

# LIVING IN ALZHEIMER'S AGONIZING GRIP

## LOCAL WOMAN TELLS OF DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF ONE OF DISEASE'S MANY VICTIMS

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It wasn't that long ago Louise Rion's father was taking to the skies with a local flying club, living out his passion for all things aviation.

But now, the Georgetown woman wouldn't consider it safe for her father, Paul Horsten, to even ride a bike, or walk anywhere by himself for fear that he'll never make it back home.

Such is the stark reality for those living with Alzheimer's disease - the most common form of dementia

that slowly robs people of their abilities and memory, and is ultimately fatal.

With January being Alzheimer's Awareness Month, the local mother is sharing her family's experience coping with the devastating condition that's becoming increasingly common.

It was about four or five years ago when Rion first started noticing changes in her dad's ability to remember things.

"Then it just became a lot worse," she recalled. "You couldn't leave him alone because he'd be wandering, and you're fearing

for his safety."

Within a span of a year, she watched as her dad - a lifelong aircraft mechanic - lost both his driver's and pilot's licences, along with his home as her parents downsized to an apartment in Brampton.

"His life and passion was airplanes. It was like everything was taken from him, which was really hard," she said. "It was a really big adjustment for him."

With Alzheimer's yet to impact his mobility, Horsten kept trying to take the car keys and go for a drive - a dangerous move that ultimately led to him and wife Sheilagh getting rid of their vehicle as well.

Having no other means of transportation available, he would then hop on his bike and ride across the busy city streets to the Brampton Flying Club,

with no water to stay hydrated or plans for his return trip home.

"It's difficult because he wants to walk or get on a bike, but it's not safe," said Rion. "My mom was at the Superstore with him and said, 'Wait here,' and within minutes he was half way down Steeles."

Most recently, Horsten left the apartment to look for his children. In his mind, the clock had turned back several decades to a time when he was a young father of three. He was convinced that Rion, along with her brother and sister, were all babies again, and that they were missing.

The Georgetown woman has now started the arduous process of looking at long-term care options for her father. In the mean-



Louise Rion photo  
Paul Horsten, who suffers from Alzheimer's, finds singing to a baby doll soothing.

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