



**Statement of Teresa Lambert
Abilene, TX**

March 24, 2009

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is an honor for me to be here. My name is Teresa Lambert, and I represent one of the 5.3 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, a fatal degenerative disease. I am also one of the nearly half million people under the age of 65 with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia – who is struggling to confront the challenges this brings to one's doorstep. I want to thank the Alzheimer's Association – specifically the North Central Texas Chapter - for inviting me to come and share my story with you today; my story about life in the two year waiting period for Medicare.

Although I was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease last year at the age of 53, the signs began quietly enough when I was in my late 40's. Changes in my personality began to surface. I had always been a very outgoing, gregarious friendly person – but slowly this began to change. It got to a point where I just didn't enjoy being around people anymore – co-workers, people at my church, even family. And for anyone who knew me, they knew this was a real departure. People would come up to me at church and say, "Teresa what is wrong with you?" And I wouldn't have an answer for them.

I was the accountant for my husband's business for seven years. For so long, I had a natural talent – a gift for numbers, if you will. But eventually I just couldn't keep up. At the beginning, I didn't suspect it was Alzheimer's. And I know Alzheimer's. This disease has invaded my family's life for years. You see my father, Don Smith, who recently passed away, had Alzheimer's disease. I would see my dad struggle daily with the disease and my mother would struggle right alongside him, doing her best to care for him. Over the years, I tried to help them both as much as I could, but it has gotten to the point where I can't help them because I'm just trying to make it myself. Alzheimer's has touched my family for generations - including claiming the lives of my grandmother and great-grandmother.

For years, I just really didn't have the money for all tests or the time I knew I would have to devote to find out if I had Alzheimer's, but eventually, you just want to know. As I continued to forget more, I decided I wanted to know once and for all – for myself and my family. I went to my primary physician last fall and expressed my concerns. And for the next three months, I took tests – MRI's, blood tests - you name it, I took it. Also during that time, I began to mentally prepare myself for the possibility. When I got the diagnosis of Alzheimer's, I originally had sought help from the Alzheimer's Association for assistance with my dad, but the North Central Texas Chapter became invaluable to me as well - as I grappled with the challenges my own Alzheimer diagnosis and what it meant for me, my husband and my children..

My husband, Mike, is my primary caregiver. He has had to cut back tremendously on his business to care for me, and we are struggling. He has health coverage under the Veteran's Administration, but his plan does not cover me. I went to Social Security and was qualified for Social Security Insurance and I am on Medicaid. I had to spend down to impoverishment to get Medicaid coverage and it doesn't pay for everything that I need. I have one year and one month left in the waiting period before I'm eligible for Medicare coverage. In addition to Alzheimer's, I also have high blood pressure, asthma and migraines and I need medications for all of these various conditions – expensive medications. I am living in the waiting period without much needed health care coverage.

Let me tell you what life is like “in the waiting period.” It is having to choose between those medicines you can afford and those you cannot. It is having to forgo doctor appointments because you simply cannot afford to pay for them. There are so many things I need to do that I simply cannot afford to do. My husband and I are barely making it, and we fear what tomorrow will bring. At a time when I need coverage the most; the early stages of this disease when treatments and health services could help me to maintain independence a bit longer – I don't have it.

I am a fighter. I always have been. I've even survived cancer. But my greatest desire is to be an Alzheimer survivor. This is why I share my story with anyone who will listen. And I am telling you – people are hurting and in desperate need of health care coverage and waiting for two years is *just too long*. Given the experience of my family and countless others who have family members with disabling conditions, it is hard to understand how we can justify not doing whatever it takes to end the two year wait for Medicare.

I would like to offer a special thank you to Congressman Gene Green from my home state of Texas for his leadership on this issue. I would also like to thank New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman – both have tirelessly championed this issue and we want – no, *need*, to finally see this legislation pass in the 111th Congress.

I would like to offer a special thank you to the Alzheimer's Association for giving me the opportunity to share my story with you today.

Thank you all.