



# Poetry

## from the heart

Written to help families and care  
partners of people living with dementia

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“ I am not an expert. I have some sound knowledge and over ten years’ experience working on the floor with people who have dementia. All that I do and every word I have, comes from the heart ”

Michelle Mills

## Foreword

I wrote the poem “My Life, My Way” as part of a presentation for Bupa Redwood in Rotorua at the end of 2015. It was after this that I decided to write more poetry with the focus on dementia utilising my knowledge and experience to try to get people to think about dementia from different points of view.



People with dementia, families and carer partners often find it difficult to understand what is happening after a diagnosis of dementia. Most people are aware that dementia involves memory loss, but there are many other symptoms too. It's different for everyone but dementia can mean people struggle to remember names, aren't able to find the right words and have difficulty following conversations. They may get lost in familiar places, could find it hard to concentrate and, as their dementia progresses, they may no longer be able to communicate using words. By respecting who they are and providing the right support for them, it's possible for people to live well with dementia.

I do not know what it is like to live with dementia but I can vicariously, through the many people I have cared for, offer some insight and hope that my words will provide some information as well as some comfort.

I have been fortunate to have received a lot of support from my co-workers at Bupa and for this I am grateful.

I am passionate about caring for people who are living with dementia and I am a strong advocate for getting to know the person and providing care that is directed by that person.

This is my dementia commitment.

Enjoy

Michelle

*Michelle Mills has worked at Bupa since 2004. She is passionate about helping people with dementia to live well. This book of her poems, shares some of her experiences. All words are her own.*

*The poems can be read all at once from cover to cover, or as individual pieces. We hope you enjoy them.*

## My Life, My Way

*I hope that in my twilight years  
I am in a place where there are people who care  
And if I should lose some of my ability  
I will make my home at a Bupa facility*

*You see I have been there before  
Many times I have walked through the front door  
So going back into that place  
Will surely put a smile on my face*

*The décor is classy, bright and airy  
Makes the term rest home a lot less scary  
I look at the photo board of all that's being done  
And I think to myself I am going to have some fun*

*There is always a lot going on in activities  
Morning exercises with rocking music for my arthritic knees  
And on the days I don't feel like doing that  
I will easily find a friend for a cuppa and a chat*

*There does not need to be any particular reason  
Except to celebrate the turn of every season  
Summer, winter, autumn and spring  
The decorations will change and staff will organise something*

*Now as for the food, it's always been good  
The cooks have great pride at The Gardens\* and Redwood\*  
From preparation to presentation to taste  
If you look at the plates there's not a lot of waste*

*Any special requests you only need to ask  
Nothing is a problem or too much of a task  
And to top it all off if you are that way inclined  
Someone is on hand to pour a beer or a wine*

*And if I end up with dementia and lose my memory  
There is a special unit that provides all that is sensory  
Where time does not matter and neither does the day  
The Bupa philosophy is 'let's do it my way'*

*My challenging behaviours not met with a push or a shove  
Just patience and kindness and a whole lot of love  
Where every day might be Christmas cos I always forget  
I will be remembered for who I was and treated with respect*

*So I will live in a place where my laundry is done  
Delivered back to my room while I sit in the sun  
My bed will be made and I will have all that I need  
If I can't do for myself, staff will follow my lead*

*To speak of the staff Bupa has the best  
The gardeners, the bosses, the cleaners, and the rest  
Throughout the homes they all have their places  
And life is worthwhile because of their smiling faces*

*So at the end of the day when all is said and done  
If I can make home with Bupa I will feel like I have won*

\*The Gardens and Redwood are Bupa Care Homes in Rotorua, New Zealand.





