Devastating

by

*Eyes Right*

**Springfield, VA –** My wife, Sharry, is struggling with Alzheimer’s disease. It is a cruel and unrelenting opponent. We first noted that she was beginning to have difficulty recalling information 10 years ago in 2015 while she was working as a Registered Nurse. She recognized her new situation and soon resigned her position, but continued normal activities as a homemaker with no problems.

Two years later, Sharry’s memory had deteriorated to the point where she was diagnosed with “Mild Cognitive Impairment.” She was still very functional in terms of everyday activities; we continued to travel to foreign countries at least twice a year and to spend several weeks each summer kayaking in Maine. A year later we purchased a camp in the deep woods overlooking Lower Wilson Pond near Greenville, Maine. Sharry continued to do daily walks, often by herself on the dirt roads near our camp.

In spring of 2019 I was writing on my computer in our home here in Springfield when I realized that Sharry had not returned from her daily walk. I immediately hopped into our truck to look for her. I expected to find her quickly because she always took the same route and never had any problems. When I could not find her within 10 minutes, I panicked with worry. I called four neighbors to join the search, but even though we had fanned out throughout our neighborhood, we could not find Sharry. I then phoned the police to report a missing person. The police immediately responded with several vehicles, followed quickly by an airborne helicopter to aid in the search. Time passed and as darkness approached, the mood became somber with worry – where was Sharry??

Another hour passed. I then received a phone call from a different neighbor who happened to see Sharry walking along a major highway ten miles from home. He was unaware that we had been looking for her, but, fortunately, stopped and asked if she wanted a ride home. It was with great relief that Sharry was soon home. When I asked Sharry what had happened, she said that she had missed a turn on her usual walk and “just kept walking.” She added that she had went to the door of a house to ask for help, but that “the lady slammed the door.” [I understand what probably happened. On her walks, Sharry always carried two plastic bags to pick up trash…when the woman answered the door to see Sharry carrying two plastic bags of trash, she apparently assumed that she was a “bag lady” asking for money.] This event ended Sharry walking anywhere by herself.

In January 2020, in the weeks before COVID hit the world, we took a Caribbean cruise out of Miami. During the cruise I was careful not to leave Sharry alone other than in our stateroom to ensure that she would not become lost on the large ship. We had a wonderful time and immediately signed up for another cruise three months later. The sudden emergence of COVID negated that possibility forcing the cancellation by the cruise line of that adventure. We still have a voucher for a cruise, but will probably never be able to use it due to Sharry’s current condition.

By the fall of 2021, Sharry’s health had deteriorated, and she was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Because she was now in need of additional nursing assistance, I began to interview home health care personnel. I was fortunate to find a qualified woman in our neighborhood who began to work 8-12 hours a day; She even traveled to Maine with us the following summer and lived with us until our return in October.

Sharry’s disease has further worsened. She is now incontinent, cannot get out of a chair by herself, and cannot walk without considerable assistance. We ensure that she eats well but must sit with her to assist at meals. Her food must be in small pieces and there is considerable spillage creating a debris field around her chair.

There is good news. Sharry remains a delightful person and is never argumentative or angry. She sleeps soundly from 9 to 9 and still knows who I am. But she cannot carry on a conversation, and only utters a few phrases, such as “I like it” when I ask her if she likes her nightly ice cream treat. She can no longer get into or out of bed on her own and sleeps in the exact same position on her back the entire night. Interestingly, she has forgotten how to use her facial muscles to smile. (I find myself often looking on my phone for photos from previous years to see her last smile – in 2022).

I share all this personal information to lessen my anger and frustration that this devastating disease now afflicts so many. I feel so sorry for Sharry and any family in a similar situation.

I thought you might like to know.

E-R