



Alzheimer's Aid Society's FORGET-ME-NOT

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THE CAREGIVER

By Margie Eisenhower

"Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength." – Unknown.

Caregiving – such a tough job! So many feelings and emotions are involved. I thought I'd share some true 'moments' and 'experiences' from people who have Alzheimer's patients in their lives (names have been changed):

Louise (wife): "The hardest part is that our kids don't think there is anything wrong with their dad, that I am exaggerating. Dealing with him is hard enough, but their lack of understanding hurts me a lot. I try to see a counselor once a month. That and my gardening help me cope."

Patty (adult child): My dad has Alzheimer's and Mum is trying to take care of him. They are both 85. Mum berates dad for forgetting and getting muddled, and dad refuses any kind of help from Mum. I feel like a referee rather than a daughter. It is a comfort to hear of others' stories and know you're not alone while battling with practicalities, difficulties and down-right angst. My poor dad is not going to improve and my Mum is not going to turn into Mary Poppins, so we all stagger on in an unhappy state. Losing one's grip on the world must be horrible, and taking care of one in that situation must be horrible as well. We can only do our best.

Mary (adult grandchild): My grandmother is always frustrated about her clothes, saying those in her closet don't belong to her, over and over. I now pretend that

someone lovely has left her some 'nice surprises' in her closet. I have learned over the past two years, that if you get tired and upset, you have to walk away, call a friend, cook something, take a walk. You are human. You need time for yourself, your spouse, your children and your friends. Even when I get really disturbed, I have learned that if I smile and approach a hard situation with a smile, it will often change her attitude. Sometimes I will sing an old tune she knows (off key!) or ask about her friends from long ago, and these things seem to appease her.

Clarisse (daughter): I've found out how important it is to get their medications balanced. Be firm with the doctor on this. I have read many books on Alzheimer's and am grateful every day for interaction with other caregivers. Every caregiver should read, "The 36-Hour Day," for its wisdom and practical presentation. You *have* to remember that your loved ones have a 'disease' and it's impossible to change *their* behavior. You must change *your* behavior.

Brad (husband): "After two years and some terrifying months, I finally had to put my wife into a care home. She was escaping from the house in ways I could never come up with myself! She was caught in someone's car a few streets away and was almost run over. People in my neighborhood still tell me that Irene didn't seem 'that bad' to them. It's hard to feel misunderstood and to keep from letting these people fill me with guilt. They just didn't know the true situation.

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THE CAREGIVER

By Margie Eisenhower

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Situations like those described can be helped by attending support groups. One little statement made to me personally, helped beyond words. When my mom entered a care home and I was leaving after visiting her, there were many times she'd ask beseechingly, "Margie, you're not going to leave me here with these *strangers*, are you? Please take me with you." Of course, she didn't realize she had A.D. and was even *living* in a care home. She only knew she was somewhere 'strange' and was being left behind. The guilt would eat me up and I would cry all the way home. Well, someone 'in the know' about Alzheimer's said, "The moment you leave, and your mom turns around, she forgets you were even there. Her mind goes to other things instantly. So don't do this to yourself." What a blessing it was to realize that.

My mom was not much of a talker throughout her life, so when visiting with her in the care home, it was difficult to think of things to discuss. One day I began asking her about her childhood because I knew that more recent things were the things forgotten. I heard 'detailed' descriptions of her childhood home (a place we visited often when I was a child). I loved it! I learned my mom played the piano for the congregation in Sunday School as a teenager! I learned that at age 5 she had what they called then, "leakage of the heart," and she had to stay in bed for many weeks. A little cot was set up for her in the kitchen, where she could be near the family, instead of upstairs alone in her bedroom. Mother told me about her mom frequently putting her ear to Mother's back, to see if her 'heartbeat' was irregular. To learn previously unknown things about my mother as a child means the world to me! Plus, details about my grandparents as well as Mom's three brothers as children that I'd never known.

This disease is such an odd one -- and the brain is such a mystery. To think, my Mother could give me all these *details* about a life 75-80 years ago, and yet forget I had been visiting her five minutes before?

I so admire you caregivers and wish you strength and wellness. Join a support group! Read up on this disease. Good luck!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark Your Calendar!

Mini-Seminars

Mini-Seminars offer two to three speakers on a variety of subjects. They are free of charge. Refreshments are served. Call to register.

July 9th 2011

at: Paramount Court 9:30 am—12 noon
3791 Crowell Rd.
Turlock, CA
(209) 664-9500

Speakers:

Robert Hopper of A Place Called Home
"How to Speak Alzheimer's"
Cynthia Wilson of UniQue ImAging
"Art Therapy"

August 6, 2011

at: Ponte' Palmero 11:00 am—2:00 pm
3083 Ponte' Morino Dr.
Cameron Park, CA
(530) 677-0100

Speakers:

Deborah Poff
Director of The Light-house Memory Care Unit at Ponte' Palmero
"Dementia Awareness: A Fresh Look at How Behaviors Manifest"
Roberto Chiesa—Writer and Director
"Inside My Being"

MODESTO'S

3rd Annual Conference FOR CAREGIVERS

July 30th 2011

at: Season's Event Center

A full day of education, information and support! All of the details can be found in the brochure/registration form included in the center of this newsletter. Register by mail, by phone or online!