

Film Two: Adjusting to change

Narrator: In the first scene we meet May who is in her seventies. May's husband passed away several years ago and she now lives on her own. Recently she suffered a significant and unexpected life event in the form of a stroke. Here she is met by Ellen, an occupational therapist and together they explore what the impact of this change has meant on May's life.

Acted Scenario

May: I've made some tea.

Ellen: Lovely I'm parched. Shall I pour?

May: No, no, you're the guest, you just sit there. How do you like it?

Ellen: Just as it comes, black, thank you. So how are you feeling May? You have been back from the hospital a couple of weeks now.

May: oh not too bad thanks. You, you said on the phone you were an ...

Ellen: I'm an occupational therapist.

May: Right.

Ellen: I will be taking some notes while we talk just so that I can remember what we are chatting about. Is that OK?

May: Yes.

Ellen: So I'm here to see how you are getting on after getting out of hospital and whether there's anything we can do to help.

May: It's good to be home.

Ellen: Yes, it's always nice to be amongst your familiar things isn't it?

May: Yes.

Ellen: So how are you feeling May?

- May: Well, a little bit shakier than before and I'm having to do things a lot more slowly than I'd like.
- Ellen: Well, that's not surprising. You've been through quite an ordeal.
- May: Yes, yes. It was a bit of a shock. When one is in the hospital everybody rushing about, doctors telling you this and that oh I mean they were all lovely but it is a lot to take in and then suddenly I am back here.
- Ellen: On your own you mean.
- May: Yes, daft isn't it.
- Ellen: No, not at all.
- May: I just feel a bit on edge. I am laughing about things one minute and then I am crying the next.
- Ellen: Well it's a lot for anyone to have to go through. You need to allow yourself time to deal with the way that you are feeling.
- May: Yes, of course.
- Ellen: You are like me you have got photographs everywhere. That's a lovely wedding picture.
- May: Oh that's my son, Robert.
- Ellen: Does he live nearby?
- May: Well not far. Ten minutes' drive.
- Ellen: And do you see much of him?
- May: Well he pops in now and then. He's very busy.
- Ellen: Is he able to find time to help you with the day to day things?
- May: Like what?

- Ellen: Shopping that sort of stuff.
- May: Oh Malcolm takes me shopping once a week.
- Ellen: Is that your other son?
- May: No, no that's my friend's son, I've known him since he was a baby.
- Ellen: And he takes you shopping?
- May: Yes, he's a nice boy

Commentary
Marian Barnes:

The idea about being attentive is to say what is important to this particular person. So you need to look at that person as an individual but as an individual in a context of other relationships. You need to be aware of things in their environment that will tell you something about what is important to them and those are things that you can introduce, "I can see you've got lots of flowers around, is gardening important to you?" and those are ways in which you can actually learn about the person.

- Ellen: Are you able to call Robert if you need things?
- May: I don't like asking him. he comes when he can.
- Ellen: But Malcolm takes you shopping.
- May: Shopping and, sometimes, after we go for tea in town.
- Ellen: That's a nice way to finish off a trip.
- May: What is?
- Ellen: Having tea in town is a nice way to finish off a trip.
- May: Oh yes. I look forward to it. Like to have a bit of a window shop too.
- Ellen: Me too. I could spend hours looking at clothes.
- May: It's more like antique shops really. I used to collect a little when I was younger.

- Ellen: Well that all sounds like fun.
- May: Yes, he's very good is Malcolm but I try not to rely on him. He has a family.
- Ellen: And what's your street like? Do you know many people?
- May: It's changed a lot over the years. it's a lot more younger families live around here now.
- Ellen: Yes I noticed a park across the road.
- May: It's a nice park. It was nice seeing the kids playing there when I went to feed the ducks.
- Ellen: Do you not do that anymore?
- May: No, not since the stroke.
- Commentary*
Beatrice Gahagan *It's such a sort of cliché to say listening is important but to really hear what they are saying and trying to understand, and are interested in, care about what they are saying is really, really important. And it's almost more important than being able to help them resolve their particular issues because they will feel that they are still in the landscape of other people. They are not sort of out there on their own with a problem that isolates them. That there is somewhere to share that and that they are being accompanied with what's happening to them.*
- May: Marge still lives round the corner.
- Ellen: Is she a friend?
- May: Well, we're friendly. She invited me to her quilting group.
- Ellen: I was wondering if this was homemade, it's very detailed.
- May: Oh years ago yes.
- Ellen: Do you still sew?
- May: Well a bit. I am not as nimble as I was but it is nice to have something to

do with your hands.

Ellen: So did you take Marge up on her offer.

May: No. I would but she walks to and fro. I just can't manage it. I am just so frustratingly slow now.

Ellen: It can be very frustrating. I think it is great that you have continued to sew. Would it be possible to ask Robert or Malcolm for a lift?

May: No, no.

Ellen: Does that worry you May? Asking too much from people?

May: I am just not used to people doing things for me. Since my husband passed away I've got by. I have always been very active really, I like doing things for everyone else.

Ellen: Life's not just about getting by though is it May? It's about enjoying the day to day things and look Malcolm likes helping you out with the shopping. Other people might like to help you with other stuff. People like to help out. Just like you do. They just need to be asked sometimes.

May: Yes, I suppose so.

Commentary
Marian Barnes

In some cases well-being is associated with people's capacity to be independent so older people internalise this sense that it's a good thing to be independent. And this is actually quite problematic and this is one of the messages that we really want to try and get over. That none of us is really independent. We all need relationships with other people to be well throughout our lives. So the question is what is the nature of those relationships and how can people receive help, be cared for in a way that enables them to feel valued rather than of less value because they need help.

Ellen: What else have you found difficult since the stroke.

