

Benefits of Not Remembering

*We may have been around awhile, seen many cycles of the sun.
We don't remember all the details but we know they've been a lot of
fun.*

*Each time we touch, each time we kiss, each time I hold you true.
It feels like we may have done it before but it also feels brand new.*

Pain Be Gone

Today, while I was with Vera on a short walk, she was holding her ribcage area. I asked her what the matter was and she told me that it hurt. She could not tell me if it was skeletal, muscular or internal but she did say it was her whole body. I told her when we got home I would give her some ibuprofen as that usually handles most pain. We were home about 20 minutes later and she was no longer holding her ribcage in the same manner. I asked her if it still hurt and she looked at me as to say, "What are you talking about?"

For Vera to forget about pain, or for pain to disappear, is not uncommon. Of course, sometimes it is more than a vanishing ache and then we deal with it. But I tend to worry whenever Vera says "ouch" and it would be good if I could remember that it usually is just a momentary twinge.

A number of years ago, before Vera was showing any signs of dementia, she had this chronic pain in the joints of her thumbs. We would go to the doctor and he would inject her with cortisone. The shots helped for a few months and then the pain would return. Sometimes it was really painful and she would complain bitterly, which is something she does not do routinely. She had many visits for these injections. The Doctor said that she had arthritis and she often showed me her thumb joints as if they were misshapen. I never could tell by looking at them that they were abnormal. Then, one day, she forgot that she had arthritic thumbs and the pain miraculously went away. She has not complained about them once since her memory has faded. In fact, I brought up her thumb pain to her recently, and Vera looked at me as if saying, "What are you talking about. That wasn't me."

A couple of years ago we were scheduled to fly to Florida as my family were celebrating my parent's 90th and 97th birthdays. My brother Ron, who has lived in Munich, Germany for the past forty years, had called all the living relatives (it would be difficult to call the deceased ones unless you were James Van Pragh), our childhood friends that we still related with, and the one friend of my dad who is his age and is still alive.

The night before our scheduled traveling date to Florida, Vera said her lower back was hurting her. She seemed to be in quite a bit of agony. I gave her some ibuprofen but it looked like we would not be able to go, so I called my brother and told him that we may not be able to come. A couple hours later, Vera was perfectly fine and did not remember that she had any pain, nor did it return. We went the next morning by airplane and had a nice trip, staying by the beach in a nice motel for the week. Vera did not complain or mention even once that her back hurt.

My dad died about a month after the reunion and I am so glad that we could see him that last time. It was also fun to see all the old friends and family, some of whom I had not seen in many years.

No Fly Zone

In 2001, before the terrorist attacks on September 11, Vera had decided that she did not want to fly. She was not scared of flying; she just did not like the way people were herded like cattle. But we had business in New York City, which required us to travel twice a year to work with *Mama Gena* and her *School of Womanly Arts*. Because we did not fly we would take the *Amtrak*. Going to New York City by train was actually enjoyable and we usually had a fun ride there and back. We did enjoy a sleeper compartment. The train ride was slow but peaceful and was at times exquisitely beautiful, especially in the Rockies. Vera would look out the window and be enthralled with the views.

The trouble with Florida is that there is not such a convenient train service to where my parent's live. Vera was very stubborn about not flying so I would go there by myself for those ten or so years, when Vera was still capable to take care of herself. I would not stay very long, as we do not like to be separated.

The fact that Vera forgot that she did not want to fly was another benefit of her not remembering. About 7 years ago, Vera flew with me to Florida via *Virgin America*. She actually enjoyed the flight more than she expected and we have been back there over the past few years once or twice a year.

No No No No No Yes

Another benefit for me is that because Vera does not remember I can ask her if she would like to do some activity over and over again until she says yes. This can be going out for a walk, coming down with me to the pool, or even having a sensual pleasure date. She may say no five times and then, miraculously, on the sixth attempt she will say, "OK." There are some offers that I don't have to make multiple times. If I ask her if she would like chocolate the answer seems always to be, "Yes!" on the first inquiry. There are also some endeavors that I have to ask so many times that I give up asking before she switches to a yes.

