

**Testimony to the Aging & Older Adult Services Committee  
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I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the time and effort of this committee on behalf of the victims of Alzheimer's disease. Unlike many other diseases, there is no cure, and once diagnosed one is set on a long downward path.

My diagnosis was shocking. I was in my 30<sup>th</sup> year as a pilot for USAirways. I was beginning to fly transatlantic routes, something I had been looking forward to for many years. In training on a new aircraft, I began to have trouble memorizing policies, procedures, and the many numbers that must be committed to memory. This was the first time in my entire career I had any difficulty at all. I failed a check ride and was threatened with termination, which meant losing all benefits and medical coverage. Because of my exemplary record at USAirways, my union recommended I seek medical assistance to explain the problems I was having. USAirways gave me two weeks to find a diagnosis. I initially went to a psychologist, as I was told it might be due to stress and depression resulting from the airline's bankruptcy. USAir had eliminated our pensions and had imposed drastic pay cuts. I received a diagnosis of depression, which bought me time to seek further medical assistance. USAirways then gave me 30 days to get a definitive diagnosis. It is not easy to get appointments with specialists (who are in your medical plan), get needed tests, and receive a diagnosis in 30 days. But my job and benefits were on the line. It took longer than 30 days. I ended up seeing a psychiatrist, neurologist, psycho neurologist and finally the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center in Pittsburgh. After nine months, I was finally given a firm diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's. Because of the extreme and intense nature of airline training, my problems surfaced much sooner than most, and I was diagnosed at an early stage.

In some respects, this was a godsend. I was able to get on the latest medications while still relatively "normal". I had the advantage of being treated by some of the most knowledgeable physicians in the Alzheimer's field. I was accepted at the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, and have volunteered for every study and research opportunity I qualify for. This has

helped slow the progression of my decline, but there are things I have difficulty with now, and some things I can no longer do. While it seems so much has been taken away, I have had my eyes opened to so many things that I had taken for granted. But that is tempered by the guilt of my inability to be a breadwinner, and the knowledge that in a short time I will become a burden and eventually leave my family far too soon. With USAir's bankruptcy, I lost my pension, and USAir has been allowed to offset my Social Security benefits, leaving us in desperate financial straits. My family will shoulder the emotional, physical, and financial burdens. The stark realization of what will eventually happen to me, and what is worse, what will happen to my family, as I become completely dependant on them for my care, breaks my heart. The guilt and remorse I feel is a heavy burden.

As of now, I deliver for Meals on Wheels one day a week and volunteer at the St. John Specialty Care Home in Mars, PA. I work in the physical therapy department doing escort duties, which involves transporting patients (many of whom are suffering from Alzheimer's) from their rooms or activities to physical therapy and back. While there, I receive so much more than I give. I am humbled by the strength and dignity of the patients and how they are handling their diseases.

As for now, I will be focusing my remaining time and energy to advocate. I will advocate for caregiver relief, for quicker and easier diagnosis, and research to find a cure. I can advocate, but I can't make the changes alone. I need your help. As long as I can, I will speak and act to further these goals, but my time is limited and only your help will allow advocates such as myself, and the Alzheimer's Association, to provide the help for the thousands of victims who are traveling down this road, and for those who will be in the future.

At the end of the day, however, in spite of my diagnosis of Alzheimer's and the problems I have in day to day living, I am still a thinking, feeling, human being and want nothing more than to shelter my family and work towards a cure for this horrific disease.

Thank you.