## Through my eyes

When you look into my eyes what do you see?  
It has been a rough road especially for me  
At first you thought I was merely depressed  
Taking until lunch time to even get dressed

In my mind I became somewhat confused  
The look on your face was somewhat bemused  
I forgot where I was and where I was meant to be  
I could be in one place and then want to flee

We would go for a power walk, I'd put you through your paces  
And then there were times I struggled with my laces  
In my addled mind reality is not today  
I can only remember what happened yesterday

My speech became slurred and my words were mumbled  
Because in my head my thoughts were so jumbled  
The simplest tasks became magnificent feats  
Moment by moment my time often repeats

I need help to eat as time goes by  
You gaze at me despairingly because you don't know why  
You have no idea what is going on  
You think the me you knew has suddenly gone

There are times I have moments of insight  
Like being in the dark when someone turns on a light  
During these moments it's comforting to see  
Loving reminders of what's familiar to me

You made the choice to put me into care  
You must have felt embarrassment, guilt and some fear  
But don't worry these people know what is best  
And it is your turn for some time out and rest

There are times when I have changes in mood  
From happy to sad, angry and downright rude  
Just remember the tangles in my brain have rearranged  
Things I cannot control and cannot be changed

When you walk into the room and I see your face  
Thoughts of yesterday flood back at a rapid pace  
So now when you look into my eyes what do you see?  
I hope when you look deeper you see I am still me



## Partnership

When a person comes into care  
It is a responsibility we all share

The family has to make a choice  
As their loved one often has no voice

For all involved it is a time of fear  
Listening to words they do not want to hear

Their usual doctor is involved  
General information is always told

Alzheimer's support is on the scene  
A practical team on whom they can lean

One of many services in a community  
That bind together to form a fraternity

The network we build is inherently strong  
Creating a community of which we all belong

The client we have is the primary concern  
We join together to ensure that we learn

The ultimate goal is quality of life  
To be united in opinion without any strife

There are times when all are put to the test  
To make decisions that are for the best

All of these groups have a part to play  
But when it comes to care at the end of the day

By far the strongest relationship  
Is Mental Health Services and Bupa's partnership







## Through the eyes of a child

Oh my goodness Nan  
Where are you going with that pan?  
You can't put it in there  
You will burn a hole in the chair

I don't know what's going on  
I'm told that there is something wrong  
Plaques and tangles mean nothing to me  
I only understand the things that I see

Like the time you tried to give away your money  
I thought that was nice and a little bit funny.  
The adults were mad at you, I wanted to cry  
The look on your face said you had no idea why

The time I remember was lunch at the mall  
You wandered away and didn't answer my call  
I couldn't believe you hadn't heard your name  
To me it felt like you were playing a game

How things changed when you went into a home  
Nowhere to go and nowhere to roam  
I came to see you, at first I was sad  
My Nan was locked up and that made me mad

I wanted you to come and live with us  
Why wasn't that possible? There was such a fuss  
As time went on I started to see  
That people there loved you, that it was meant to be

They were taking care of you  
Managing the strange things you do  
The adults thought this was best  
They told me you were having a well-earned rest

Dementia is the new word I have learned  
In some parts of society you would be spurned  
As time passes I will do all that I can  
To remind you lovingly, that you are still my Nan



## Note to Carers

Get out of my room  
And turn off the light  
I'm not getting up  
It's the middle of the night

Why should I leave my bed now?  
When I'm feeling a bit low  
Time is not a factor  
I have nowhere urgent to go

I can choose my own clothes  
I don't even like that shirt  
And I can decide myself  
Whether I wear pants or a skirt

Please don't give me porridge  
It is not to my taste  
I like cornflakes and fruit  
All else is waste

I will eat in my room  
Because I don't like a crowd  
I am not anti-social  
It's just the noise is too loud

I listen to opera  
It's my taste in music  
Country and western  
Just makes me feel sick

The point I am making  
Is that I have a care plan  
It was put together for me  
And should be followed where you can

So when thinking about  
My person centred activity  
Take into consideration  
My specific sensitivity







## My Mum

In the beginning not much was wrong  
The few forgotten words in her favourite song

One day she couldn't find her way home  
Up and down the street she started to roam

Then came the day she forgot my name  
It was then I knew things would never be the same

I reflect on all that she was and what she had  
Especially the loving relationship with my Dad

Family is paramount she always said  
Above all else those words stay in my head

She was always there when I got home from school  
Afternoon tea, then homework that was the rule

She championed my highs, comforted by lows  
Hugged me and reassured as I told her my woes

I grew up, she began a career  
Took it in her stride, conquered her fear

She was respected and even held in awe  
Her empathy with people brought to the fore

I could extol her virtues all day and night  
But I wouldn't do her justice so it doesn't seem right