Reprieve from Meanness

I am not sure if the following is a benefit or a temptation, but if I say something mean or treat Vera other than kindly she will not remember that I did so. It's like I get a clean slate and can start afresh after being an asshole. It is then up to me to forgive myself for not loving as well as I could have and move on to the next loving act or feeling that I can have. Vera will have moved on already.

As An Excuse

Sometimes I will use Vera's dementia as a reason to not do something that I would probably do if she did not have this condition. I also would be more truthful as to my real reason for not doing something if I did not have this excuse or trump card available. This is perhaps not a benefit that I am proud of but I still use it on occasion.

As I just wrote my dad died a couple of years ago at the ripe age of 97. My brother called to tell me that he passed away and that the funeral was in a few days. I was sad but not as much as I thought I would be. This was not unexpected news. He had a heart condition and was suffering from Melanoma that had spread to numerous places in his body. In some ways it was a relief that he did not have to suffer any longer. He was always a jokester. One of his favorite lines was, "If it doesn't hurt it doesn't work." He was not a big complainer, but he was

complaining the past few years about all the pain and suffering of his body.

My first response that I felt was that I did not want to travel to Florida again to go to his funeral. We had just gotten back from Florida where we had that lovely party to celebrate his and my mom's life. As I related, Vera traveled with me and we had a good time, however I think my brother was surprised as to the extent of Vera's condition. He and his wife saw what I was dealing with on a daily basis.

I used my trump card and said, "I do not think that we can go again so soon back to Florida. The last trip took a lot out of Vera and traveling is so difficult for us." My brother was traveling from Germany where he lives and his trip is even more difficult. He responded if I could find someone to watch Vera, which he had said before on other occasions. After spending time with Vera the month before, he knew that would not be a real possibility. I said, "I will see what I can do," but knew that I was not going to go. I did not feel much guilt or any remorse for not attending. If Vera was healthier and did not have Alzheimer's I am sure that I would have gone even if I did not want to.

Writing this reminded me of an episode on *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Larry David writes and stars in this show and in this one episode his mom passes away. Larry's role is basically very funny but he is an asshole and he would be the first to admit that. He uses his mother's death, as an excuse not to do things that he would otherwise be expected to do. He played being the victim who is mourning and everyone gives him a pass.

Being a victim is easy to sell, as there are so many buyers of it. I am of the belief that we are all responsible for our lives and the choices that we make. I am not a victim very often and believe nobody else is either. This is not always obvious and I am sure can be argued to the nth degree by those who feel victimized.

Control

Another benefit for me is that I get to control the remote control when we watch TV. We watch a lot more sports this way, as those are my favorite kind of TV shows. Vera used to go and watch on our other TV when I did that but now would rather be with me. She will even watch the games intently, though I don't know if she knows what is happening.

I do try to find something that she will enjoy besides sports at times and if she really does not like a show I will change it for her. She will let me know. Sometimes decisions are hard for me to make, which I will describe in a later chapter. Choosing a TV show is not one of those difficult choices.

Sometimes people will either want to come over or invite us to an event. I usually say, "yes" to most offers but there are times when I don't want to socialize or be a host. I use Vera's condition as a reason why we are unable to fulfill these offers and everyone understands them.

Sometimes people want to come over when it is too late, or I think it is too late, and I just use Vera as an excuse that I am busy taking care of her. Usually it is true that Vera may be coughing or having a difficult time so visitors would be better off not coming.

Another kind of benefit is that each meal is new and not repetitive, no matter how many times I've made it. I like to eat meals that I prepare and that are healthy and tasty. With our current reflux conditions I choose to cook meals that are basically reflux or GERD friendly. I do not have a big repertoire. Vera likes the same foods that I do, but I think she would have preferred a wider assortment of choices. She also liked to go to restaurants more often but it is difficult to find a proper healthy meal there. We do not go out to eat as often as we used to, instead we might pick up something to add to our meal.

For the last two months that I have been writing this book I have been making almost the same chicken stew recipe every day with a slight variation in perhaps which vegetable to put in the stew. I use the same seasonings in it, that is ginger, basil and turmeric. Occasionally I will grill some fish instead of chicken. It tastes basically the same with whatever vegetable or protein that I use. Vera really likes it and does not remember that she ate it the day before. She eats it with relish and acts like it is a special treat. It is really good but people usually like more variety. I do add avocado to it on occasion to liven things up a bit.

