

younger-onset connections

Oklahoma and Arkansas Chapter
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Strength in numbers

Married in April 1982, Ed and Cathy Meyering shared their passion for traveling as they began their young family. Over the years, they enjoyed fishing, road trips and many other outdoor adventures, and as the family grew so did the family's strength.

It was this strength that would guide the roadmap of their lives, but as Ed entered his 50's Cathy began to notice changes in her husband's daily life.

"He wasn't able to do simple math or remember conversations we had the day before," Cathy said. "He was also losing things more easily. Ed is a very intelligent person and I knew that something wasn't right."

Ed began to experience stress at home and on the job. At first the family attributed the problems to merely depression. After seeing several doctors and going through numerous tests and medications, it got to the point where Ed had to retire from his job after 28 years.

After several misdiagnoses Ed underwent a PET scan and

in 2007 with no family history indication, Ed's official diagnosis was Younger-onset Alzheimer's.

"After you receive this diagnosis the depression and anxiety sets in," Cathy shared. "I didn't know what the future was going to hold for our family."

However, the Meyering family has not allowed Alzheimer's to break their spirit.

"We are so blessed to have supportive family and friends who are always there for us if we need something," Cathy said. "Ed currently attends a senior citizens facility where he enjoys interactive social activities, and we still enjoy traveling and spending time together as a family."

One of the first steps the Meyering family took was to contact the Alzheimer's Association to discover resources and since then have been participating in a support group for one and a half years with their son, Casey.

"We have met some wonderful people through this group and it's been a great help to me to be



The Meyering family has grown stronger during their journey with Alzheimer's by attending support groups as a family.

Left to right: Ed, Casey, Cathy

able to talk to other families that are going through the same situation," Cathy said.

The journey has been unexpected and difficult but the Meyering family holds on to hope.

"I know it will come to the point that he won't remember me or our son and other family members, and he will forget all of the wonderful memories we have made as a family," Cathy said. "The only thing we can do at this point is to look to our Heavenly Father who knows all things and trust Him to take care of us no matter what life brings our way."

From Denyce's Desk

Support groups offer insight into caregiver experiences and community



Dear Friends: Just wanted to share with you a little about support groups. Are you currently in a support group? If yes, you know the benefits of a support group and the friendships that can form. If not, hopefully you will agree with some of the benefits listed below and want to get involved in

a support group near you.

To find a support group located near your home visit alz.org and search by state, and then you will find support groups listed as an option, or you can call 1-800-272-3900.

The Alzheimer's Association office near you offers peer or professionally led groups for caregivers and others dealing with Younger-onset Alzheimer's disease. All support groups are facilitated by trained individuals.

Common effects of Caregiving might include the following:

- 1) Stress symptoms such as fatigue, headache, sleep problems.
- 2) Emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety, guilt, anger, loss, feeling overwhelmed.

3) Changes in relationships with care recipient, family, and friends. 4) Feeling disconnected from others and alone.

That's where a support group comes in! Benefits of a support group may include:

- The opportunity to share experiences
- Learn about resources
- Discover that you are not alone
- Receive encouragement and moral support
- Hear expert speakers
- Learn ways to cope with care giving
- Get tips from others in similar situations
- Normalize your feelings
- Access research results
- Experience community

Alzheimer's Town Hall Meeting

If you are in the early stages of Alzheimer's or have a memory disorder, join the Alzheimer's Association at a free event. Call 405.319.0780 to register!

Guthrie, Oklahoma

October 5, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
American Legion, 123 N. 1st Street

Edmond, Oklahoma

October 11, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Autumn Life Center/Edmond Medical Center
One South Bryant

Autumn Memory Walk Schedule:

NORTHEAST ARKANSAS

- October 9, Arkansas State University
- Jonesboro, AK. / 9 a.m. Registration
- Contact: 501.265.0027

OKLAHOMA CITY

- October 23, Bricktown Ballpark
- Oklahoma City, OK / 8:30 a.m. Registration
- Contact: 405.319.0780

TAHLEQUAH MEMORY WALK

- November, 6 / Tahlequah, OK
- Contact: Penny Gifford 918.407.2626

Teens fight Alzheimer's, too

The thing about Alzheimer's disease is that you lose your loved one twice — once when they forget you, and then when they die, says Catherine “Cat” Sweatman of Fort Smith, Ark.