May: Just things that you take for granted. I mean like being able to walk into town. I used to go to a coffee morning too.

- Ellen: Oh really? Where was that?
- May: At the community centre. I used to take a cake. They don't expect it but we would have coffee and cake and then I would go into the library next door. I'd like to get back into that routine.
- Ellen: So really one of the main issues seems to be transportation because there's the quilting group, there's the coffee morning, there's the library, all things that you would like to continue with if only you didn't have to walk there and back.
- May: Well maybe I could make enquiries about a lift to the community centre but the other things, no, no, Malcolm does enough.
- Ellen: Alright. And how are you managing around the house?
- May: I'm alright.
- Ellen: And what about the normal day to day things like bathing or cooking?
- May: Well a shower is easier so I use the shower.
- Ellen: And do you cook?
- May: Well basic things like boiled eggs, soup, I don't get that hungry.
- Ellen: OK.
- May: Your appetite goes.
- Ellen: After the hospital or just in general.
- May: As you get older.
- Ellen: Right. But you are eating?
- May: Oh yes.
- Ellen: Do you have visitors?
- May: My best friend Claire lives in Leeds. We speak to each other now and

again on the phone.

Ellen: A bit far for a visit though isn't it

Commentary

Marian Barnes:

Friendship relationships are obviously very important, but you can't just switch them on. People are encouraged to get involved in new activities in order to make new friends to relieve their isolation. But one of the characteristics of friendships is that you share a history. That what you do with your friends is talk about things that you used to do that you have done. And that's difficult to achieve with people who you make friends with in old age. And that's perhaps why the diverse relationships that people can have with strangers, with neighbours as well as with people who provide services to them become so important.

May: I just miss the whole popping in thing you know.

Ellen: Popping in?

May: Well just somebody popping in for a cuppa and a gossip.

Ellen: Is Robert able to stay for a cuppa when he comes over?

May: Sometimes yes.

Ellen: And is that nice? Do you have the chance of a good catch up?

May: Well, he tells me about his work. He works very hard. It's so difficult nowadays, everybody is so busy. His dad was great with him. Well we sit and we have a talk and a cup of tea and then he washes up for me afterwards.

Ellen: And how are you finding the housework? Are you coping?

May: Well no, I just find it exhausting to be honest.

Ellen: How would you feel if someone came over a few hours a week just to help out?

May: Like who?

Ellen: Well a volunteer or maybe a carer if you need more structured help.

May: Oh I don't know.

Ellen: Well you could meet them first, see if you get along.

May: Well I suppose, it would be nice.

Ellen: Would you like me to look into that for you.

May: Well if it's no trouble

Ellen: No, it's no trouble at all, of course not. I tell you what, why don't I go away with what we have discussed today and speak to some of the charity organisations and maybe they could pop in to see you.

May: Oh, yes, that would be fine.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes*

The second principle to an ethic of care is that of responsibility. Having been attentive to an individual's needs you need to take responsibility for acting to meet those needs.

Ellen: Right, what I am going to do is I am going to write down everything that we have discussed today and then send you a copy in the post.

*Commentary
Lizzie Ward:*

Having a good intention isn't enough. You can intend to do things well but if you don't do them then you know care, good care, hasn't happened. One aspect of one of those interactions would definitely be that it's just summarised what we have gone through so that we know what we've, what we've spoken about and what we've agreed.

Ellen: It's really nice meeting you May.

May: Yes, it's been a nice chat.

Ellen: Yes, it's been lovely and thank you so much for the tea. So will speak to you in a couple of days then OK.

May: Yes, I think so, I will wait to hear from you.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes:*

Our research included people aged between 67 and 97. During that thirty year period people can undergo huge transformations but also the world is

changing round them. If you think about all the changes that have taken place in the last thirty years in terms of the internet, the use of technology, these sorts of things. It can become quite hard for older people to maintain a sense of themselves having a place in the world so maintaining wellbeing can become quite hard work.

Research team discussion

Bea: Adjusting to change is easier when you are able to work it out for yourself and come to your own solution or your own conclusions because being told that you can't do something is already difficult.

Bunty: One of the hardest things for a lot of people, it will happen to me one of these days, is when you lost the ability, or must no longer drive. How do you get your shopping?

Francis: The free bus pass is tremendously valuable. If you go on a bus, three quarters of the people are at least elderly.

Liz: A lot of people can't carry an enormous amount of shopping but they can take you know little and often.

Marian: So that's an adjustment in terms of people's behaviour isn't it?

Liz: You used to go for a big weekly shop and now you can't, you go twice a week and throw in fewer things.

Commentary
Beatrice Gahagan: *There are big adjustments that have to be made. There are changes in family relationships. There are changes in the sense of identity. There's not getting the validation that you would have just taken for granted in the social life that you had, or the work life that you had, or the family relationships that you had. They all can shift and change and sometimes disappear.*

Bunty: But there also was a lady who said she, it's like sitting in the back seat of a car now when the family is around, you are not heard and you are not listened to in the back seat of a car.

Commentary
Lizzie Ward: *One of the things that people spoke about is that actually as you get older you can experience a sense of being less visible. People maybe don't interact with you in the same way. So for an older person who has very*

little opportunity to have a conversation with other people, having that five minute chat while they are waiting at the checkout might be one of the few opportunities in a day that they speak to somebody.

Marian Barnes:

In the interviews there was lots of evidence of people recognising that they needed to change, they needed to adapt, they had to learn how to be well in different situations. Some of them had to learn how to be well when they were unwell. So they had to learn how to maintain their interest in things that were important to them, perhaps in a different way. One woman for example, who was a very keen gardener and who was finding gardening increasingly difficult for her because of her physical frailty had started to grow orchids on her balcony, so she was doing gardening but in a much more contained way.