

## Joy-Filled Visits...in Your Own Home

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:00:00] I am delighted to get to speak to Julie Bigham today. She is a Certified Alzheimer's Educator, a Certified Trainer for Second Wind Dreams with the virtual dementia tour, and she is the founder of Joy-Filled Visits, which does a lot of really cool stuff. And that's what we're going to talk about today. I was really lucky to meet you online, and I don't remember how I met you online, Julie. Was it through Mike?

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:00:31] It might've been, I was just putting out the Joy-Filled Visits kit at the time.

I had a kit for family caregivers to help keep their loved one engaged, and I did do, I think I wrote a blog for Mike.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:00:49] Okay. Yeah. So, for newer listeners, we're talking about Mike Good, who is the founder of [The Alzheimer's Podcast](#), and he used to be the host, before he went off and chased his dream of designing and creating high-end cat furniture. So yeah. So yeah, it's been a while since you and I have talked and I feel like thumping my forehead because why did I wait all this time to think, to put you on the show?

But thank you for coming on.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I think this is a great time.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:01:25] Yeah, so what tickled my brain again is you send out a newsletter called the Joy-Filled Visits newsletter. And you sent out a special edition a few days ago. Or a week ago. It's been a little while now, but it took us a minute to get the timing right for us to be able to talk.

There's some changes because one of the things that you usually do is facilitate memory cafes, and I've been kind of surprised at how many folks I've run into who don't know what a memory cafe is. So, can we start with, tell us what a memory cafe is and then we'll keep going from there.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:02:10] Right. We started a memory cafe here in Matthews, North Carolina, which is right outside of Charlotte. Basically, it's a social event where people who are living with dementia now--I say we started it here, through Joy-Filled Visits, but it is an international program. So, they have memory cafes all over internationally.

And it's basically, like I said, a social event for people who are living with dementia, an opportunity for them--their caregiver and the person living with dementia--to get out of the house into a safe environment where they can just have fun.

You know, we have support groups and we, you know, go to doctor visits and we have medications that we have to take and the humdrum of getting through every day and sometimes just having fun together kinda goes by the wayside.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:03:03] Right.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:03:04] And we need, we need that opportunity. And isolation is a big problem for people who are living in, still living at home, for both the caregiver and the person being cared for. So the memory cafe gives them an opportunity to get out of the house together and just have fun together.

There's a lot of different types of memory cafes. Ours is strictly activity based. Some are support based, some are educationally based. But because of my background as an activity professional, I was really interested in helping people stay active and engaged. So we just, generally have someone who comes and entertains us or we play bingo or, we take a reminiscence trip and just have two hours of fun.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:03:56] I love that. I have always loved the concept of memory cafes, and I've loved every one that I've been able to participate in. I know that a lot of times people they're not really clear on what the concept is. And I think you explained it really well. I think that the other huge benefit is with, for the care partner, being able to go take your person out to a place where, like you said, you get to go together, you get to have fun, but you also, you're in an environment where, first of all, it's safe for your person, so you don't have to be a nervous Nelly the whole time.

Second of all, nobody is going to look sideways. Because everybody in that room, you've got dementia in common. And so, everybody just gets to like exhale. Just be yourself, care partners. You get to just relax, meet other people who also have a person living with the diagnosis.

And for the folks living with the diagnosis, they get to be in an environment where everybody gets it. They just get to really feel relaxed and be themselves, to not have to try to keep up with what everybody else is doing or struggle to understand. And in an environment that really is very supportive for them.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:05:27] Yeah. Not like a facility. I think that's an important aspect. Cafes meet in different places.

Some actually do meet like in a coffee shop or a restaurant, some meet at libraries. We happen to be housed at a community center for senior adults. So, it works really well because they don't feel like you're just going from one facility-type place, or from home to another facility-type place or home. It gets them out into the general population, so to speak.

But yet it is that safe environment. And what I, just this year have had, family members-- well, I will just go back a little bit: when we first started three years ago, I had maybe two

participants and their care partners. And then I had more volunteers than I did actual participants. Over the years, we've grown.

And it's what you were saying right from the beginning, how many people don't know about memory cafes and what they're about. We now have anywhere from 16 to 26 people that come every month. And so, yeah, we've seen a lot of growth and I'm actually hearing the care partners say, "You know, we belong to a support group and that's really wonderful and it really meets that need, but we also needed somewhere we can take our loved one and do things together."

So, they're getting it, you know? Yes, you need the support, but also we need, you know, the opportunities to just forget about it and just have fun for a little while.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:07:06] Yeah, that's, you know, I always say that fun is one of those words that always gets lost. It's like there's some unwritten rule somewhere where you can't use the words fun and dementia in the same sentence, but--

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:07:23] Absolutely.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:07:23] Not true. You can have a ton of fun with your person!

