

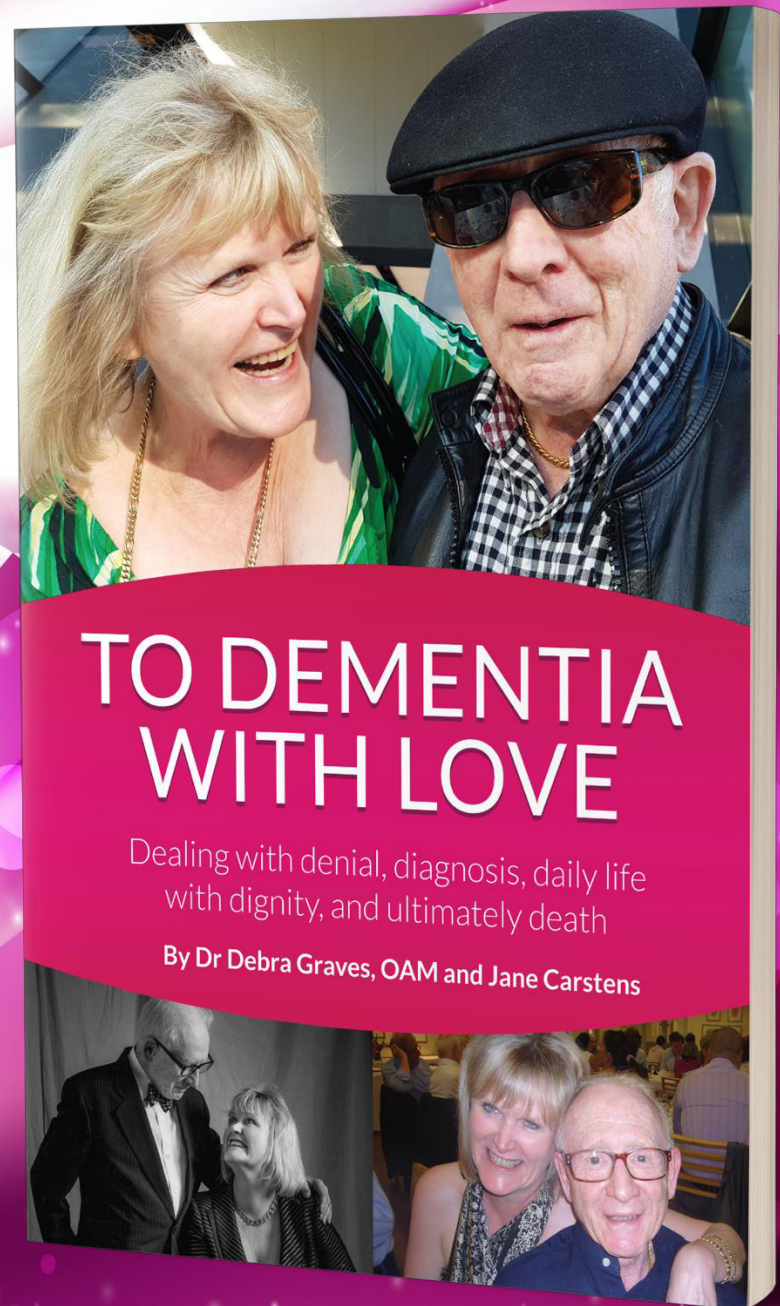
AGEING WITH CONFIDENCE: MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Dr Debra Graves OAM
To Dementia With Love

An initiative of the Eastern Suburbs Older Persons Mental Health Service,
SESLHD
22 October 2025



