

Floating Away From Those You Love

By : elleswish

For school I was asked to write seven diary entries from somebody who has alzheimers or who knew somebody with the disease. This is what I wrote. The biology teacher that assigned the work to us, cried when she read it and later asked if she could publish it in the annual school magazine. That doesn't happen very often.



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Floating Away From Those You Love : Chapter 1

Friday the 26th of February 2006

Dear Diary,

Today has been a bad day and I am glad it is over. My wife, Petunia, has recently been having a few mental health problems. We've had a few theories about what might be wrong, some form of dementia we thought, but it wasn't until today it was confirmed and we found out what type.

When we walked into the doctors room and took a seat the doctor told gave us a sympathetic look then told Petunia as gently as he could that she has Sporadic Alzheimer's Disease (SAD). He then went on stating how dementia affects 1 in 4 people above the age of 85 and 50% - 70% of these people have Alzheimer's. I don't care about these silly facts, I just want my family to have a safe and happy life. Is that too much to ask for? That appointment just kept getting worse and worse. I wouldn't have been surprised if Petty doesn't remember the rest of it. She looked like she was about to faint. God knows I only listened to half of it. I clearly remember Dr John Campbell mentioning to us how the average person would only last 7-10 years longer. The only other thing I remember him saying was that there was no known cause of SAD which meant that there was no cure. I can't imagine a life without Petunia; she is all I have ever known.

I remember when all this started to happen. It was around 3 years ago. I remember the first incident crystal clear. It was a beautiful warm day with no clouds in the sky. Petunia and I were sitting down about to have our breakfast; cereal and a slice of toast each, when I realized we were out of milk. I was waiting for a phone call so I couldn't go for a run down to the corner shop myself, so instead Petty went for me. The corner shop was around 100 meters from our house and is usually only a ten minute walk there and back.

Soon an hour came and went and Petty still hadn't returned. At the time I didn't find this a huge problem but I started to worry when it was almost two hours since she had left. I busied myself for another hour, trying to pass the time by going outside into our large garden and doing a bit of work, but I gave up when the outside clock gave a chime, declaring that three hours had passed since she had left home. By this stage I was starting to worry and went back inside. Nothing could hold my attention for long so I gave up and just started pacing back and forth beside the phone, wondering if she would call me to let me know she is okay. Where could she be? I thought to myself. The clock on the wall must be going flat as it took what felt like years for the second hand to declare a minute.

Once another hour had passed I gave up and went down to the corner shop to look for her myself. The young girl behind the counter told me the Petty had never turned up, so I went back home to see if she had turned up or there were any missed calls saying that she had gone over to a friend's house for a coffee. When I got back I saw that nobody had called that day, not even the call I had been waiting for. So I decided to call our daughter Sarah and ask her if she had heard anything. Like I had expected, the answer was no.

Two more hours had passed when I heard a knock at the door. I ran to answer the door and was relieved when I saw Petty standing confused with our two next door neighbors, Mandy and John. Apparently Petty had stumbled upon the couple who were having a romantic picnic on the beach, this being less than an hour ago. She had asked for directions to the blue shop that sold milk. Mandy had found it odd that she was lost in an area she has lived in for the past fifty year. Not only that but she didn't even recognize Mandy, who was her best friend.

The four of us sat down and talked about what had happened. Petty described how she was walking down the street and the shop was within eyesight. The next thing she remembered was that she was on the beach having a conversation with a nice couple. After much debating Petunia finally managed to convince everyone that it was just a one-off and we all put the incident to the back of our minds.

My daughter came up to me a few weeks later saying that her mother was telling a funny story from her past to Sarah and her two children. A story I myself had heard Petunia tell many times. Sarah told me with a worried look etched on her face that her mother had repeated the story three times, word for word, without even realizing what she had done.

A few more incidents like these have happened. So much so that Petunia and I decided to give a visit to the doctor. Now, here I sit here today, totally numb to the fact that in a few years my own wife will forget me, her

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own identity and everything else she knows.

Timothy

Chapter 2: Floating Away From Those You Love - Symptoms

Saturday the 2nd of April 2006

Dear Diary

Petunia hasn't been herself since we found out she had SAD. Her symptoms are becoming more obvious. Or maybe it is because I know they are symptoms and not coincidences but anyway...She has vagueness in everyday conversations, she forgets to bathe quite often but insists she has and she has even been having problems following complex instructions and when she does finally understand them, she takes a while to complete these tasks.