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:07:28] Right, right. And you know, if that were the case, then we wouldn't even need activity professionals, you know, yet we're seeing in this pandemic how important that activity professional in facilities really is.

People are being more isolated from their family members who can't come to visit due to the restrictions, which I agree with, totally. But at that point then, even living in a facility, you have that growing loneliness, being separated from families. So, we're seeing the true importance of our activity professionals who are having to really step up their game. And they're being broadcast on Facebook. You know, 'Look what we're doing to keep our residents entertained, you know, and keep them active and engaged.'

But I think. You know, we're really going to see through this how important the engagement and the activity piece and the having fun really is for people who are living with dementia.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:08:32] For sure. So now that we have people really excited about memory cafes.... Yeah, we're in a pandemic, so I'm glad you're excited about a memory cafe, but you don't get to go to one. So--

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:08:47] Yeah, really hoping that that's not going to counteract, you know, the growth that we've had over the last couple of years. You know, I'm just praying, Lord, please, you know, you know, yes, we can't be together right now, so I'm actually sending out weekly emails to my participants just to kind of, you know, bridge that gap a little bit till we can get back together.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:09:09] That's great. So what tips do you have for folks, maybe that are taking care of their person in their home and are kind of like, you know-- we see it all over social media right now, you know, professionals that are working from home that have

young kids that aren't in school anymore. And they, those working parents seem like they're maybe headed toward the end of their rope. So, it's a common thing for folks to be kind of trying to figure out how to get their footing underneath them.

But for our dementia care partners, they may have already been in the situation where they do spend a lot of time at home with their person. And now maybe some simple things that they used to do together that they kind of took for granted, now maybe their one trip to the grocery store a week that they used to do together, or one trip to the park to feed the ducks or what have you, doesn't feel like a viable option anymore. So, what tips do you have for those care partners that are home with their person and kind of running out of ideas?

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:10:17] Right. And this is, you know, where the special edition of my newsletter came in because that hit my mind right away. you know, what are these folks going to do now, you know, that they really are having to be isolated? We keep, you know, we're trying to keep them from being isolated. Now, we don't have that option anymore. So, what can we do at home? And you know, tip number one for me is you got to turn the lights on. You know, we got, we got to have the blinds open.

We've got to not be afraid to go sit on the porch, right? You know, it's okay to take, weather permitting, you know, just take a couple of chairs out if you don't already have something set up and be outside. You know, for 20 or 30 minutes a day. If possible, take a walk, you know. And folks are going to know their loved one best as to what they can and can't do.

But, you know, we have to adapt sometimes the activities that we do together. So, you know, this is no exception. You're going to have to adapt to what they can handle. But, if the weather's bad and you can't get outside, let's open a couple of windows, pull up a couple of chairs and sit there and just enjoy some fresh air.

I just think that's so very critical. Getting that exercise, whether that's being able to take a walk, a short walk or, you know, pulling up a video, you know, and doing some chair exercises together, or a simple game of balloon volleyball, which I love anyway. Balloons just make people smile. So, you just get that little bit of exercise.

And you know, it's okay to take a drive. You don't have to get out of the car and be around people. You can get in the car, take a little drive, you know, just look at the spring blooms, maybe pack a little picnic. My husband and I did this last week. We packed a little picnic and went off to a park and social distanced away from anybody else and sat and had our lunch.

Well, actually it was supper and then took a walk, you know, and it just lifts your mood so much to be outside and getting that little bit of exercise, taking a drive.

I have some games that, you can play in the car that don't require you to stop or to get out. And one of those is just, you know, a scavenger hunt or what I call car ride bingo, where you make a list of items that you're going to search for while you're on your drive, just to kind of spice it up a little bit and have a little bit of fun.

Another thing that's really important right now is turning off or limiting the news.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:13:00] Yes!

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:13:02] You know, we all want to stay up to date with what's going on, but people who are living with dementia, sometimes their ability to reason, becomes skewed. And so, when we're hearing, you know, what's going on for us, and it's, you know, for us it's scary. Imagine what it is for them. You know? This is, it's bigger than what we're feeling. They're feeling or their emotion about what's happening. It's going to be even bigger. So, I think really being careful about the news is important.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:13:37] I think that's true every single day. I know some people, have been in the habit or were in the habit of having the news on all day.

You know, they turn it on and then, you know, it's just playing in the background all day and, and they think, okay, you know, this is normal. This is kinda how it's always been. And that is one of the tough things, in navigating through dementia, is understanding that things, you know, are not going to be how they always were.

