

Geri Taylor, a Voice for Alzheimer's, Is Dead at 81

She turned her diagnosis into a command to live life passionately, leading to a 12-page New York Times profile and a new career as a public speaker.



Geri Taylor in Florida in 2015. A former nurse, she brought her profession's competence, knowledge and frankness to her second career as a spokeswoman for people with Alzheimer's disease. Michael Kirby Smith for The New York Times

Geri Taylor, whose openhearted disclosures about the ravages of Alzheimer's were so striking that they made her a public spokeswoman for people with the disease, died on Aug. 4 in Danbury, Conn. She was 81.

The cause was complications of Alzheimer's, her husband, Jim Taylor, said. Ms. Taylor, a former nurse, brought her profession's competence, knowledge and frankness to her second career as an activist. She and Mr. Taylor became frequent interviewees in news articles about Alzheimer's, activists in Washington and lecturers for audiences of patients and researchers. They spoke jointly to more than 15,000 people, Mr. Taylor said.

All of that followed from a 21,000-word [profile](#) of the Taylors published in The New York Times in 2016 — the product of 20 months of work by the reporter N.R. Kleinfield, a specialist in writing stories about people of little fame but great significance.

The “familiar face of Alzheimer’s,” Mr. Kleinfield wrote, was “the withered person with the scrambled mind marooned in a nursing home.” But there was also, he added, something else: “the beginning, the waiting period, which Geri Taylor has been navigating with prudence, grace and hope.”



Ms. Taylor with her husband, Jim Taylor, in a cab in Las Vegas in 2014. The Taylors helped found an organization called Voices of Alzheimer’s, which pushes for accessible and improved medical care. Credit...Michael Kirby Smith for The New York Times

Ms. Taylor first learned she was developing Alzheimer’s in 2012, when she was 69, after she had the uncanny experience of looking in the mirror and not recognizing her own face.

Then, at a family reunion, she struggled when speaking to relatives, since she found herself forgetting basic things like the name of the town where her sister had lived for 40 years.

A therapist instructed her not to tell people she had Alzheimer’s, warning her that her friends and family would abandon her.

Ms. Taylor did the opposite. She told everyone — including strangers she met on the street.

At CaringKind, an Alzheimer’s support organization in Midtown Manhattan, not far from the Taylors’ home on the Upper West Side, she led an effort to form a peer-driven group for Alzheimer’s patients to share strategies with one another, with minimal mediation from an outsider.

She devoted herself anew to her passion for photography. Her husband followed suit, chasing a dream to act in the theater; he wound up being cast in a play in Las Vegas about, of all things, Alzheimer's.

"Now we're always living in the present," Ms. Taylor told Mr. Kleinfeld. "I can't remember to postpone something."

Mr. Taylor added: "We're much more dedicated to be with each other. The disease has brought that."

Sharing such sentiments and anecdotes became the basis for Ms. Taylor's new life as an activist.

After Ms. Taylor's Times profile was published, she and Mr. Taylor appeared at events with figures like Maria Shriver and Hoda Kotb. They spoke at conferences in Switzerland and London. The Taylors helped found an organization called [Voices of Alzheimer's](#), which pushes for accessible and improved medical care. And they campaigned in Washington [for Medicare to cover PET scans](#) and called on the Food and Drug Administration to approve new Alzheimer's drugs.



Geri Taylor, age 9. She grew up on Long Island and went on to pursue a career in nursing.

Geraldine Ann Wilson was born on May 7, 1943, in Brooklyn and grew up in several towns on Long Island. Her father, Edgar, managed a Woolworth store there, and her mother, Frances (Day) Wilson, was a bank teller and accountant.

In 1964, Geri received a nursing degree from Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, and several years later she earned a master's degree in public health from Columbia University. She became a medical executive at Beth Abraham Hospital and at the Jewish Guild for the Blind, both located in New York.

Her first marriage, to Ransom Widmer in 1964, ended in divorce. They had a son, Lloyd. Her second marriage, to Robert Thompson, also ended in divorce.

She met Mr. Taylor in the early 1990s through their children, who were enrolled in the same day camp. He called her to see about car-pooling. Before too long, they went to the Mostly Mozart Festival together. They married in 1993.

In addition to her husband, Ms. Taylor is survived by her son; three stepchildren, Heidi, Mark and Amy Taylor; a sister, Greta Davey; a brother, Robert Wilson; a granddaughter; and six step-grandchildren.



In 2015, Ms. Taylor participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer's in Riverside Park in Manhattan. Credit...Michael Kirby Smith for The New York Times

Ms. Taylor's condition eventually deteriorated, but she still managed to become the [public face](#) of clinical trials for Alzheimer's medical treatment run by the pharmaceutical company Lilly and get featured in news coverage about Alzheimer's in [The Daily Mail](#) and [The News-Times of Connecticut](#) and on the local TV channel [New York 1](#).

She and Mr. Taylor followed a model they had set in their very first public appearance, at a Florida Universalist church in 2015. There, they spoke in a conversational style, focusing on little matters of quotidian life for people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.

Ms. Taylor discussed how she liked people to talk to her: Ask questions one at a time; pick a single subject. She appreciated an affectionate arm squeeze and a smile. She listed a few simple sentences that she found meaningful: "I know," "I'm your friend," "I'm glad you're here."

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/22/health/geri-taylor-dead.html>