Dr Debra Graves OAM
AUTHOR AND ADVOCATE
FOR DEMENTIA
AWARENESS AND CARE

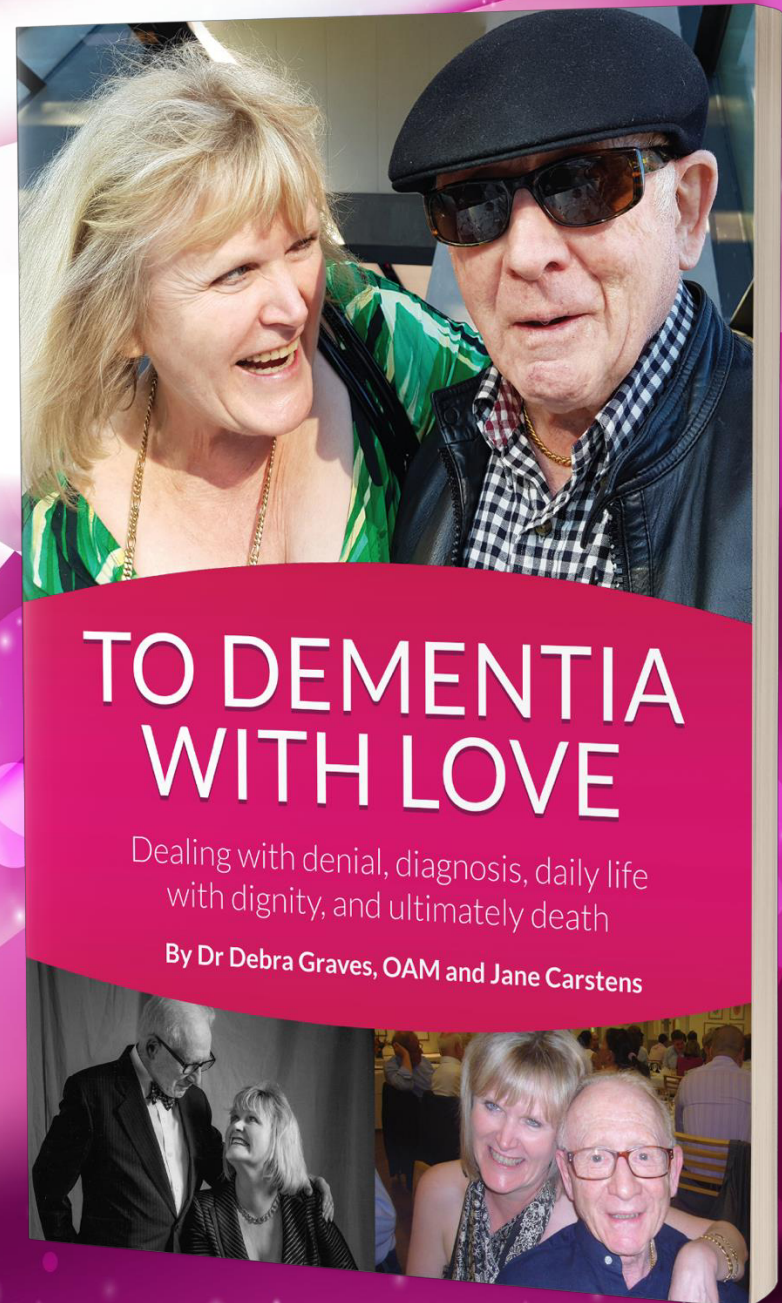


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Why did I write to Dementia with Love

- I was given books that were very prescriptive about how to care for a loved one with dementia.
- I tried following the advice in them, but it did not make Don happy or content.
- I decided to do it our way as I knew him best.

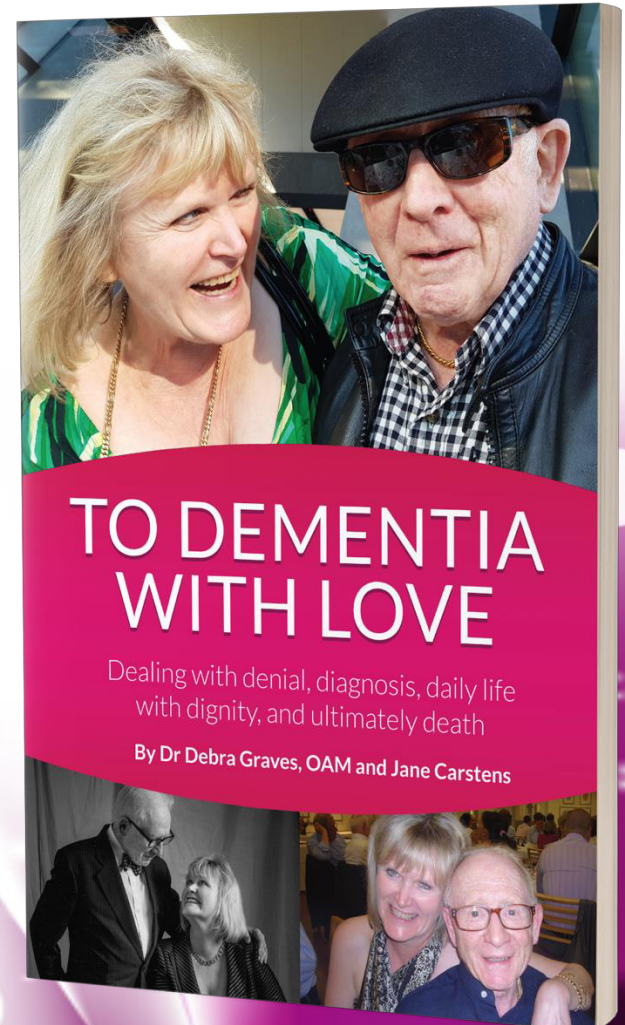


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Why did I write to Dementia with Love