And sometimes it gives us a positive opportunity too, and I think turning off the news, not having that on all day, is one of those positive opportunities. Because we may not think that it really has any effect on us, but I challenge anybody, if you usually have it on all day, you know, limit-- maybe you catch it first thing in the morning and then last thing in the evening, and have other inputs throughout the day. You'll really be surprised how you feel and it's going to be a happy surprise.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:14:46] Absolutely. And you know, you can really exchange that news program for music. Whatever floats your boat or your loved one's boat, whether that's going to be some of the oldies or gospel music or contemporary Christian, you know, whatever it is that you both love, you know, exchange the news or the music. Maybe even dance around the kitchen a little bit, you know, while you're listening.

Yeah. And you're going to have a whole different experience from that, the positive versus the negative of the news. So, I think that's really important. And yeah, you do the dance party, you get the exercise that you need in there too. Alongside that, I think, you know, making sure you're eating healthy and staying hydrated.

I noticed the other day I started to feel bad and I was like, what in the world? Well, you know what, I had been busy and I hadn't been thinking, and I had let myself get dehydrated just very quickly, you know, and a glass of tea and I felt a whole lot better. So I don't think we really always think about making sure that we're eating healthy and that we're getting plenty of fluids and for people living with dementia and actually, you know, people of older age, they need that reminder to make sure that they're staying hydrated.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:16:07] Well, I'm 50 and I'm just thinking that's a really good tip. So, don't say people of older age. That's a really good point. Yeah.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:16:18] It's not just people with dementia, but all of us.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:16:22] Right, right. And being hydrated helps people think more clearly. And it's one of those things where in the summer we talk about it a lot. And I think as professionals, we don't always do such a great job of talking about it in, in the colder months.

And some places in the country are still, it's still very cold weather. You know, for example, I'm in the Pacific Northwest and I think the high today is going to be around maybe 50. So, it's still, you know, it's not spring weather, exactly. You can still get dehydrated in the winter or in the spring. yeah, be sure to, drink.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:17:04] It's so easy to forget and you know, you think, well, I had that cup of coffee. Well, that's not really hydrating. You need, you know, you need water, you need flavored water, juice.

And, I've had a great time this week, you know, in all of this pandemic. I will say that cooking has added a great deal for me. More in tune with making sure that we're eating healthy and stretching the food out, so we only have that once every week or week and a half groceries that we have to do. But jello, man, we've been having some good jello salad with fruit in it and you know, that's a great option for hydrating, and that's an older treat that, you know, that's something I remember my mom fixing, when we'd have the jello on a bed of lettuce with some fruit. And, so that's been kind of fun, and something you can definitely do with a loved one who's living with dementia. You know, get them in the kitchen with you.

If you're afraid of the heat or the knives, you know, they, there's other things you just have to adapt to keep them safe, but they can still tear lettuce and mix the salad and, you know, get a spoon and mix, cookie dough or whatever, you know, you're gonna be working on together. There are things that they can do, and everybody loves to be helpful.

So, do it together and have fun together. I think that's another great tip. And you know, and the other thing that I've noticed, my oldest son and his wife moved away, moved to Kentucky, back in October, took my two grandkids, my two oldest grandchildren, and it's really hard for me, but we have been FaceTiming.

So, there's a lot of technology out there. I'm glad we learned how to do that back in October, because that's all we're, you know, able to do now, even with our daughter and her family who live here in town, we're relying on this new technologies, to keep in touch. So that's another tip. I want to give caregivers is look and see what's out there.

The computer, while it's intimidating, and I learned that yesterday, when we were trying to have our meeting yesterday. There are so many wonderful opportunities, to connect with your loved ones, whether that's through your phone, just chatting together with the FaceTime, or in these platforms like we're using today, the Zoom and the Skype and things like that where you can actually bring the whole family together and have some family time.

I think that's important. The other thing that I've learned, and I'm seeing a lot on Facebook, are opportunities on YouTube. I had no idea. You can do anything on YouTube. But the

Cincinnati Zoo, now you can go through their website and [look at the animals](#). They do a little educational thing on their animals there, virtually. You can do virtual field trips through YouTube and yeah, it's amazing.

You can go to NASA, you can [learn all kinds of awesome things](#). So that's another opportunity for people to sit down with their loved one and pull up these little virtual field trips or the YouTube channels and just really enjoy some time together.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:20:29] Yeah, I found a couple of things, and I'll include links to it in the show notes, but for example, there's [an orchestra in Little Rock that performs bedtime lullabies](#).

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:20:39] Oh, awesome!

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:20:40] That's all really good stuff. So what would you recommend for care partners that want to get connected with you, Julie? Go to the website? Go to Facebook? How should they get connected with you and, and be part of Joy-Filled Visits?

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:20:57] There are several ways. I do have a website. It's <http://www.joyfilledvisits.com>, and you can, through the website, you can actually input your email address and shoot it over to me and you'll start receiving the monthly newsletter. And April is just chalk full of activity ideas that you can do at home. That's really important right now.

