

# Scrapbook photo albums are therapeutic for Alzheimer's patients

**Mark B. Mizen, Ph.D.**

**Director of Technology  
Creative Memories  
Saint Cloud, MN 56301**

**C**reative Memories is committed to helping end Alzheimer's disease. In addition to the annual Time for Triumph campaign, we're taking another step as a corporate sponsor of Alzheimer's Association Memory Walks.



Creative Memories has donated nearly \$1 million to the Alzheimer's Association since the partnership began in 2001

With more than 600 communities taking part in Memory Walks throughout North America, the Creative Memories name and Mission will be in front of hundreds of thousands who may be caregivers, doctors or family members of those who have this memory-robbing disease.

No cure exists for Alzheimer's disease. Consequently, caregivers have relied on various therapies to help patients.<sup>1</sup> Creative Memories believes in and teaches the importance of preserving the past, enriching the present and inspiring hope for the future. We want to help the family members and loved ones of Alzheimer's patients make meaningful albums to connect with one another.

Available studies on the use of scrapbook photo albums when working with Alzheimer's patients are typically either anecdotal or involve only a small number of patients and are not well controlled. Several published reports document patients' response to albums.

This review summarizes available information and suggests ways in which scrapbook photo albums might assist patients with Alzheimer's disease. This review also gives Creative Memories Consultants and others information to assist Alzheimer's patients and their families.

In general, published studies show that scrapbook photo albums enhance the well-being of both Alzheimer's patients and others affected by the disease.

## ■ Photographs comfort patients

Photographs from the past allow patients to reminisce about pleasant times in their lives. Photographs from the present help patients relate to their current situation. The patient experiencing memory loss is able to "remember or recognize someone they love and know in a world where so many things are now unfamiliar to them."<sup>2</sup> A study by Ellen Mahoney of Boston College found that, in one instance, photos distracted the Alzheimer's patient from the effects of Alzheimer's disease.<sup>3</sup>

Photographs provide additional information that allows Alzheimer's patients to become comfortable with their environment. In one study, an Alzheimer's patient in the United Kingdom used photographs to remember the names of members of his social club.<sup>4</sup>

## ■ Scrapbook photo albums are therapeutic

Scrapbook photo albums assist trained professionals in treating patients with Alzheimer's disease. A yearbook format scrapbook can serve as a therapeutic restorative biography. A biography of this type can make, "a profound difference in how late stage [Alzheimer's disease] patients are perceived and understood."<sup>5</sup> Families relate to the patient through photographs and memories. Caregivers develop empathy and are able to see the patient as a human being.

Albums provide trained professionals with information about the patient for use as part of reminiscence therapy.<sup>6</sup> These albums stimulate remote memories, which do not deteriorate as readily as current memories, to help patients deal with Alzheimer's disease and improve general well-being.

The aim of reminiscence therapy is to empower the patient, provide pleasure and improve both the quality of life and the quality of care.<sup>7</sup> Reminiscence therapy targets the patient's self esteem and confidence and results in short-term improvements.<sup>8</sup> Talking about the past can also facilitate communication and improve the patient mood.<sup>9</sup> More comprehensive studies are required to better understand the benefits of reminiscence therapy.<sup>10</sup>

## ■ Compiling a scrapbook photo album

Limited resources within treatment programs generally prevent professional caregivers from compiling therapeutic biographies. Consequently, this responsibility generally falls on the patient's family or other volunteers. Also, the patient's family has photographs and other memorabilia required for the scrapbook photo album and is in the best position to provide background information.

Share your knowledge about creating albums. Remember, you are not a licensed psychologist trained in phototherapy.<sup>11</sup> But, you are able to share information about how to make meaningful albums.

The Creative Memories Memory Album Tutor™ provides helpful hints and journaling tips for creating a This is My Story album.

Recommend including photos of a patient's family, friends and home environment; these offer a sense of security and happiness. Include both older and recent photos to assist patients with recalling past memories as well as more recent events.

Large, easily identifiable photographs are best. Many patients have poor eyesight and are unable to make out fine details in a small photograph.<sup>12</sup> Make sure journaling is written clearly using large letters and simple language. A nurse or other caregiver can use these details to assist the patient.



The Creative Memories Memory Album Tutor™ provides helpful hints and journaling tips for creating a This is My Story album.

If possible, include a photograph of the patient smiling: “Seeing a photograph of one’s self smiling usually elicits another smile, and helps instill feelings of happiness.”<sup>13</sup>

Share the importance of journaling. Let families know it’s best if patients do their own journaling. Or, encourage families to interview their loved ones about their childhood, family traditions and favorite activities.

Communication with Alzheimer’s patients requires compassion.<sup>14</sup> Alzheimer’s patients live in a different world and are functioning in the moment. Any interaction with patients should reduce, rather than increase, anxiety.

Photographs and journaling related to traumatic events or national tragedies, such as Sept. 11, 2001, require special sensitivity.<sup>15</sup> These photographs may cause the patient to relive the tragedy, with no therapeutic benefit.<sup>16</sup> Avoid photographs and journaling that cause patients to feel pain. If a patient experiences anxiety, move on to another photograph or switch activities altogether.

Photographs and personal memorabilia help patients locate their rooms within treatment facilities.<sup>17, 18</sup> For this application, use a duplicate copy of a photograph with the patient’s name in bold letters on a single album page. Place the album page in a Creative Memories Fridge Frame and then attach it to the patient’s door, with adhesive, if necessary. Older photographs may assist some Alzheimer’s patients more than more recent photographs.