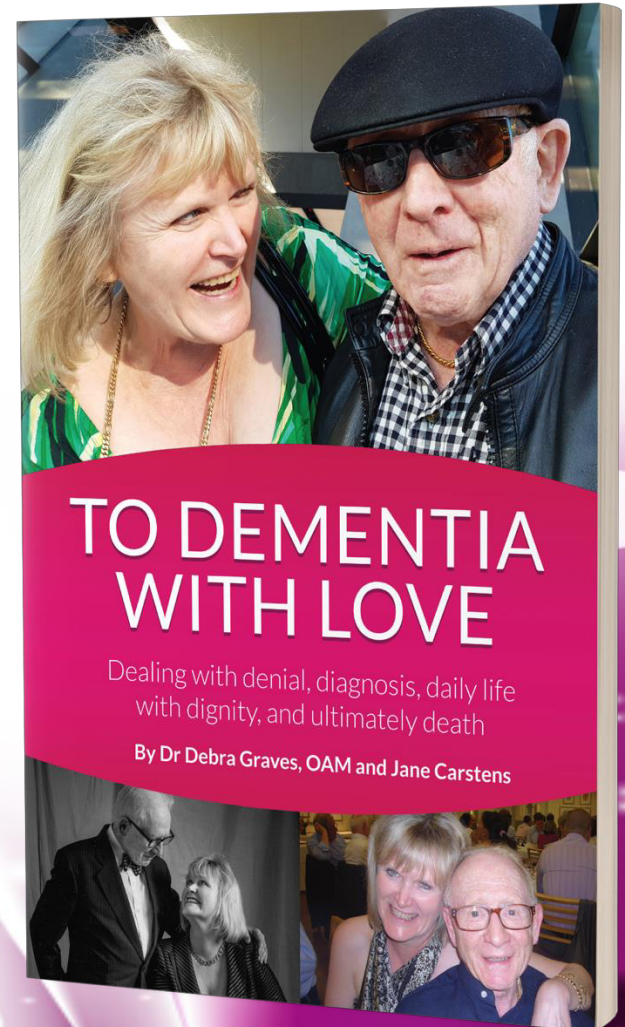
- Don's carers suggested I should write a book about our different approach to caring for a loved one with dementia
- And we did!



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- Denial
- Seek Professional Advice
- Important to rule out other diagnoses
- New treatments

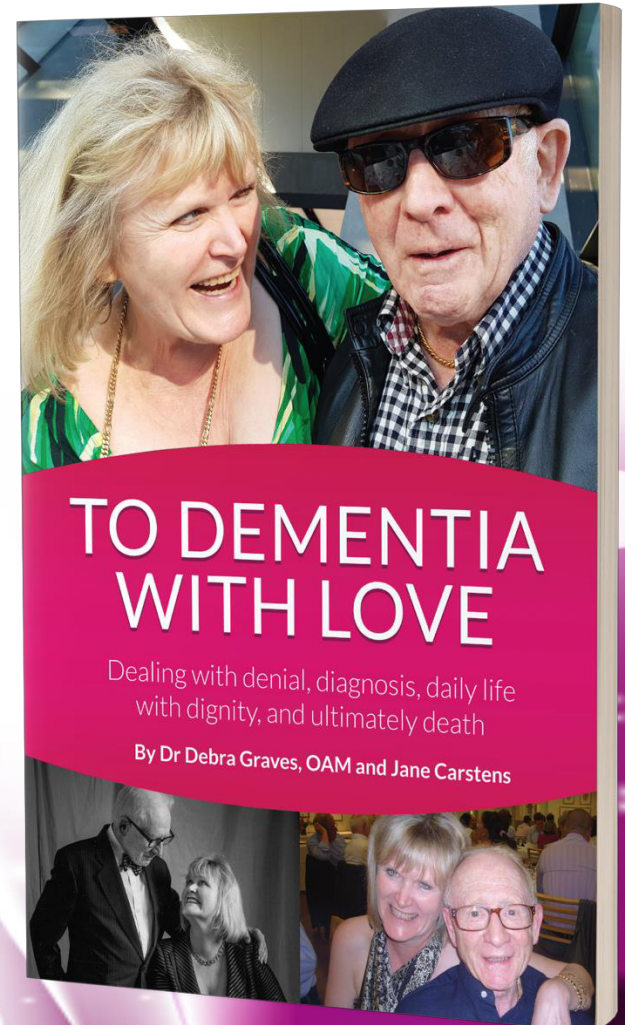


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**What did making my own
rules really mean?**

