

## COMMENT

# Alzheimer's impacts are far-reaching

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### The View From Here

I'm afraid that one day I won't recognize my husband and children.

In fact, I might not even remember who I am.

While these might sound like irrational fears to some, let me explain. You see, I've been watching the havoc that Alzheimer's disease can wreak on a person and a family since I was a child.

With January being Alzheimer's Awareness Month, I thought I would share my family's story as we've been coping with this terrible disease for decades. While it's most often characterized as an ailment that affects your memory, Alzheimer's symptoms are actually more far-reaching than most would expect.

My grandfather was diagnosed with Alzheimer's when I was very young. It's difficult for me to recall a time when he knew who I was, but I know there were some fleeting moments when we were visiting him and my grandmother at their farmhouse in Owen Sound.

After the disease led to him wandering off and acting out violently, my grandma had no choice but to put him in a nursing home. She visited him every day and continued to help care for him. Even after he passed away, she continued to volunteer at the nursing home daily. My grandmother was an amazing person, but that's a topic for another time.

Our family had a slight reprieve from Alzheimer's after my grandfather's passing, but over the past decade it has reared its ugly head again, this time affecting two of my aunts.

While there are mixed opinions in the medical community about whether or not Alzheimer's is hereditary, it's hard to look at our family and not point to genetics.

My dear Aunt Joyce has been suffering with the disease for many years now. Whether I'm seeing her in person or through Facebook photos, the sight of her today brings tears to my eyes. My once-vibrant aunt, who was always dressed impeccably with flawless hair, make-up and lots of gold jewelry, is now a gaunt shell of her former self.

She was the ultimate homemaker who did it all while raising four children and doting on my uncle. Alzheimer's has taken away her ability to do anything for others or herself, severely impacting her motor skills and even her speech. Through it all she has been blessed with the most amazing caregiver, my uncle, who has handled the situation with such selfless grace.

At a recent family reunion I watched him lovingly kneel down in front of my aunt, hold her hand and lean in to speak with her. She couldn't respond verbally, but she smiled, and I prayed that just for a moment she would recognize him, or any of us. But she didn't.

Alzheimer's is ruthless and unfair. And just as it did when my grandfather was suffering, it still makes me feel helpless.

So what can we do? Besides talking about it, raising awareness and praying for a cure, we can also raise money to fund programs that help those living with the disease, either on our own or through one of several upcoming Walks for Alzheimer's ([www.walkforalzheimers.ca](http://www.walkforalzheimers.ca)).

I'll be walking for Aunt Joyce, Aunt Jean and my namesake in heaven, my grandfather, Mel Thompson.

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