

## London Carers' responses to RYCTT

### Anita & Ludwig (Daughter and father)

First - just a big thank you....to Pam and all the team. The project has had a very positive and rather curious effect - for me at least - Monday afternoons became a place (unique in my experience as a carer to date) where both my parent (in this case my father) and I had an equal presence, our own identities. All our memories were valued - his were no more important than mine, my loss no more important than his. Of course many of our reminiscences were shared (or at least his were usually tales I had heard before) but it didn't even matter whether we could both remember the same things. To some extent we were starting afresh - because the way my father's memory for recent events works (i.e. anything from today to 20 years ago or so) - appear to be wiped clean every night - which means that many of my stories are news to him - even the one's involving him!



I was also intrigued and very moved to see how effective music, dancing, re-enactment and drawing were in bringing out the younger selves in all those present. The fact that my father loved singing and dancing is not news to me - but it was a revelation to see him in action - how his body and soul seemed to recall things he was no longer really aware of... I don't think I have laughed so much in recent months as when we played imaginary hockey with no sticks or when June stuffed the turkey!

We were blessed with a remarkable group - but perhaps all groups are remarkable...maybe it is the process, maybe it is Pam, or maybe it is having such a large and attentive team of apprentices and volunteers - but everyone seemed to be special, eccentric or talented in some way - all memorable.

I recently watched the film *Amour* - "Gosh" I moaned to my husband half through the inexorable misery of a stroke survivor and her carer-spouse "so bloody French and depressing" - caring is gruelling but it can have its rewards in funny and enjoyable times and unexpected revelations - the project seemed to generate this in spades.

Curiously, today Ludwig was at a slightly low ebb. One of our exchanges went thus:

**L:** "I have lost a lot by not speaking English as a first language"

**A:** "What have you lost?"

**L:** "The opportunity to perform and hear applause"

A: "You dark horse!" [explains his contented expression after his rendition of *It Happened in Monterey* was so well received]

I am sure I will think of more to say about *Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today*, ...at some point ... it will be interesting to take the long view too.

**POST SCRIPT** - the creative memory project

The collective buzz around the Creative Projects and the Preparations for the Street Party that were to mark the end of our Reminiscence group came at very difficult time for my father and me - and , in an important way carried through it. My mother, whose dementia is very much more severe than my father's became so vulnerable she could no long stay at

home. Although Ludwig never erred from his desire to move to residential care with her (really before his time) they had to endure a very painful separation before the hard process of adjusting to residential care began. [ They had married 57 years earlier - by chance in the old registry office - just yards from where the RYCT group met. ]



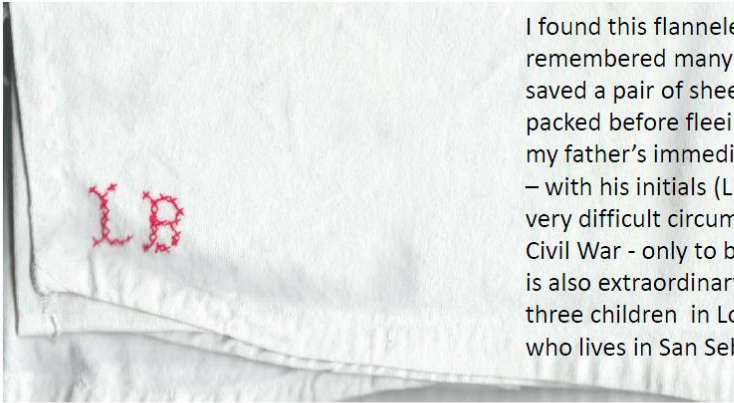
this is us." What more could I have wanted.

The idea around the Memory Cloth (or the Cot Sheet project) is explained below. I concocted a ridiculously complex triptych (with the help of the two Alex's - my son and Pam's husband). The middle panel contains the embroidered cot sheet. The side panels show key episodes of my parents' lives, father on the left, mother on the right - together in the middle. Although he wasn't always sure what its purpose was, Ludwig diligently proofread all the text and carefully repositioned the map pins. When it was finished he sat down in front of it and examined it very carefully. "Yes, yes - this is me,

With thanks to all the wonderful folk we met in Belsize Park on Monday afternoons. Special thanks to my sons Adam and Alex H, and to Alex Schweitzer.

Anita Berlin June 2014

## The Memory Cloth *Ludwig & Carmen* Celebrating a European love story



I found this flannelette cloth in my parent's airing cupboard. I remembered many years ago my grandmother telling me she had saved a pair of sheets from my father's cot in the trunk of linen she packed before fleeing Nuremberg in 1939. By extraordinary good luck my father's immediate family survived the war – and so did the sheet – with his initials (LB) cross stitched in the corner. My mother, under very difficult circumstances survived another conflict – the Spanish Civil War - only to be caught in Hungary during the Nazi occupation. It is also extraordinary that they should meet, marry and then raise three children in London? Peter, who lives in Paris and Carmen-Rosa who lives in San Sebastian have also had a part in this project.

My parents, in very different ways, were always great raconteurs – their own stories meshed with some of the significant events in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Many memories have surfaced in the last year while my father and I reminisced as part of the *Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today Project*. A map seemed a good way to capture my parents' life and love stories, and the cot sheet a nice backdrop. Carmen and Ludwig celebrated their 57<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in March but as my mother is now very frail and is no longer able to tell her own story I decided to include text and photos on two side panels. Some of the inspiration came from my son's little water colour "A Boy & A Girl In love". The Celebration is for my parents and my children .

