleased to support Alzheimer's Society



If you would like more information about dementia, please visit [alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk)