



PO Box 312
Westminster, VT 05158
(802) 722-3607

A Feast for the Senses

Twice a month, an eclectic gathering of individuals enter the Westminster Fire Station to participate in the *Secrets of Healthy Aging discussion group and potluck*, a program of Westminster Cares. This group of seniors, ranging in age from the sixty's to ninety's, gathers to explore the unique issues faced in the aging process, engaging in an infinite variety and depth of topics. We've been meeting since 2002, some of the original members still attending.

It is my blessing and challenge (depending on the day!) to facilitate this group of outspoken, hilarious, sincere and generous-hearted people. All of us consider our meetings a feast of the senses! Let me offer some examples.

"The things this table has heard," declares one long time attendee! Sitting around the table, some of the things **heard** include: raucous laughter, life experiences, opinions that challenge and intrigue, welcoming of new members, and thoughts and stories that inspire.

Continuing with the sense of **sight**, participants gaze upon strangers who have become friends; a diverse group of people happy to be in each others' presence. Joyful shouting greets new arrivals (even the late ones!) while we try not to ogle each other's potluck items. Exercising a different form of sight, that of deep insight, one group member has called our gatherings a place where, "minds are working and souls are shared."

Touch comes into play as the group mascot, my "senior" dog, Minnie, wanders from person to person with her own calm, sweet, greetings. Here and there someone pauses to stroke soft fur and receive cold-nosed nuzzling. When a person new to the group arrives, everyone eagerly jostles to make space - figuratively and literally - at the table, ready to be touched by whatever it is that person may bring to the gathering. Or, as one person said, "touching each other's hearts with our spoken words."

Depending on the seasons of our meetings, the **smells** wafting through the room are sometimes subtle, and sometimes commanding, but always adding to our sensory participation! New-mown grass, whispering rain, the first snow...and, oh! Warm bread awaiting us - baked by one of the group. Sometimes, our discussion may focus on what sensory awarenesses people are having; it's not unusual for our waiting lunch to play a starring role!

And last, but certainly not least, is our shared meal; a sumptuous conclusion encompassing a feast of all the senses, especially **taste**. Over the years participants have found great pleasure in bringing a unique selection of edibles - which of course, is not complete unless chocolate is present! The unknown accompanies us with every discussion and every meal. We never plan what we'll bring to the table, verbally or gustatorily! Somehow it always works. No one is ever required to speak before they're ready, or bring food to share - there's always more than enough



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of both to warm our hearts, minds and bellies.

And on top of all that, at any given meeting, "we have been known to burst into song!" Come give us a try!

If you would like more information about this gathering, please call Westminster Cares at 722-3607 or email: wecares@sover.net

Cheryl Richards, MA, CT is an End of Life &
Grief Counselor & Educator