I sit here now watching her sleep  
For my beautiful Mum I silently weep

In the beginning not much was wrong  
Just those few missed words to her favourite song

And then at the end of the day  
I held her hand as she quietly passed away



## Challenges

Around and around through each door I go  
Making the most of indoor/outdoor flow  
To say I am wandering implies something meaningless  
What I am doing is walking, I have a purpose

You want me to shower, I know how this goes  
I get to the door and dig in my toes  
My intention is not to put up a fight  
It is just that I am used to bathing at night

If I happen to yell when you give me a shave  
Do not think I intend to misbehave  
I am not used to that buzz around my head  
So take some time, give me a wet shave instead

By being aggressive I have nothing to gain  
Keep looking at my face for expressions of pain  
I have no way of telling you when I feel hurt  
But you will get my message if I pull on your shirt

Disturbing vocalisations is just what I do  
You need to know I want attention from you  
The noise is distressing and others may fret  
To minimise the anguish, make sure my needs are met

I might need a drink or something to eat  
I could want the toilet or a change of seat  
I don't have the words to tell you what's wrong  
Yelling and hitting is a clue, it makes me feel strong

The one thing that is an absolute must  
Is the relationships that are built on trust  
There is a reason for everything I do  
The behaviours that challenge are only challenging to you







## Smile

I mirror the mood  
Reflected in your face  
So your gift to me would be  
Put a smile in place

Nothing makes me feel more down  
Than looking at someone who is wearing a frown  
I like that reassuring hand on my arm  
It means to me that you mean no harm

And I'm not adverse to a hug or two  
It shows me you care about the job you do  
Please speak to me in a gentle tone  
When harsh words are said I feel so alone

We are going to be a partnership for a while  
So I would feel a lot happier if you would just smile



## White Lies

Every day at about the same time  
A particular gent asks the same thing  
'Where's my car?' He wants to know  
'It's at the mechanics; I'll give them a ring'

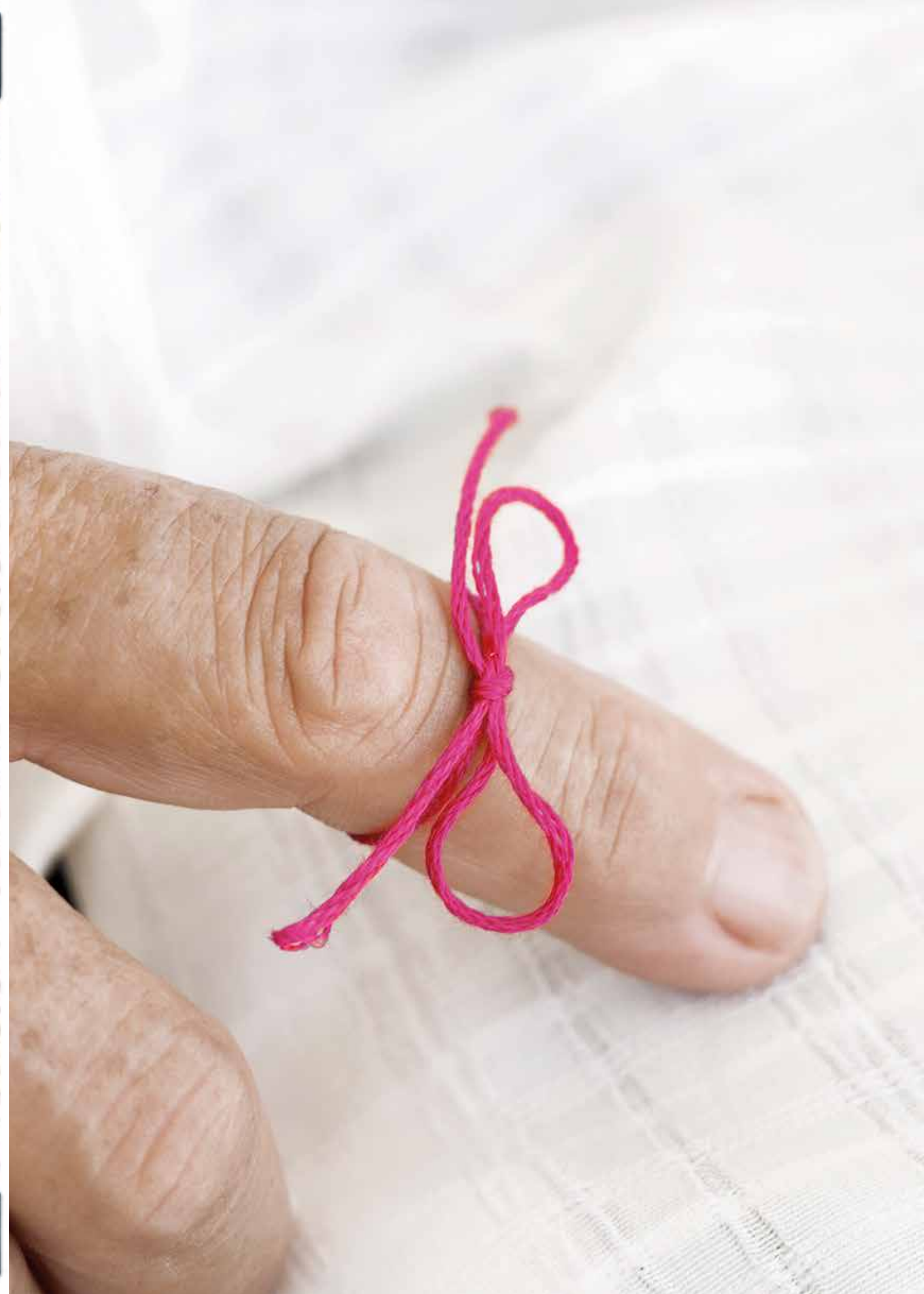
Along comes the lady looking for kids  
'They're still at school, that's where they'll be'  
I hope that she believes what I say  
'School doesn't finish until three'