- Making life as normal
as possible



Travel



Cruise and Silent Night



Theatre and Concerts



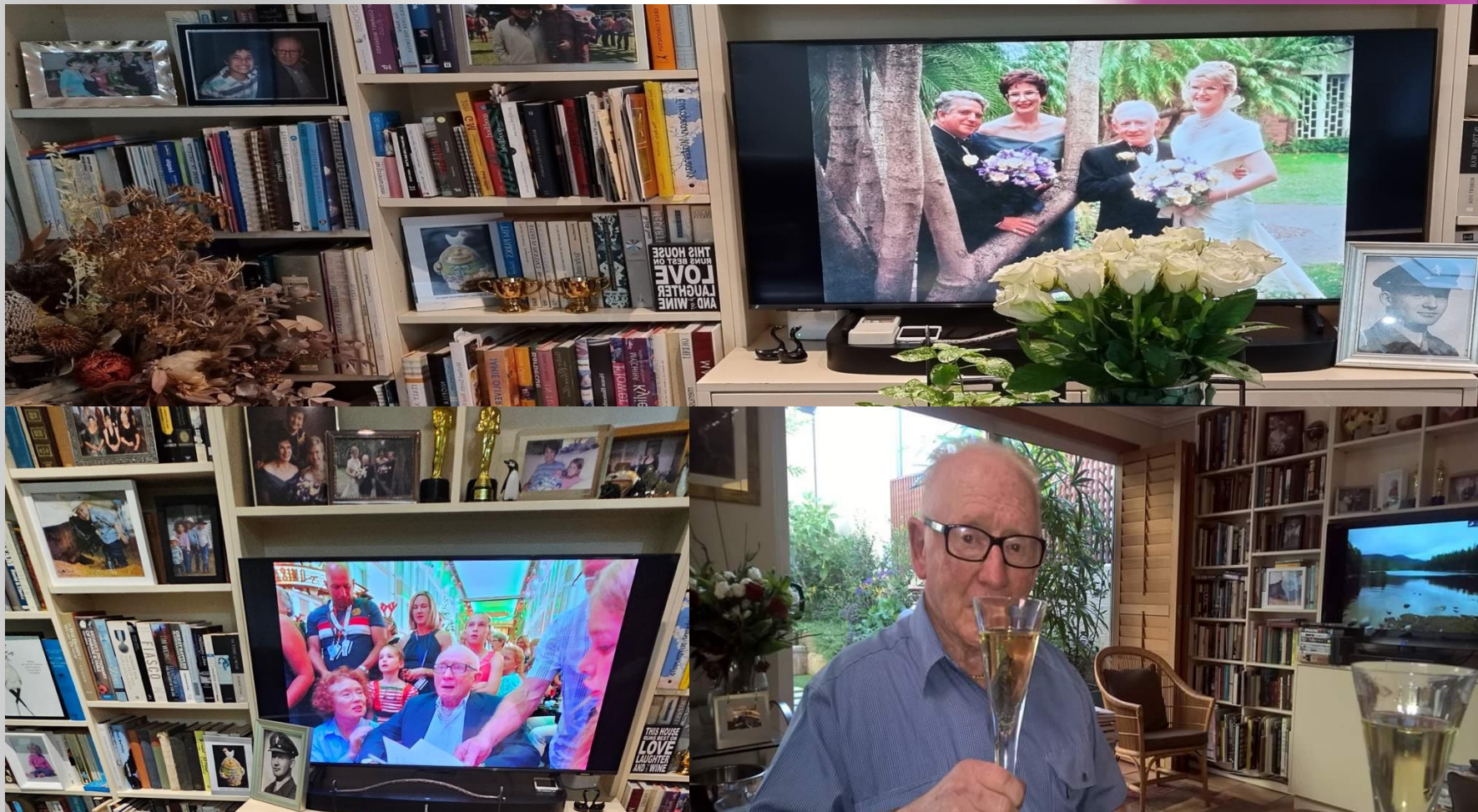
Going out with Friends



Important Events



Keeping in Touch with Family and Friends Apple TV



Dementia Milestones

Don's Dementia Milestones

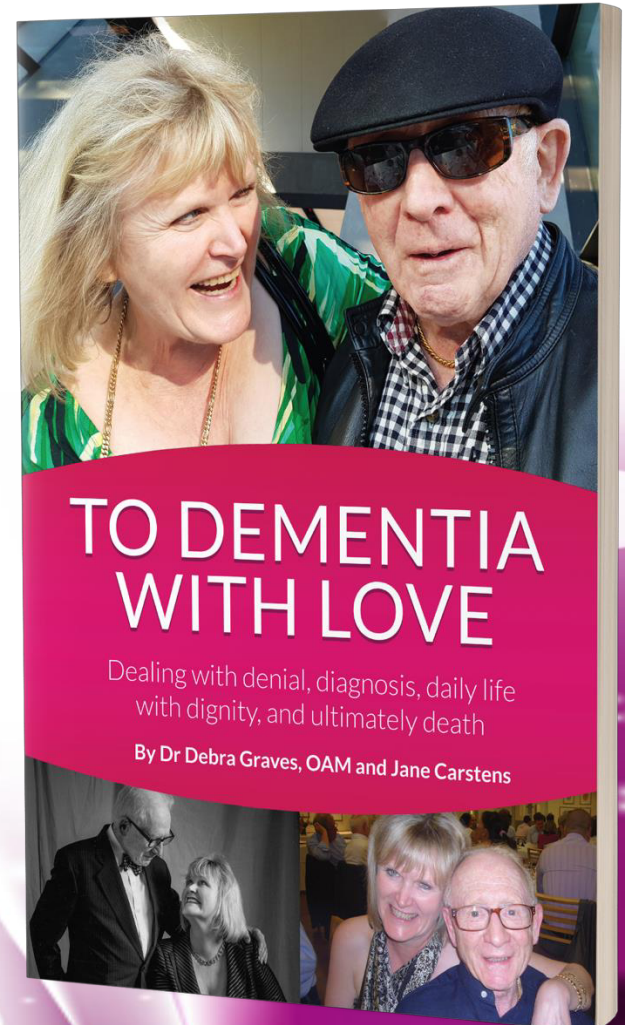
- 2005 Don admits to a friend he is concerned about his memory and losing words.
- 2007 Don's son notes his father is more forgetful than usual on a holiday together, and not able to finish his old jokes.
- 2008 Don starts misplacing things and forgetting names and places.
- 2009 Don sees a consultant psychiatrist to investigate his memory issues and scores 100% on a Mini-Mental State Examination. His difficulties are attributed to ageing.
- 2010 Don has a stroke. He recovers, but his memory issues remain.
- 2011 Don is occasionally confused. He becomes worried about his finances and then obsesses over them.
- 2012 Don starts to have falls. His speech is noticeably less animated. He becomes quite confused at times.

- 2013 Don's memory issues become more noticeable to those outside his inner circle, and he finds it harder to express himself.
- 2014 Don starts wandering around the neighbourhood in the afternoons at the beginning of the year, and around the house at night in the latter half of the year. He now needs help showering, dressing, and toileting.
- 2015 Don becomes incontinent and starts to wear pull ups and incontinence pads. He needs a walking stick some of the time.
- 2016 Don has difficulty walking long distances. A wheelchair is purchased, and he uses it most of the time. Constipation is a problem, and it impacts his mental health. Don essentially becomes non-verbal, saying only the occasional word or sentence. His body becomes weaker, and he has more asthma attacks. He requires full care with toileting, showering, dressing, eating, and getting around.
- 2017 Don starts sleeping more during the day and spends a lot of time sitting in his chair at home. His movements become stiffer, and he communicates less. He needs a wheelchair all the time.
- 2018 Don sleeps most of the time and is physically very weak. He dies on 30 December. Causes of death listed on his death certificate are *aspiration pneumonia, cerebral amyloid angiopathy, hypertension, and dementia.*

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- I am going to outline five practical lessons I learned along the way