The 18-year-old is sharing her story with five campers at a Colcord ranch nestled in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains. All are teenage caregivers for a parent or grandparent who has the disease.

Sweatman earned her wisdom the hard way. At age 9, she became caregiver to her father, who had younger onset Alzheimer's disease.

“I was 10 when he forgot who I was,” she said, fighting back tears. “It's heartbreaking. It was probably the worst day of my life.”

Her father died at age 58, when Sweatman was 16, an “equally devastating” day, she said.

“How many 18-year-old girls have their dads die of Alzheimer's disease?” she asked “How messed up is that?”

Younger-onset Alzheimer's refers to when the disease occurs among people age 65 or younger. An estimated 500,000 people have younger-onset Alzheimer's disease or other dementia; of those, 40 percent have Alzheimer's disease, the association said.

Sweatman is an Alzheimer's teen advocate. She has traveled twice to Washington, D.C., to share her story with members of Congress and has participated in other events, such as the teen caregivers' camp. She gives 10 percent of her income to the Alzheimer's Association for research and education. And she encourages other teenagers to be advocates, too.

“I'm sure you guys don't want anyone else to go through what you went through,” she told the campers.

In just its third year, the weeklong summer camp is named after 15-year-old Austin Mobley of Missouri, whose mother, Tracy Mobley, was diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease and frontal-temporal dementia when Austin was 7 and she was 38.

This year, five teenagers ranging in age from 13 to 17 — including Mobley — were able to participate in “Austin's Camp Building Bridges” at New Life Ranch. Eleven had registered, but family situations



Above: Camp attendees take a break for an impromptu group photo

Right: Cat Sweatman shares her story in a support group session



prevented their attendance. The Hille Foundation and Bank of America were the primary sponsors of the camp.

One youth came from as far away as Arizona. Others came from Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas and Texas, said Margaret Love, a counselor and assistant program director of the Tulsa office of the Alzheimer's Association Oklahoma and Arkansas Chapter.

Children as caregivers has been cited as a hidden national problem, she said.

“The roles they play are the same as the adult roles,” Love said. “They feed them, cook for them, dress them, take them to the bathroom. Everything adult caregivers do, they do.”

The camp provides teenage caregivers support and education about the disease and teaches coping skills through journaling, photography and other activities. It also allows them to open up about their feelings.

Although the camp allows the teenagers to find emotional support and resources, its primary aim is to provide respite, Love said.

“We're trying to give them a chance to have some fun and be a kid,” she said.

• **Kim Archer/Reprinted with permission from Tulsa World**

Man battles Alzheimer's by sharing story

It wasn't like Larry Travis to chop firewood any size other than what he knew would fit in the stove or have to be told one day while driving that he was veering into the middle of the road.

Sure, his memory wasn't as sharp and his reasoning skills not as quick as they used to be, but Travis had chalked it up to old age. Feeling some questions needed answered, wife Ida called family doctor, J.R. Baker, who recommended they see Dr. Homer Brooks at White River Health System.

"I thought it was just the aging process," Travis said. "He said, 'Yeah, that's probably what it is, but let's check to make sure.'"

A series of memory tests would show Travis to be in the early stages of Alzheimer's, a progressive and irreversible neurological disorder with no known cure that destroys brain cells, causes memory loss and problems with thinking and behavior.

"I'd get confused," Travis said, and things that needed quick responses or decisions were difficult to make on the spot.

As many as 5.3 million Americans live with Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association. Travis said his grandmother had dementia from hardening of the arteries and his dad had dementia as the result of mini-strokes, however, neither were diagnosed with Alzheimer's. It was a diagnosis Larry and Ida hoped wasn't true that day in April 2009.

"When doctors tell you that you have a spot in your brain that's dead, that's pretty bad news," he said, leaning forward in his chair. Rather than lose

his mind, Travis said he contemplated ending it all. Once home, "I thought, 'I know how to handle this,'" he continued. "I thought my life was over."

Ordained in 1977, Travis, who retired from preaching four years ago, feeling he had done all he could after having been pastor at the Vine Street Baptist Church in Batesville, Arkansas for 17 years, however, knew his faith was stronger than that.

"I thought, 'God is in control.' ...It really is a

lack of faith" not to trust him. "I know he loves me and will take care of me," he said, and the thoughts of suicide never entered his mind again.

Medicine, however, helped him deal with the bouts of depression and sleeplessness, he said.

