

Have you ever called a family member or a friend on their birthday to sing Happy Birthday to them? In my family this is a common occurrence. When family or friends are far away this simple act lets them know you care. And always brings a smile.

What if your loved one has Alzheimer's or another form of dementia? Talking on the phone can be a challenge. It might leave you feeling discouraged and your loved one feeling confused. But what if you still want to connect with them? What if you just want them to know you haven't forgotten them, and that you love them?

One of my friends solved this problem. She lives far away from her dad who is living with dementia. She wants to stay connected to him and she would do anything just to brighten his day. Here's her story.

"My father went to a home in Cadillac in late November, and I live in Mason, by Lansing. So I don't get to see him very often. I started calling him, but he couldn't understand me, and I couldn't understand him. So I started singing and he, of course, started singing along (one word behind mine). So now I call everyday, and we try to start a conversation, but quickly he will say, "Are you going to sing?" and of course I sing. And, if my 8 year old granddaughter is nearby, she will join in!"

My thoughtful friend takes a simple extra step to make sure the calls are successful.

First, she calls the home where he lives and alerts the caregivers that she is about to call. She asks them to turn off the TV in his room and to make sure the speaker is on for his phone.

Why does she do this? Because she knows that people with dementia often have a hard time sorting out the sounds around them. Competing with the TV would not be a good idea.

She then places the call and greets her father. Each time she sings a familiar old song such as Let Me Call You Sweetheart, My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean, Home on the Range, For He's a Jolly Good Fellow, or When You're Smiling. The calls last only 3 or 4 minutes. She tells me "I don't stay on the phone long. I just share a song or two and tell him I love him. We always end with the chorus of You Are My Sunshine. We sing it at least twice. It's one small way I can stay connected."

Is it worth it?

Her dad proudly tells my friend's sister and her brother about the calls and the songs. And my friend has a little bit of peace of mind, knowing that even though she is far away she is able to share her love and a moment of joy with her dad.

Mary Sue Wilkinson is the founder of Singing Heart to Heart and the author of *Songs You Know By Heart: A Simple Guide for Using Music in Dementia Care*. The book includes contributions from Teepa Snow as well as Mary Sue's CD of 18 favorite sing along songs. Buy the book [HERE](#). To learn more about Mary Sue's work visit her [website](#).