And here comes my friend with that worried look  
I know what she wants, call it a hunch  
She is concerned and I know why  
She can't find her purse, can't pay for lunch

'Don't worry Nan, we'll find it later'  
I take her hand and say with a smile  
'It will be my shout today'  
And it will be worthwhile

The little old man with his heart on his sleeve  
Whispers to me, 'Do you know where my wife is?'  
I put my arm around his shoulder and say  
'She will be back soon, I'm sure of this'

All day long I tell the residents lies  
They vary in size and there's not much to it  
It helps to give them peace of mind  
Everyone is happy, we call it therapeutic





## Be Kind

If you see someone at a corner looking lost  
Offering to assist comes at no cost

With their mind in a muddle  
The dark road looks like a big puddle

And with no perception of what is deep  
The kerbside appears too steep

There is too much noise all around  
The effect on them is profound

Looking for somewhere quiet to go  
No place to sit, no one to follow

They need a place to rest  
And someone calm to help would be best

A bit of time to get things straight  
And a kind person with whom to wait

A warm hand to hold on to  
A cup of tea to get them through

Having dementia is different for everyone  
Something from which you cannot run

Everyone can help and learn  
To give them a change, maintain all that they yearn

So everybody should take the opportunity  
To be part of the community

If someone looks lost that you find  
It does not take much to just be kind

**D**eterioration in a part of the brain

**E**nds of the nerves you cannot retain

**M**emory loss that is hard to explain

**E**verything you knew is no longer plain

**N**othing is done without significant strain

**T**asks become impossible and confidence can wane

**I**mpossibilities where simplicity had one lain

**A**lzheimer's is one, just a link in a chain



# What's your Dementia Commitment?



Take 20 minutes to learn more about dementia and find out how you could help to build a dementia-friendly New Zealand.



[bupa.co.nz/DementiaCommitment](https://bupa.co.nz/DementiaCommitment)



Bupa New Zealand are part of the global Bupa Group of companies, a leading international health and care organisation. Bupa New Zealand draws on the Bupa Group's wide international expertise and experience to help provide people with better health and care choices, support and advice.

We do this through our care homes, retirement villages, rehabilitation centres, medical alarms and dental clinics. Our purpose is to help people live longer, healthier, happier lives.

We reinvest back into improving the quality of health and care services in New Zealand. We believe this is the only way to truly put you first.

We have a dedicated phone number offering practical advice from experienced dementia advisors. Call us free on:



0800 DEMENTIA (0800 336 368)  
8am to 8pm every day



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