"The brain is the end of all your nerves, and

when you have (light) tremors ... you don't sleep — you just don't rest." Today, Travis averages about five hours a night. "I can make it on that," he said with a laugh. Although a terminal disease, "Alzheimer's is a very treatable disease," and this is what the 67-year-old wants others to understand.

With Aricept and Namenda, medicines that help slow the progression of Alzheimer's, Travis, who grew up on a cotton patch farm in Bay, is able to live as normal a life as he can even if it means taking one thing at a time, and he and Ida are grateful for the staff at White River Medical Center for all they've done to make sure of that.

Inspiration, however, lurks in the most unlikely places. For Travis, it's the day-to-day

"Everyone's going to die. ... I'm settled with God about it. He's given me peace. ... The only reason I don't want to die is (because of my wife) Ida."

Larry Travis,
Retired preacher,
Person with YO Alzheimer's

• “MAN BATTLES” CONT.

journey living with a terminal disease. Currently, he is writing a book, or, as he calls it, a “log,” of that journey titled “A Patient’s Perspective of Alzheimer’s.”

Recently, Travis was asked to be guest pastor for a congregation near Possum Grape and while he would feel honored to do so again at other churches, he has to be up front about having Alzheimer’s and let the decision be theirs and the Lord’s if they want him to speak, he said.

Meanwhile, Ida, continues to stand by her man both as wife and as a caregiver. Sometimes, “she’s worried more about it than me,” and while she may be overprotective, “I know she does it out of love and concern,” Travis said, smiling, looking at his wife of nearly 30 years.

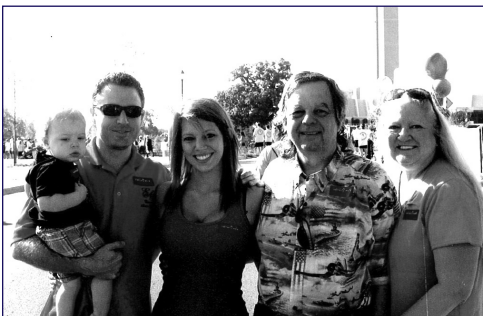
Next to Jesus Christ, her love and support have been as unconditional as humanly possible, he continued. Still, her biggest fear, Ida said, is what will happen to him if something happens to her, and she’s been assured by her family that she has nothing to worry about, she said.

Death, however, is something Travis tries not to worry about, “Everyone’s going to die. ... I’m settled with God about It. He’s given me peace.... The only reason I don’t want to die is (because of) Ida,” Travis said, adding that doctors have told him it’s possible for him to lead a productive life for 20 or 30 more years and has a greater chance of dying from something other than Alzheimer’s.

The grandfather of two, Travis has always had a thirst for knowledge and a strong memory even now; he recently discussed his journey with Alzheimer’s disease during the local Alzheimer’s Caregiver Support Group meeting. And even if just one person walked away having been touched by his story or learned something, for Travis, it will be worth it. “I’m totally at ease with having Alzheimer’s,” he said, adding that sharing what he knows and has learned with others is also something he wouldn’t mind continuing if given the chance. “And maybe that’s what the Lord wants me to do,” Travis said, smiling.

• **Lacey Mitchell/Edited to space and reprinted with permission from Batesville Daily Guard newspaper**

Stepping up at Memory Walk 2010



Top Left:
Alex, Chris, Shelby, Phil and Anna come together as a family to raise awareness at Memory Walk



Top Left:
Beverly and Dan have been long time supporters of the Alzheimer’s Association



Below Left:
Tom and Janet enjoyed Walk activities including a silent auction, booths, snacks and drinks after they walked the scenic Memory Walk course.



Below Left:
(left to right) Sydney, Bob, Paula, Shirley and Mike did not let the August heat keep them from walking this year

Alzheimer's Association Online Resources

Twitter & Facebook

- Updates on events, research, photos, discussions and more. To access Facebook search "Alzheimer's Association Oklahoma and Arkansas Chapter" or follow the Twitter tag: *AlzheimersOKAR*

Message Boards & Chat Rooms

- Visit www.alz.org to find interactive topics related to Alzheimer's and dementia

Early Stage Alzheimer's Web Portal

- Currently in development and will include information on what to expect in the early stages of Alzheimer's and how to connect with others

To offer input on online resources contact ronda.roberts@alz.org or 918.481.7767

