

Meaningful Gifts for Your Relatives in the Last Moments of Life

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If a close family member or friend is diagnosed with advanced illnesses, and he/she may only have a few months to live, this does not mean you won't be able to have fun together, or that it is impossible to share any more beautiful moments in life.

Fun, social activities are an essential part of our lives and a patient who is suffering from a terminal illness can still enjoy these activities, just like before their diagnosis. It can be depressing for patients when their relatives come visit and focus solely on the illness, instead of focusing on the moment and on the gathering that they are having, which used to be fun, before the patient got ill. Consequently, patients may feel like they are a burden to their loved ones, as they feel like they are the reason for the sober atmosphere. Research has shown that these negative feelings can make a patient feel socially incompetent, which might even lead to mood disorders such as depression.¹

So, what can we do to cheer patients up, and to make visits to them more happy and meaningful? Some ways to do this is by bringing personal gifts and by treating the patients as “normal”, and not as a patient. Some suggestions for this were mentioned in an internet post by caregivers of patients with advanced illnesses:

- A self-made informal photo book filled with the patients' life stories
- A short film portraying all sorts of memories of the patients' life
- A wind-up music box with a song that the patient likes
- A box or container filled with slips of paper with loving messages written on them
- Having a big meal outside with family and friends
- Having an ice cream or cold beer (or anything the patients likes!) during a family gathering

What is common among all these gifts are the meaningful moments created with the patients, both by reliving the past together and sharing memories, and by being together in the moment, enjoying life in the present. The gifts mentioned not only contain meaningful moments, they show the effort of love, and they create a chance for the patients to meet up with loved ones, chat and laugh together, and relive the highlights of their life. Regardless of how much time there is left, celebrating life together with loved ones is the most precious treasure anyone can give to a patient.

¹ McPherson, C. J., Wilson, K. G., & Murray, M. A. (2007). Feeling like a burden: exploring the perspectives of patients at the end of life. *Social science & medicine*, 64(2), 417-427.



Sources: <https://www.caring.com/questions/best-gift-for-dying-parent>