

The Gentle Art of Connecting *Laura Haldane of Mesa, Arizona*

I learned in China [on the 2000 Ambassador trip with Patch Adams] to observe people and take their signals. So in the nursing home by responding to whatever residents gave to me in their first reactions to me, a lot of what I was doing was just holding hands and hugging.

There was one woman who kept following me around. I had gone over and talked to her and had an interaction. She liked that so much that when I was visiting other patients she kept following me around and wanting a hug. It was really very funny for all of us - staff and residents.

A lot of the Alzheimer patients were lucid. The staff would say, "They are having a good day" For me it didn't make any difference. I would watch for a little smile, which was an invitation to interact with them. I didn't have to do magic tricks or balloons. Actually I did balloon flowers before Christmas and there wasn't 4as much interaction. As soon as I started balloons the dynamics changed. I didn't want to be just someone giving them a "thing" I wanted to make a connection.

These are people whose world has become small. Because many of them don't have visitors, they are lonely and bored. Of course that is my projection, but I want to give them something that would make them smile.



Laura Haldane visiting a patient in China

Everyone loves to hug. There was one woman lying in her bed. She didn't speak and didn't seem "high functioning" I just came up and hugged her. She cried and her body language said she loved it. It was so incredible that something so simple was so needed. It was obvious it was something she was hungry for. It's in those moments that you feel like you make a difference.