

Reframing: Sometimes what we put **around** the experience, though not changing the situation, changes how we experience the situation. We call this “reframing.” Cecil Murphey in his book *My Parents, My Children* offers an excellent illustration of how this might occur.

Excerpted from: *My Parents, My Children, Spiritual Help for Caregivers* by Cecil Murphey, p. 115-118. ISBN 0-664-22246-3.

“But He Stinks!”

Because Granddad had lived nearly a thousand miles away, the children didn’t know him well. Even so, they accepted his coming and seemed excited.

The fourth day after his arrival, six-year-old Wendy refused to take his breakfast to him. “He stinks, that why,” she said.

Other problems came to the surface – such as his flare-ups of anger over his food and his yelling at the children for making too much noise. He complained when the telephone or doorbell rang. Sometimes Granddad wouldn’t talk. At other times, he’d take the hand of whichever child was in the room and talk non-stop until the child wiggled out of his grasp.

By the fifth month, Emily’s patience had given out. The once-close family unit had turned amazingly fragile.

One day Emily poured out her troubles to her best friend, Joan. After she had gone through the laundry list of complaints, she brushed the tears from her eyes and asked, “What do I do now?”

Joan told her friend about a children’s sermon she had heard as a girl. The pastor gave each child a dime, pointing out the coin’s small size. “Hold it at arm’s length and stare at it.” They all did. He had them move the tiny coin closer until it was about an inch from their eyes. “See, that tiny coin blots out everything else, doesn’t it?”

She never forgot the story and how it applied to many situations in life. It’s like one bad thing blinds me to all the good things. Once I realize that, I start trying to see other things in my life. I hold out my hands in front of me. On my fingers, one by one, I count ten things for which I’m thankful. They can be big things or small things. It doesn’t matter what you give thanks for, just do it.”

Emily, desperate for anything to help, tried it. Although she felt no immediate change, she began to make it an ongoing habit.

One day the children saw her strange behavior and asked what she was doing. They wanted to try it. Most nights before bedtime, the parents and children formed a circle and

called out. “One, I’m thankful for a nice house to live in.” “Two, I’m thankful for…” Often their list reached into the fifties.

That simple act of giving thanks for specific things in their lives made the next nine months bearable.

Granddad’s condition worsened and he died. The evening of the funeral, the family gathered in a circle.

“One, I’m glad Granddad is with Jesus now,” said Wendy’s brother.

“Two, I’m glad I was able to care for him,” said Emily.

“Three, I’m thankful we gave him a home here.”

Within minutes they had reached one hundred. As they prepared for the final prayer, Wendy said. “I’m glad Granddad came here even though I didn’t like the stinky part.”