Reminiscence Guide
Welcome
Welcome to the National Wool Museum’s Reminiscence Cottage. The Reminiscence Guide may be used in conjunction with your visit to the National Wool Museum’s Mill Cottage and has been designed to:

- support the care giver to better understand the benefits of reminiscence therapy,
- provide a range of activities and ideas that will encourage reminiscing; and,
- offer ways in which to work with these ideas and activities at home.

How to use the Guide
The Guide consists of:

- an explanation of reminiscence therapy,
- reminiscence programs on offer at the National Wool Museum,
- information regarding your reminiscence experience,
- guidelines to care givers when facilitating reminiscence,
- descriptions of the items within the cottage and suggested triggers for remembering,
- links to websites for further support.

Visiting the Wool Museum

What is reminiscence therapy?
“Each time an individual tells part of his/her life story, those who listen are like a mirror, reflecting and affirming their lives.” John Kunz, founder, International Institute of Reminiscence and Life Review.

The act of reminiscing is familiar to us all. It is an important part of identity-building and giving order to life experiences. Reminiscence Therapy is where a person with dementia engages in a facilitated activity to stimulate their recollection of past life experiences. For a person with dementia the act of reminiscing enhances interpersonal skills and engages their attention more fully. It increases the participants’ mood, ability to interact socially, aids with depression, and is a positive creative and emotional practice. Communicating these experiences to the listener is highly beneficial for all parties, as it creates feelings of intimacy and gives special meaning to time spent with care givers. Sharing the information discovered during the process means passing on wisdom and skills which may have been considered lost. It may also remind the person with dementia of past feelings of self-esteem and competence and remind carers of a time when the person was flourishing.

As the care giver your cooperation will enhance the reminiscence process, ensuring past memories become informative and enjoyable. You may also be able to provide valuable information and support regarding items or subjects that may cause distress.
Sight, sound, touch and smell

Reminiscence gives those struggling with verbal communication an opportunity to use other forms of communication. Reminiscence therapy engages the senses to enable the release of stored memories by using items of autobiographical meaning.

In relation to the Wool Museum’s Reminiscence Cottage, the following senses are addressed using a range of stimuli:

- **Sight**: photographs, paintings, picture books and specific objects.
- **Sound**: music, newscasts, musical instruments.
- **Touch**: a range of textures including steel, wool, fur, lace, velvet, rocks and shells supported with engaging activities to stimulate movement and rhythm.
- **Smell**: smell kits (spices, herbs, lavender bags, baby soap), specific smells associated with items such as leather, wool, clothing and household items.

The Reminiscence Program

The National Wool Museum is working to offer a range of activities for people with dementia and their care partners.

The Mill Workers’ Cottage

The Cottage has been designed for a person with dementia and their family to experience a sensory journey that encourages the process of reminiscence. The cottage consists of a kitchen, lounge room, hallway and front veranda and is designed to reflect an Australian household between the years 1930 and 1950. All aspects of home life from within this period are evoked through the furnishings, household implements, clothing and representation of daily, domestic activities.

Groups and individuals are welcome to visit the cottage independently or to experience a reminiscence workshop. Cottage activities include a range of hands-on experiences developed to incorporate the senses, engage the visitor’s interest and stimulate the act of reminiscing.

People are encouraged to touch, listen, smell and engage with items within each space; sit at the kitchen table, listen to the wireless, handle the kitchen utensils, read books, discover the knitting basket, play games and peer into the fridge.

The cottage also contains other visual memory prompts that will stimulate memory. These include:

- **Story Cards** with photographs of everyday items found in the cottage, an explanation of their use and history and suggested questions to stimulate memory and conversation.
- **Souvenir books** with a pictorial history of Geelong published in the 1938.
- **Postcards** which include photographs of Geelong and region from the 30’s and 40’s and short messages exchanged between family members at the time.
Your Reminiscence Program Experience

Memories evoked in a reminiscence program often relate to childhood experiences; therefore, the decor of the Mill Worker’s Cottage reflects life within a twenty year time span. Depending upon the participant’s age, household items may stimulate memories of a parent’s or grandparent’s home, if not their own home. Below is a brief history of the period.

Life in the 1930s and 1940s

Life in the 1930s and 1940s was very basic compared to the technological age in which we live today. The 1930s saw the introduction of bus service to Geelong with the founding of McHarry’s and Benders Buslines and the continuing expansion of the tram system. Geelong’s industry had been growing through the 1920s with the establishment of the Ford Motor Company factory and new woollen mills. By 1936 Geelong had become Victoria’s second largest city. However, both the 30s and 40s were affected by significant world events. The 1930s witnessed the Great Depression and the commencement of World War II (1939). Both had a catastrophic impact on the lives of home front Australians.

