

New Rituals of Regard

By bell hooks

Sadly, in her new state of lost memory, Mama no longer cooks, or finds delight in delicious eating. She has to be coaxed to come to the table. This is often the case with those who suffer dementia or Alzheimer's. New rituals of regard are needed....

5 Nowadays, Mama spends much of her time sitting. There are beautiful and wonderful
aspects to her current forms of self-expression and identity. It is a joy to sit next to her, to be
able to hold her close, to caress her hands, all gestures that would have been impossible in the
past. She would have deemed it silly to be sitting around talking of love when there was work
10 to be done. How wonderful it is to have these new experiences with her converge with the old,
to see her so tender, so vulnerable, so without the restraints of shame and conventional inhibi-
tions. Now I see in her the wildness of spirit she once saw in me and wanted to crust for fear it
was dangerous. My gratitude that I can be present—a witness to her life now—as she struggles
to make sense of the dots that do not connect, as she journeys towards death, knows no
15 bounds. Also it is good to witness Dad gracefully walking down the mountain giving him now
and then a helping hand.

[P. Travis] Krocker believes that “as we dedicate ourselves to one another, and thus
experience daily and directly the diverse array of gifts that contribute to our living, gratitude
will take its rightful place as the fundamental disposition that guides and forms our ways.”
20 Gratitude allows us to receive blessings; it prepares the ground of our being for love. And it is
good to see that in the end, when all is said and done—love prevails.