### ■ Alzheimer’s patients can create meaningful albums

With assistance, patients with Alzheimer’s disease can create scrapbook photo albums. Creating an album is a meaningful activity. In one study, patients in Israel received assistance in creating albums.<sup>19</sup> The patients identified each other, had a starting point for further discussion, and generally found the albums relaxing. In another study, an Alzheimer’s patient used a camera and journal to chronicle and remember events.<sup>20</sup> This activity helped this patient track and review his daily life.

### ■ Conclusions

Finding a cure to Alzheimer’s disease will require time. Yet, patients suffering from Alzheimer’s disease need assistance now. Studies have shown that scrapbook photo albums can be one part of this assistance, and Creative Memories Consultants can encourage patients and their families to complete meaningful albums. In doing so, they will preserve the past, enrich the present and inspire hope for the future.

## Alzheimer’s Album

1. Photo of patient smiling
2. Photos of family, friends and home environment
3. Old and recent photos
4. Large, easy-to-identify photos
5. Don’t forget journaling

## References

---

1. Frances, I.; Barandiaran, M.; Marcellan, T.; Moreno, L. "Psychocognitive stimulation in dementia." *Anales del Sistema Sanitario de Navarra* **2003**, *26*, 405-421. <http://www.cfnavarra.es/salud/anales/textos/vol26/n3/revis2.html>
2. Koretsky, P. "Using Photography in a Therapeutic Setting with Seniors." *Afterimage* **2001**, *29* (3), 8. [http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_dls/m2479/3\\_29/80757501/p1/article.jhtml](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m2479/3_29/80757501/p1/article.jhtml)
3. Friedman, G. "Bathed in Memory." *Boston College Magazine*, Summer **2003**. [http://www.bc.edu/publications/bcm/summer\\_2003/ll\\_memory.html](http://www.bc.edu/publications/bcm/summer_2003/ll_memory.html)
4. Clare, L.; Wilson, B. A.; Breen, K.; Hodges, J. R. "Errorless Learning of Face-Name Associations in Early Alzheimer's Disease." *Neurocase* **1999**, *5*, 37-46.
5. Cohen, G. D. "Two New Intergenerational Interventions for Alzheimer's Disease Patients and Families." *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* **2000**, *15*, 137-142.
6. Pittiglio, L. "Use of Reminiscence Therapy in Patients with Alzheimer's Disease." *Lippincott's Case Management* **2000**, *5*, 216-220.
7. Woodrow, P. "Interventions for Confusion and Dementia 3: Reminiscence." *British Journal of Nursing* **1998**, *7*, 1145-1149.
8. Gräsel, E.; Wiltfang, J.; Kornhuber, J. "Non-Drug Therapies for Dementia: An Overview of the Current Situation with Regard to Proof of Effectiveness." *Dementia and Geriatric Cognitive Disorders* **2003**, *15*, 115-125.
9. Garner, J. "Psychotherapies and older adults." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* **2003**, *37*, 537-548.
10. Spector, A., Orwell, M., Davies, S. Woods, R. T. "Reminiscence Therapy for Dementia (Cochrane Review)." *In The Cochrane Library*, Issue 1, **2003**. Oxford: Update Software.
11. Weiser, J. "PhotoTherapy Techniques." *PhotoTherapy Centre*, Vancouver, **1999**. <http://www.phototherapy-centre.com>
12. Rentz, C. A. "Reminiscence: A Supportive Intervention for the Person With Alzheimer's Disease." *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing* **1995**, *33*, 15-20
13. Buckner, B. "Therapeutic Implications of Portrait Photography in a Nursing Home." *Concern in Care of the Aging* **1978**, *4*, 31-32.
14. Ayres, L. "Compassionate Communication with the Memory Impaired." *Ageless Design* **2001**, *16*, 7-10. <http://www.agelessdesign.com/nl/vol16/compassionatecommunication.htm>
15. Ashton, Denise. "Therapeutic use of reminiscence with the elderly." *British Journal of Nursing* **1993**, *2*, 13, 894.
16. Krauss, D. A. Personal communication, April 21, 2003.
17. Nolan, B. A. D.; Mathews, R. M.; Harrison, M. "Using external memory aids to increase room finding by older adults with dementia." *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias* **2001**, *16*, 251-254. <http://www.ku.edu/~hdf/faculty/matthews/Mathews%202001%20AJAD.pdf>
18. Namazi, K. H.; Rosner, T. T. Rechlin, L. "Long-Term Memory Curing to Reduce Visuo-Spatial Disorientation in Alzheimer's Patients in a Special Care Unit." *American Journal of Alzheimer's Care and Related Disorders & Research* **1991**, *7*, 10-15.
19. Weiner, R. L.; Abromowitz, L. "Use of Photographs as Therapy for Demented Elderly." *Activities, Adaptation, & Aging* **1997**, *21*, 47-51.
20. Sandoz, C. J. "Photographs as a Tool in Memory Preservation for Patients with Alzheimer's Disease." *Clinical Gerontologist* **1996**, *17*, 69-71.



Creative Memories  
3001 Clearwater Road  
Saint Cloud, MN 56301-5949  
[www.creativememories.com](http://www.creativememories.com)

© 2004 Creative Memories. This guide may be freely distributed but may not be modified in any way.