In 1932 almost 32% of Australians were unemployed and working class children consistently left school at the age of about 13. Over 60 000 people depended on sustenance payments by 1932. This was given in the form of food staples, like bread and potatoes. The hardships that the Depression demanded of Australians stood them in good stead for the constraints of war. For several years after the end of the war in 1945, major household items, including food, petrol and clothing continued to be rationed and coupons were issued to each home for this purpose. Butter and tea were rationed until 1950.

Women, once the backbone of the home, were called upon to do their bit for the war effort, working in factories or on farms in the Land Army, ‘digging for victory’. Many children did not see their fathers for several years until they returned from the war. Backyard vegetable patches flourished. Many clothes were handmade, either knitted or sewn by the women of the house. The attitude of ‘make do and mend’ prevailed. If your shirt had a tear, you sewed it up; if your socks had a hole, you darned them. Supermarkets did not exist and women shopped daily in the local high street. With the return of the men, women were required to leave paid employment and return to the household, raising their children.

At night one could hear the sound of the dunny man’s horse trotting through the streets as he collected dry toilet waste, and in the early hours of the morning, the milko’s horse delivered bottled milk to your door. Television was not yet available. Entertainment was in the form of a radio, record player, magazines, books, games, films, dance halls and the pub which closed at six o’clock in the evening. 1931 included the launch of Geelong’s own radio station 3GL. Reportedly a plebiscite was held to decide whether live community hymn-singing or football would air on a Saturday afternoon – football won the day. Children played with meccano, tiddlywinks, jacks, street cricket, cards, dolls and teddies. By the end of the 1940s prosperity was on the rise, as was hope for a more prosperous and safer future.
**Fast Facts**

**Head of State**
- King George V (1910-1936)
- King Edward VIII (1936 – abdicated)
- King George VI (1936-1952)

**Prime Minister**
- Joseph Lyons (1932-1939)
- Robert Menzies (1939-41 / 1949-1966)
- John Curtin (1941-1945)
- Ben Chifley (1945-1949)

**Avg. Salary (per year, 1940)**
- £248 5s 8d (male) / £123 1s 3d (female)

**Min. Wage (per week)**
- $6.28 (1933); $9.80 (1943); $23.50 (1953)

**Avg. Rent (per week, 1947)**
- 22s 11d (unfurnished single family home)

**Cost of staples (1940)**
- Bread (4lb loaf) 5d
- Milk (quart) 7d
- Butter (lb) 19d
- Potatoes (lb) 12d
- Tea (lb) 30d 10s
- Postage 2d

**Dollar value**
- 1930 $1 = $37.22
- 1935 $1 = $43.77
- 1940 $1 = $38.10
- 1945 $1 = $32.39

**Memory Kits**

The Wool Museum also has a range of Memory Boxes. The program allows for individual groups to identify specific items that may be of interest to them, for example, men’s tools or children’s toys to be available at the time of arrival. The Memory Boxes include a range of items from the 1930s to the 1960s, an explanation of their use and suggested activities designed to stimulate memory.

Memory Boxes offered to support your visit include: (please enquire before your visit)

- Child’s Play (examples of games and toys of the 1930s and 40s),
- Men at Work (examples of men’s work and hobby items and activities),
- A Woman’s Day (examples of women’s domestic items and activities),
- People at Play (examples of leisure time activities from music to sport).

**What to do when reminiscing**

As the care giver you will need to observe a few guidelines to ensure that the experience is rewarding for everyone involved. There are many sensory stimuli within the cottage and it is important that the participant is not overwhelmed by the experience. We encourage you to use discretion in the number of items that may be used to evoke memory. The following guidelines will enhance your experience.

**Before you start here are some handy tips:**

- Familiarise yourself with the Museum’s layout – especially the location of toilets and the time required to access them.
- Be vigilant as to time and signs of distress or restlessness.
- Before you start, consider a plan of action if the participant becomes distressed.
- Remain relaxed; there is no right or wrong way. Remembering is more difficult when the participant is stressed.
- Open ended questions may aid the participant’s response rather than yes or no questions.
- Be aware that asking questions may not be the best starting point for some participants with moderate to advanced dementia as they may fear giving the wrong answer.
• Start with questions focussed on experiencing the object (eg. what do you see/feel/hear?), to direct observation questions (eg. what was this used for?), to memory/emotion questions about responding to the object (eg. did you have one ...?). Repeat comments back to the participant periodically to reinforce and validate what they have shared.
• Do not focus on exact facts and details but focus on general memories and emotions. There are no wrong answers. The goal is to respond.
• Be a good listener and give the participant ample time to speak or respond.
• It does not matter if the participant discusses other topics as reminiscing often triggers a range of memories.
• It is importance to let the participant know when the reminiscing activity is over.