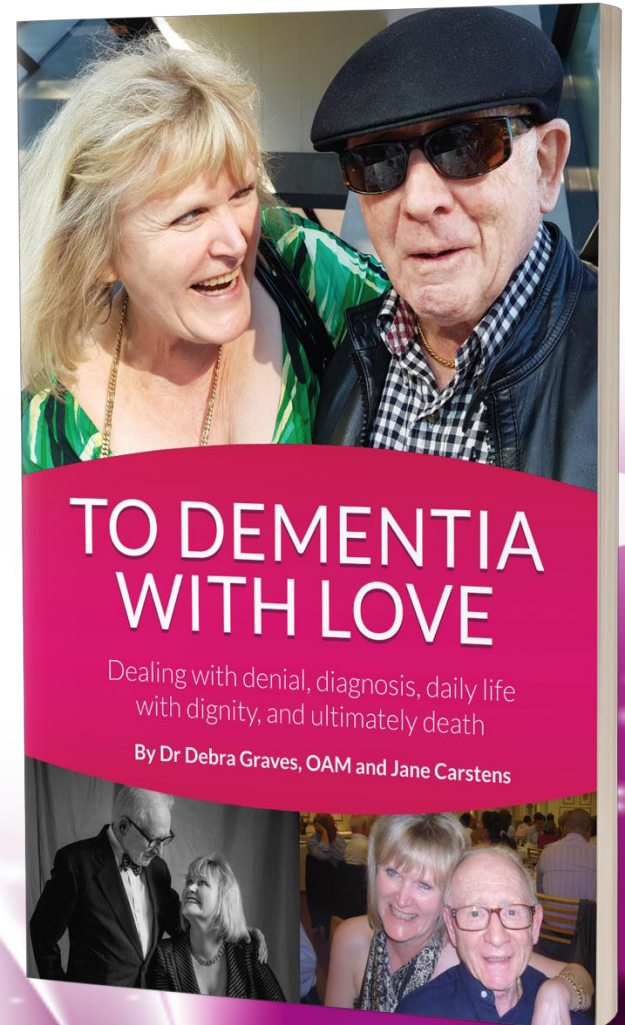


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1. There is no rulebook

Every person's dementia journey is different. What worked for Don may not work for your loved one. Trust your instincts, adapt, and make your own path.

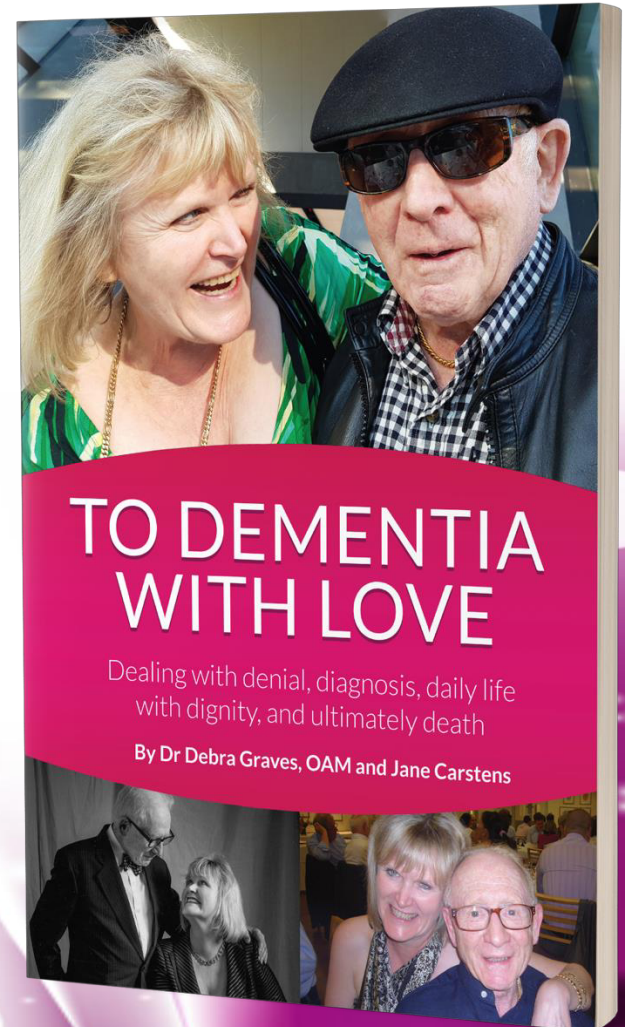


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2. Focus on dignity in the everyday

Small things matter — from choosing clothes that make someone feel comfortable, to adjusting routines so life feels less stressful. Holding onto dignity helps preserve connection and respect.