The other day I walked in on her cooking and saw her trying to apply a chocolate spread on top of the roast. When I pointed out what she was doing she became all flustered and worried, I would nearly go as far as saying that she was having a panic attack. It took a while to calm her down and insist that our tea could be salvaged, but even when I had finally calmed herself down, I could see on her face that the episode had scared her. She has been doing things like this for a while now, but I did not know whether there was a reason for doing it or it was the symptoms, but now I know they are symptoms, I cannot help but notice them.

When I was doing the research I found some interesting information on a website, it was saying how Alzheimer's usually affects people that are over the age of 65. Petunia is nearly 87 now so that is okay. It was not only that but I found out what happens to the nerves of patients with SAD. I included a quote from a website I found that explains what happens to the nervous system of people with Alzheimer's.

"Alzheimer's cause deterioration of the brain by obliterating the nervous system. Once the nerve cells begin to deteriorate it causes a reduction of responses to other nerve cells. The condition spreads out causing chemical interruptions, the transmission of impulses slow, and finally tissues in the brain begin to get worse.

"(<http://www.alzheimer-advice.com/Alzheimer%20Disease%20and%20the%20Central%20Nervous%20System.php>)

Timothy

Chapter 3: Floating Away From Those You Love - Progressing On

Tuesday the 26th of January 2007

Dear Diary,

It's getting worse. I lost Petunia again today but this time it was longer than ever before. I lost her for a whole day. I am starting to worry if I can look after her by myself, I think I might need help.

Today I left Petunia watching a program on the TV while I went outside and got the paper from the paper boy. I must have only been gone five minutes but when I returned, I saw that she was no where to be found. As usual, I searched the house but couldn't find her. Outside there is a large garden that is filled with small nooks and crannies. It took me a while to search the whole garden but by the time I had finished I was in a mad panic as I had not found her yet. I decided that I would need some extra help on this because it seemed more serious than ever before.

All our friends and family helped me search the whole town but we could not find her. After searching all through the night we finally found her at the edge of the forest. I had that feeling you get when you lose someone that you're close too, no matter how small a time they were lost, it gives you a feeling you can't describe, one of pure worry, guilt, anger, depression and many more emotions. Thankfully we found Petunia again and she was safe and sound.

Many people come up to me and give me their sympathy for myself and my wife, but that doesn't mean anything to me, what about those who can empathise? Those are the ones I would like to talk to. Those who understand and have been through what I am going through.

Lately I have been working alongside my Son-in-law to modify our house so it is less harmful if she ever falls over. I don't want things to get any worse than they already are.

Timothy

Chapter 4: Floating Away From Those You Love - The Future

Monday the 23rd of January 2008

Dear Diary,

I long for the days when the two of us were happy and healthy. Where I didn't have to keep an eye on my dear Petunia. To make things easier for her, today I spent the day with Petunia making notes to place around the house. They are everywhere, on all the drawers, all the cupboards and on every type of container possible. I knew she found it embarrassing, she hates asking for help, she has too much pride.

Petunia and I were talking about the future. She was saying how the future is scary, it will be filled with long and lonely days that she will not be able to remember anything. Her recent memories were already fading but yet she remembers her childhood like it happened only yesterday. While we were talking about her future we played around with the idea that when things get too bad then Petunia will move into a nursing home. I told her that I will do everything possible to keep her out of there for as long as I can.

It was her 86th birthday about a week ago. Our daughter Sarah gave her mother a scrapbook filled with photos of everyone enjoying themselves. Under each picture was a small piece of script describing everything that happened that day. Petunia said that it was the best present she could have been given so that when she's having a bad day and has forgotten everything, then she can take a peek in the album and look at the great life she has lived.

Timothy

Chapter 5: Floating Away From Those You Love - Nursing Home

Monday the 12 of November 2008

Dear Diary,

Today Petunia moved into a nursing home as I was no longer able to look after her by myself. She wasn't able to perform the simplest actions and in the end she became fully dependent on me. I would spend all my day tending to her. I had to dress her, feed her, wash her and all the rest. I couldn't even leave her by herself, only if it was just for a minute. It was like having a baby again but this time I was alone. Actually I nearly always had a visitor at the house who came to help me care for Petunia.

Those last few sentences must have sounded so selfish and cold. I love Petunia with all my heart but I know that there are people out in the world that could look after her better than I could. When I told Sarah we were thinking about Petunia moving into a nursing home she offered for the two of us to move in with her but I couldn't do that. She already has a two young children and a husband to look after. She doesn't need two elderly people living in her house, one of which needs full time care.