Let’s start reminiscing:
• If possible, be physically at the same level as participant.
• Retain eye contact when possible.
• Ensure the participant is comfortable and not distracted by background noise.
• Your communication should be simple, pleasant and respectful.
• Speak clearly and slowly.
• Small, simple sentences aid in concentration rather than a long narrative.
• Focus on one idea at a time.
• Use a variety of ways to help the participant make full use of their senses:
  - **Touch** – hot, cold, rough, smooth, holding, feeling, rhythm, movement
  - **Sight** – light, shade, colour and pattern
  - **Smell** – musty, sweet, sour, perfume, pine cones, saw dust
  - **Sound** – voice, music, music box, wind chimes.
• Look for non-verbal cues
  - Is the participant looking at the object?
  - Is the participant making gestures?
  - Does the participant appear agitated or upset?

Exploring the cottage
Exploring the cottage there are Story Cards available to tell you more about the objects you will find. Story cards can be found in the kitchen and on the bookshelf. The cards contain more detailed information about some items and some suggested conversation starters.

The Veranda
The veranda allows wide, easy access to the cottage, with a gentle ramp for walkers and wheelchairs. It has:
• Sensory garden (currently in progress)
• Front door with letter slot

Activities
1. Knock at the door on arrival
2. Touch the plants
3. Post a letter, or bring in the mail.

**The Hallway**
The hallway has access to the cottage and to each of the rooms. It has:
- Coat rack with:
  - Man’s hat and walking stick
  - Woman’s fox fur stole
  - Woman’s day dress
  - Girl’s school tunic
- Letter rack with selection of postcards – these can be posted through the letter slot
- Wall mounted vase with woollen flowers

**Activities**
1. Try on hat.
2. Stroke and try on fox fur.
3. Remember school uniforms.
4. Discuss animals or pets that the memory of fur triggers.
5. Read a postcard.
6. Discussion regarding if the front door was ever left open.

**The Lounge**
The lounge is roomy and may comfortably hold six to eight people depending upon mobility. It has:
- Three piece suite (sofa, two arm chairs) where the family would gather in the evenings
• Radiogram with four different radio broadcasts including popular tunes, announcements, commercials and newscasts

• Bookshelf which contains a range of reading materials, games, knitting basket, tobacco tins

• Glass-fronted cabinet has a range of items

**Activities**

1. Listening to the radio newscasts and gently discussing the memories that arise
2. Singing the songs or moving gently to the rhythm of the music
3. Knitting part of the scarf provided using large needles
4. Taking photographs with the Box Brownie
5. Handling the ornaments, sewing basket etc
6. Sniffing the tobacco tin, old books, leather items

**Discussion points**

1. Photograph Album or cards, discussing individual items.
2. Memories that the music generates.
3. Who took the photos in your family?

**The Kitchen**

The kitchen was the heart of the family’s daily life and usually mother’s domain. It has:

- a wooden kitchen range and wood box
- a Hecla toaster
- a Speedie electric jug
- utensils, cutlery, rolling pin, bowls,
- cupboards containing a range visual prompts
- reproduction foods based on common recipes
- scent drawer with a variety of common household smells

**Activities**

1. Discovering what is in the cupboards and fridge.
2. Handling the kitchen items.
3. Explore the contents of the scent drawer.

**Discussion points**
1. Making dinner
2. Mother’s kitchen and Mother’s work life
3. Favourite foods
4. Children undertaking tasks for pocket money
5. How the War or Depression may have affected the kitchen routine

**Activities to do at home or within your facility**
- Activities are engaging if they reflect useful household applications rather than simply repetitive actions, for example folding laundry.
- Print out images of items that engaged reminiscence. Use them to further discuss ideas and evoke memories.
- Start a Memory Book or Scrapbook.
- Create a Memory Rummage Box of important items that a person can physically handle.
- Create rich multi-sensory environments.
  - listen to music from a significant period
  - encourage singing, dance or movement
  - pin up photos
  - read stories from childhood or offer picture books
  - have a range of textures available for tactile experiences
- Encourage knitting or other creative experiences.
- Record bird song or other appropriate sound.
- Put up a wind chime.
- Record oral history as the person relates stories and memories.
- Consider outings to other facilities like museums, art galleries, or gardens.
- Walk in the garden to look at colours, variety and seasonal change.

**Links to other support sites**


Early Symptoms Alzheimer’s:

http://www.earlysymptomsalzheimers.com/?gclid=CKvB_s3n4LkCFed_Qgod4VQA0w

Better Health Vic. Government:


Holding memories: http://holdingmemories.wordpress.com/

Memory Lane Café: http://www.fightdementia.org.au/services/memory-lane-caf-.aspx