

The Experience of Dementia As a Journey

I am going on a long journey by train. As I begin, the city skyscrapers and country landscape look familiar. As I continue my journey, the view reminds me of times gone by and I feel relaxed and comfortable. The other passengers on the train appear to be feeling the same way and I engage in pleasant conversation with them.

As the journey progresses, things begin to look different. The buildings have odd shapes and the trees don't look quite the way I remember them. I know that they are buildings and trees, but something about them is not quite right. Maybe I'm in a different country with different architecture and plant life. It feels a bit strange, even unnerving.

I decide to ask the other passengers about the strangeness I feel, but I notice that they seem unperturbed. They are barely taking notice of the passing scenery. Maybe they have been here before. I ask some questions but nothing seems different to them. I wonder if my mind is playing tricks on me. I decide to act as if everything looks all right, but because it does not, I have to be on my guard. This places some tension on me, but I believe I can tolerate it for the remainder of the trip. I do, however, find myself becoming so preoccupied with appearing all right that my attention is diverted from the passing scenery.

After some time I look out the window again, and this time I know that something is wrong. Everything looks strange and unfamiliar! There is no similarity to anything I can recall from the past. I must do something. I talk to the other passengers about the strangeness I feel. They look dumbfounded and when they answer, they talk in a new language. Why won't they talk in English I wonder? They look at me knowingly and with sympathy. I've got to get to the bottom of this, so I keep after them to tell me where the train is and where it is going. The only answers I get are in this strange language, and even when I talk, my words sound strange to me. Now I am truly frightened.

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