Usually I like to add in some articles that I find that I think are helpful and yeah, there might be one or two of those in the newsletter, but it's basically going to be just completely filled with activity ideas that you can do at home.

And then I do have a Facebook page [called Joy-Filled Visits, LLC](#). If you just put that in there, it'll bring you to my Facebook page. And again, I'm just adding activity ideas or these virtual trips that you can take. Just something every couple of days that families can enjoy together.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:21:58] I'm going to put up links to both of those things in our show notes, and also link to your special edition of the newsletter because it has so much good stuff in there, a lot of the things we've talked about, but in more depth. It also has a little mention of your book, [Creating Joy-Filled Visits in the Midst of Alzheimer's](#).

So, you don't even have to wait for a newsletter. You can just [order it] and then, 'Look, I've got books full of good ideas!'

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:22:30] And it's got, actually, I'm glad you mentioned that because there is a place, a page in the book that outlines for you how to adapt activities for every stage. When, when I talk about activities, a lot of times families [say], 'Well my mom can't do that anymore. You know, she used to love to do that, but she can't do that anymore.'

And this particular outline will help them understand, *How do I adapt this so Mom can continue to do these things?*

I took some time off with my kids and was just a mom. But I, when I went back to the workforce, I, completed my education. I got a bachelor's degree with the intent of going downtown and working with the homeless population.

That was my going to be my career change. And God said, you know what, no, I'm not done with you here yet. And so, then I, I went on, became a training and education coordinator for an in-home care company. The majority of my profession rotated around being an activity professional, and that's just so close and near and dear to my heart.

And keeping people at all levels, all stages of dementia, active and engaged for as long as possible. And what I saw when I worked in the facilities were families who were struggling to know how to have a positive visit. How do I do this? and I realized they don't get the training that we get.

So I developed the Joy-Filled Visits Kit in hopes of helping families, maneuver that, you know, figure out how do I have this positive visit? And a librarian approached me and said, "You know, this is great, the kit, but it's a one-use thing."

She said, "I need something that people can check out of the library to use from family to family." And that's when the book was developed, I guess, or put together. I don't know what you call that. Created. And it's an easier way for families to get the information and put their own creative minds to work and, having joy-filled visits and keeping their loved one active and engaged.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:24:48] That's wonderful. And the reason I asked you to go back and kind of give us a little, a career history is because I wanted listeners to really get that, you know what you're talking about. You can take something that somebody used to love to do and adapt it along the way so they can still enjoy that, but in a different way than they used to. And giving explicit instructions for families in this book, I think is fantastic.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:25:15] And you know, I had a personal experience with this, before I left the facility. The last facility I was in, I had a woman who was living, in late stage. If she was sitting in a chair, she was asleep unless I was engaging with her. And so, it was a constant having to bring her back to the moment.

But one afternoon I was baking cookies and I had some Elvis music playing on the radio, and I looked over and this sweet lady's foot was just tappin' to the beat of that music. So, I went over, and I awakened her, and I got her to look at me and I said, 'Would you like to dance?'

And she said, yes. And I helped her up and man, and she took off. Like she was 17 again, you know. And she danced around the room, and I had my phone with me, so I videotaped her dancing to the music and sent that to her daughter at work, and she was just thrilled because she and her family did not know that mom was still able to do this.

You know, and a couple of months later we had our Valentine party and I had a band playing and her family came, and her sons got her up and danced with her. And it was a precious

moment to see the realization to this family that, yes, you know, this has been a devastating illness. And you know, it took away my mom, but wait a minute.

No, she's still here. You know, she's still here. We just have to adapt the way we do things to bring her back into the moment. And so yeah, you're right. It does work. I've seen it work. I've seen the beauty of adapting and bringing people into the moment over and over and over again, and it's contagious.

So, once I figure out what works with a person, I'm going to continue to do it. You know? So, I can get that positive effect. So, if I can share one other thing with you, I don't have much time we have, but I wanted to just share with you I have another book that I wrote. It's more of a personal story, and it is [free right now on Kindle](#), through the 29th. It's called Gifts from Gramps. And it is my joy-filled journey from granddaughter to grandmother and, people, if people are interested, it would just be a fun-- it takes maybe an hour, hour and a half, to read through it, but it would be fun to read aloud to your loved one as well. So just want to plug that in there for folks who are looking for something to read on Kindle. It is free on Amazon right now. I know people are looking for that kind of stuff: what can we do? What can we do? So I thought this would be a great time to put that out there.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:28:10] Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for your time this morning, Julie. Really appreciate it. And we're going to get this episode turned around as quickly as possible so folks can take advantage of all of your expertise and great ideas.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:28:26] Awesome. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

**Christy Turner, CDP:** [00:28:30] My pleasure. Stay safe out there.

**Julie Bigham, CAEd, CT:** [00:28:32] Okay, you too.