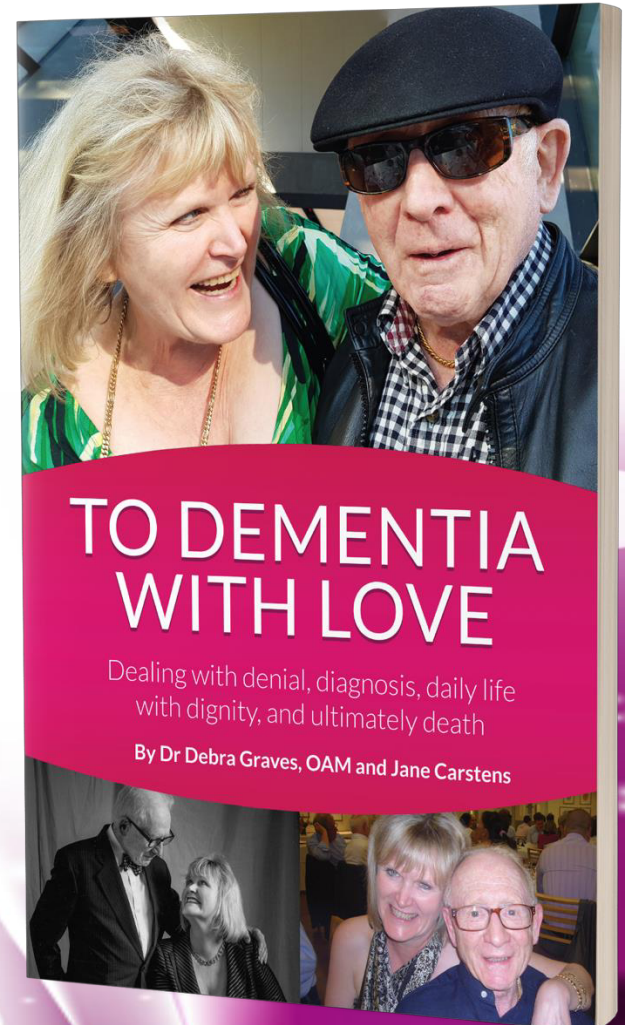


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3. Accept help and build a team

Family, friends, carers, neighbours — even strangers — became part of Don's support network. You don't have to do this alone. Allow others to step in; it gives you strength and gives them the chance to share in precious moments.



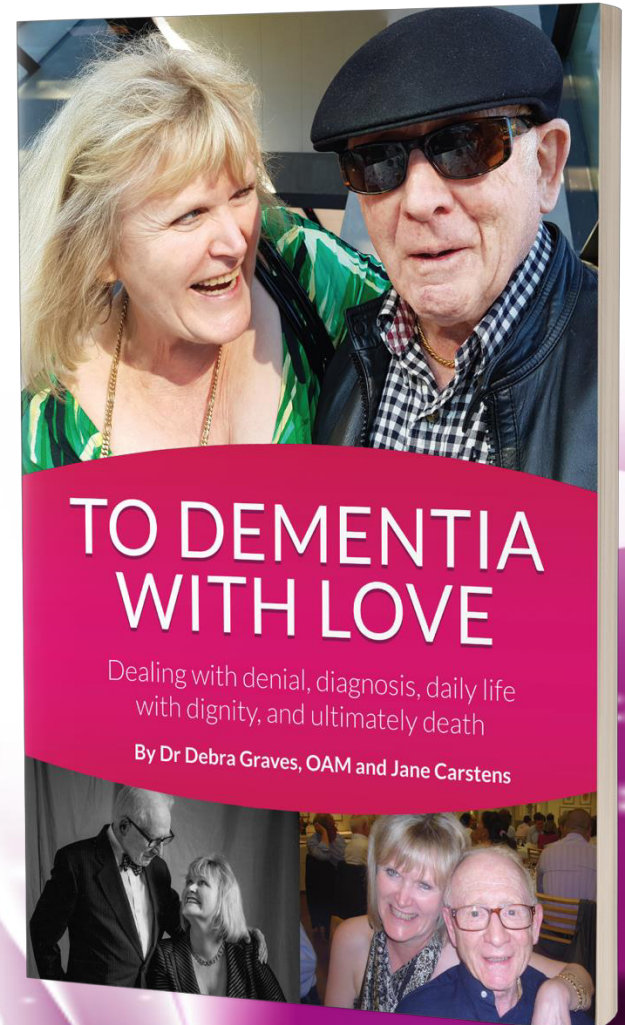
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4. Hold onto joy

Even as dementia progressed, Don and I continued to travel. It wasn't always easy, but it gave him moments of happiness and gave us memories to treasure.

Look for the things your loved one still enjoys and make space for them.

