

## Notes from the Village Agent

Somerset

Village

Agents

Aunty Vi loves a family gathering and likes nothing better than reminiscing over a cup of tea. She recalls her son's turbulent teenage years with clarity, but she doesn't remember what she had for lunch. Aunty Vi has dementia, but with support from family, friends and carers she still has a full life.

About two thirds of people will get dementia in later life, although it can affect younger people as well. There are several different types, with Alzheimer's being the most common. It usually starts by affecting people's short term memory, but can also affect perception, so for example people may not recognise themselves in the mirror.

A helpful illustration is to imagine the brain as a not very well made bookcase with your memories stored in a set of encyclopaedias, stacked from the bottom shelf upwards. Every new memory goes into a book which is then placed on a shelf. If something shakes this wonky bookcase the volumes on the top shelf fall off, they are the most recent memories of today, this week, last month, all gone. Lower down the books are still safely in order on the shelf and you can remember Charlie's wedding 10 years ago, or the French you learnt at school.

Feelings and opinions are kept in a separate book, which isn't stored on the bookshelf. So you will know how you feel: happy, sad, hungry, that you don't like chocolate! But without remembering why you feel that way.

So it's no good telling Aunty Vi she can remember what she had for lunch, or getting cross when she says the same thing over and over again. To give her confidence and make her feel good I can treat each time she tells me the story about her son's first day at school, as if it were the first time.

Having to make sense of a world you don't remember is very hard work and Aunty Vi gets tired quickly, so I don't mind if she has a nap.

*You can join me in becoming a Dementia Friend – the Alzheimer's Society runs short courses.*

If you are concerned about someone, the Alzheimer's Society can help.

- ✓ The national helpline is 0330 333 0804.
- ✓ The website is [www.Alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.Alzheimers.org.uk).



Leading the fight  
against dementia  
**Alzheimer's  
Society**

***If you are finding life hard going at the moment, I may be able to help, my phone number is 07798 703 321, email [alison@somersettrcc.org.uk](mailto:alison@somersettrcc.org.uk)***