

“I’m Still Here”

By John Zeisel

First published in 2010, Zeisel’s book is written for caregivers to aid them to maintain good quality of life as dementia progresses. Zeisel is unapologetic for adopting a positive outlook towards dementia and advocates that people living with dementia are treated as people first and then as people with an illness. The book has two ‘common sense’ messages – that the remaining skills and capacities of people living with dementia provide opportunities for connection and communication and that these opportunities allow us to establish new relationships that support both care and well-being.

“I’m Still Here” has chapters devoted to different topics including art and dementia, the dramatic arts and environmental design. Zeisel’s own professional background is in environmental design and he is acutely aware of how living spaces can impact on independence and well-being. He offers some good basic advice on how to arrange environments that reduce anxiety and encourage engagement. The theme of engagement is continued with a useful chapter on building relationships through communicating effectively with people with dementia. Again Zeisel adopts his common sense approach, offering tips and advice on how to engage with people with dementia in a thoughtful and supportive manner.

The book concludes with a brief overview of Mindfulness and about being in the present moment. Zeisel draws parallels with the suggestion that this is how people with dementia can experience time. He recommends a form of ‘Alzheimer’s Meditation’ which involves the person with dementia and their partner/caregiver and is based around mindful breathing exercises lasting around 15 minutes.

“I’m Still Here” is an informative read written in an accessible style. Although the seasoned professional will already be aware of many of the ideas in this book, it is still a great starting point for anyone new to the world of dementia.