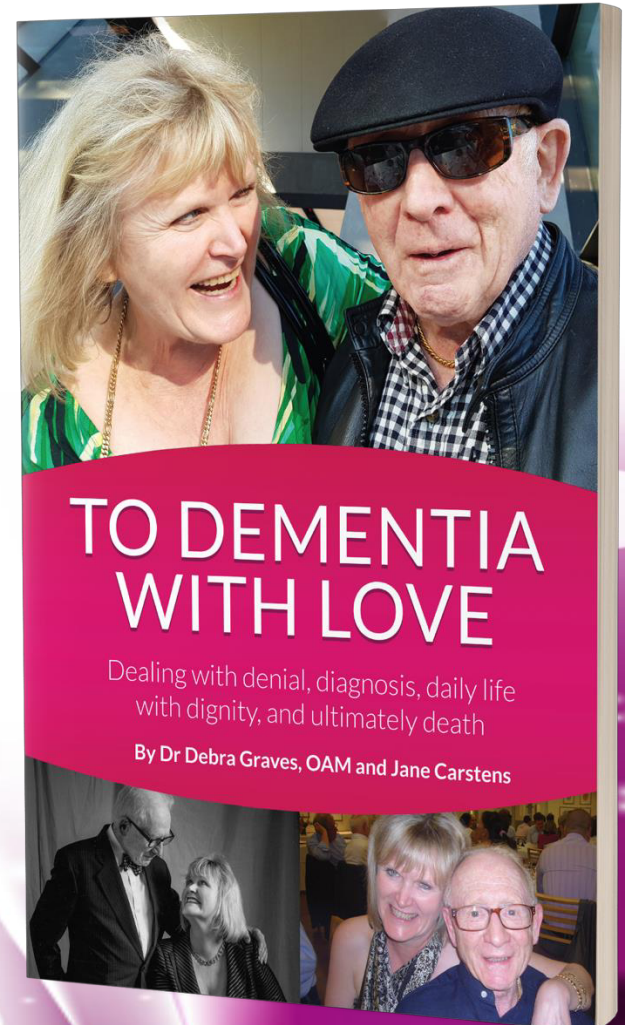


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5. Remember love is stronger than dementia

At its core, this journey is about love.
Dementia may take words,
independence, or memory, but it cannot
take away the bond you share.



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[To Dementia With Love](#) can be purchased from:

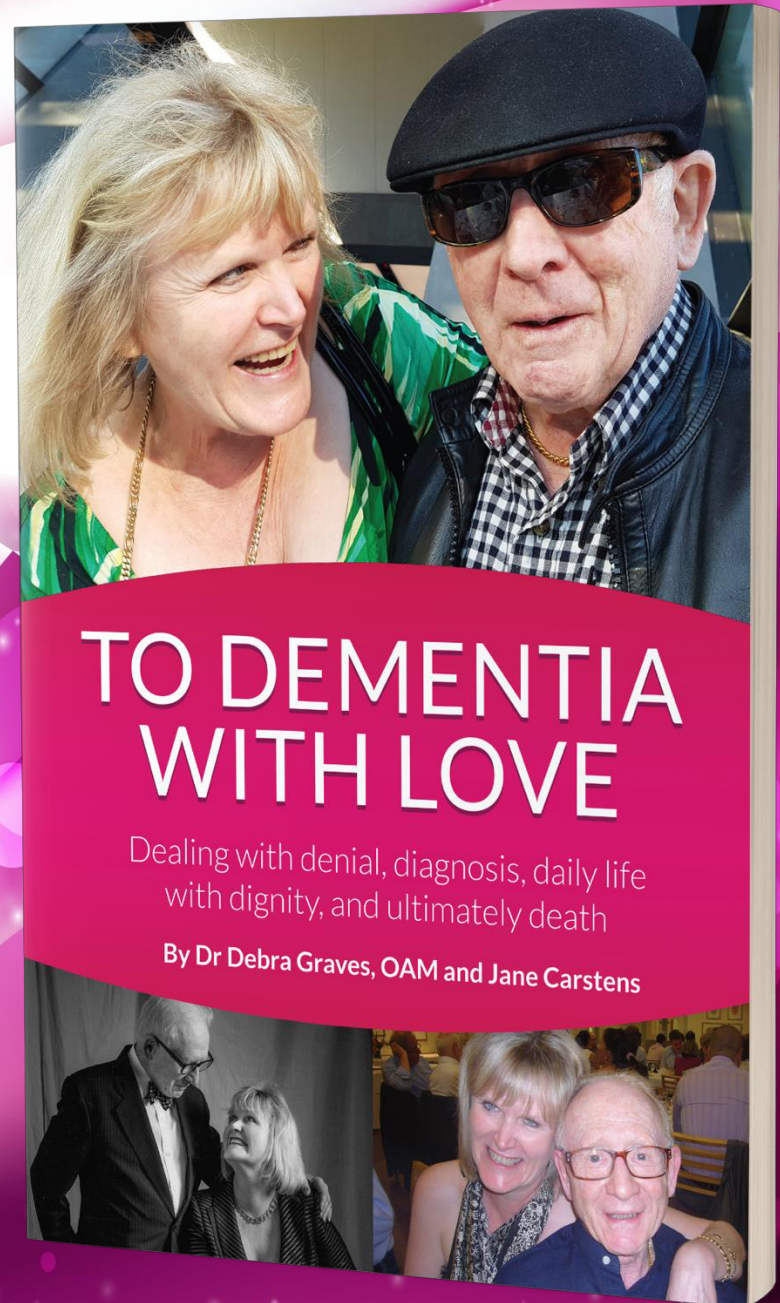
Outside in exhibition

<https://thebookadviser.com.au/product/to-dementia-with-love/>.

Alternatively, it is also available at:

The National Library of Australia
bookshop in Canberra, and in

The Burns Bay Bookery at Lane Cove,
Sydney.



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