When we were moving all of Petunia's things into her new room I knew that she was pretending everything was okay and it was all for the best. But I knew her better than that, I could see it in her eyes; the self-hatred, envy and anger that she wouldn't let anyone else know of. It nearly tore me apart. As soon as I got home I burst into tears. How could I have done that to her? How could I have left her in that cold place where everyone is waiting till death knocks on their door. I know I will never forgive myself for doing it.

Some days I find it hard when she doesn't recognise my face. How can I help her when she thinks I am some stranger that walked off the street? You don't talk to strangers, everyone knows that but on days like that I pretend I am a friend of a friend and I don't let anyone know how much it hurts.

Timothy

Chapter 6: Floating Away From Those You Love - Waiting

Tuesday the 25th of December 2009

Dear Diary,

I visited her again today, like every other day I spent it sitting around the nursing home, watching her sleep, going for walks around the gardens, sitting by the duck pond or in the old dining room.

Sarah came with me today but my dear Petunia told her to go away. Petunia cried out so loud, yelling how Sarah was not her child. She yelled so loud it made me cry as well as Sarah. This is our daughter that together we share, but why does she not remember the life once had? How would you act if your mother doesn't recognize you? She lives in a world where her memories are a reality.

I dream for the days that I hope will happen. The days when she gets the sparkle back in her eyes but I know it is just that; a dream. A dream where her face tells a story of her life; one that is grand and full of life but now it only tells the story of an old lady who is slowly dying. Death might even be better than this. She is always in pain. There is no treatment available at her stage of Alzheimer's but they give her medication to give her a better quality of life and to ease the pain of her symptoms like: seizures, bed wetting, skin infections, extreme weight loss and being unable to swallow.

She's in her own private prison. She is trapped inside her own body. She can't communicate with anyone, she can only grunt, groan and moan. It depresses me to know that it will only get worse. Sometimes I wish that I was in her place instead. She is a mother, a grandmother and a wife, she is needed more than I, I wish we could swap places.

I watched "The Notebook" yesterday. I feel for the old man. I am in the same place as he. I hope I can soothe Petunia's pain like Noah soothed Ellie's. Their love carried them to heaven. I wish I could help her get to a better world like that. One where there is no such thing as pain and suffering, a world that is full of love and hope, a world where everyone is equal and no one is sick.

Whenever things get bad I take Petty's hand and let her borrow some of my memories. I tell her of the old days of when we were 17, young, carefree and full of life. I tell her how when we were 21 and got engaged everyone thought we were lovesick fools. I tell her about our wedding, the magic that was in the air that night. I tell her of the feeling that we both had when our only daughter arrived into the world, our daughters first day of school, her graduation, her wedding, even when she had her own two children. Sometimes I know she remembers along with me, I can see it in her eyes. But those moments are becoming few and further in between. I know the two of us don't have much time left with each other. I am scared to leave her side as I want to spend every waking moment with her but I know that isn't possible.

Timothy

Chapter 7: Floating Away From Those You Love - Death

Thursday the 11th of March 2010

Dear Diary,

Why does crap happen to good people? I suppose it was for the best. Today I attended Petunia's funeral. It was a private ceremony held in the morning of the first day of spring. It seemed as if even the weather was mourning our loss. Petunia requested whilst she was still alive that when her funeral was being held that there would be no black worn, only bright colors as it was the start of new journeys.

I think it is for the best; her passing away. No more suffering, no more pain, no more depression, no more forgetting. She has moved on to a place where she can be set free and live in a state of harmony. Watching over myself, our daughter, our grandchildren, and all those to follow. She will be our own guardian angel keeping us safe from the harm of the real world.

Pneumonia. A word I now hate. It was this that finally ended Petunia's life. The two of us got stuck out in the rain one day, while I caught a cold, Petty's caught a bad cold that progressed on topneumonia. In some ways I am relieved that Petunia is free now, but I am still grieving for her as now I can't hold her in my arms and attempt to soothe away her worries.

I refuse to remember the Petunia that I came to know before her slow, cruel death. No, I will remember her as the strong, carefree lady that was the love of my life. The Petunia I have spent my whole life with. The journey we shared was full of pain, sorrow, peace, joy, excitement and most of all happiness. I will hold her dear in my heart till the day I die.

Timothy

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