

Alzheimer's Diagnosis Brings Out the Fighter in Roger Bateman

By Michelle Leigh Smith

Although he's no longer working a 2 a.m. to 10 a.m. shift, retired radio anchorman Roger Holland Bateman finds himself squarely in the information game. For many years, he was covering news in Houston, Dallas and Omaha for Metro Network, on the 37th floor of Williams Tower. Prior to that, he worked for the Hobby family at KPRC.

Bateman has been asked to be a member of the National Alzheimer's Association Early-Stage Advisory Group. The 15-member group is made up of people in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease who retain the ability to participate in daily activities and can take part in a give-and-take dialogue.

"I was once in the business of informing the general public of what's going on in their city," says Bateman, a Bellaire High '68 graduate who now lives in Fondren Southwest. He grew up on Mimosa Street in Bellaire, the son of a Battle of the Bulge survivor, Marvin Bateman, who was awarded the Bronze Star, and homemaker Johnnie Holland Bateman.

"Now, I find myself in another role – that of a messenger sending a message – which is the fact that the disease is affecting more and more people every day – not just the people who have it, but their loved ones and caregivers as well."

Both his father and his grandfather had early onset Alzheimer's, but in those days, more often than not the symptoms were referred to as "senility."

"When my dad, Exxon Mobil accountant Marvin Bateman was diagnosed in 1975, we had never heard of Alzheimer's," Bateman says. "My father was a walker – one night he did not come back and we called the police. They found him at 61 Riesner and he did not know where he was. Dad was my introduction to the disease."

Burglar alarms were installed in the home to alert the family when he would leave.

"From my standpoint, the target is to get information out to the general public that there's a need to do something right now. Alzheimer's is a disease which is almost invisible still, even though most people have heard about it. However, funding for research is lagging behind efforts to eradicate other diseases like cancer and heart disease.

"The symptoms of the disease are showing up in people at a younger age now," Bateman explains. "I can remember my first incident. It was January, 2009 and I was driving out to my sister's house for dinner in Missouri City and I ended up in Alvin. That was the wakeup call. I said to myself, 'I've got it.'"

He was diagnosed in May 20, 2009 at age 59.

"While it was hard for me to believe Roger had contracted Alzheimers at such a young age, I was not surprised by the energy he has exerted to find a cure," says journalist Cindy Horswell.

"He has been a long-time fixture in the Austin and Houston radio news market since I knew him in the 1970s when working at KNOW, which was then the No. 1 station in that market. He not only had a strong, articulate way of speaking but also understood how to summarize complex stories without distorting them.

"He prided himself on accuracy," says Horswell. "But he's also been a wonderful friend to me and those who knew him."

Radio's one and only Sportmouth, Barry Warner, calls Bateman a "prose pro."

"When he would give the news, he gave me who, what, when, where and how," Warner says. "Roger was the anchor at the top **See Alzheimers page 10**



Newsman Roger Bateman has been appointed to the National Early Stage Advisory Board for the Alzheimers Association. He travels to Chicago and to Washington, D.C. to advocate for more funding for research and to raise awareness of the seriousness of Alzheimers in the hope that a cure can become reality. Photo by Diana Leggett

Early Stage Alzheimer's Notes

By Roger Bateman

As a person who's been diagnosed with Early Stage Alzheimer's Disease, I'm trying to do my part to help raise awareness of the seriousness of it in hopes that a cure can someday become reality.

Being a retired radio newscaster, I was once in the business of informing the general public of what's going on in their city. Now, I find myself in another role – that of a messenger sending a message – which is the fact that the disease is affecting more and more people every day – not just the people who have it, but their loved ones and caregivers as well.

From my standpoint, the target is to get information out to the general public that there's a need to do something right now. Alzheimer's is a disease which is almost invisible still, even though most people have heard about it. However, funding for research to find a cure is lagging behind efforts to eradicate other diseases like cancer and heart disease.

One of the many ways to get the message out can be through public service announcements (PSA's). One 30-second commercial containing specific actual numbers of cases and other information can have a significant impact.

Another way to help in getting the "public knowledge level" increased would be to solicit the Mayor and City Council for their help. One idea could be to sell "memory bricks" which would be placed in areas of the city. Once the locations are known, they could be published in a list. Through the sponsoring of an event, the bricks could be sold.

There's a real need to raise awareness of this disease with so many people being affected by it in Houston. That's not just those who have it, but their loved ones as well.

Houston is a city that has seen many medical breakthroughs in its history, and it's time that Alzheimer's Disease is added to the list of medical success stories.

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and bottom of the hour and he was a joy to be with. There's no diva in him, in a business full of egomaniacs. The fact that he's on the board is no surprise at all."

"We started at KXLY, the NBC news all news, every day station in 1975," says Warner, publisher of Saigon Text News and KILT 610 AM Talk Show host.

"Radio was his first love, but he was great at and the clients loved him," says June Rives, longtime Houston public relations executive. "Roger's greatest strength is his fortitude. He has a super positive attitude and deep down, he is a loyal, good person. He served as my vice president of June Rives Public Relations for several years. My engineering clients loved him. I was in Paris off and on, working on my travel excursions division, so he held down the fort here."

All cases are similar but no two are alike. He uses sticky notes and often visits the Museum of Fine Arts and also the Houston Museum of Natural Science, which all have programs for Alzheimers' patients providing opportunities for them to be treated as a whole, functional human being.

"As long as you keep a person's mind active, it really helps keep them out of nursing homes and stave off the full impact," she says his sister, Diana Leggett, a retired teacher who taught at Elrod, Parker and Anderson Elementary. In Texas, there are approximately 340,000 individuals with Alzheimer's and 853,000 unpaid Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers.

Currently more than five million Americans have Alzheimer's disease. That number is expected to triple by 2050.

"With regard to treatment - there is currently no available treatment to slow or stop the deterioration of brain cells in Alzheimer's Disease," says Richard Elbein, CEO of the Alzheimer's Association Houston & Southeast Texas Chapter. "The US Food and Drug Administration has approved five medications that temporarily slow worsening of symptoms for about six to twelve months, on average, for about half of the individuals who take them. Despite the current lack of disease-modifying therapies, studies have consistently shown that active medical management of Alzheimer's

and other dementias can significantly improve quality of life through all stages of the disease for diagnosed individuals and their caregivers. Active management includes appropriate use of available treatment options, effective integration of co-existing conditions into the treatment plan, coordination of care among physicians and others involved in maximizing quality of life for people with Alzheimer's or other dementias, and use of supportive services such as counseling, activity and support groups, and adult day center programs."

The association has just rolled out a new program called Trial Match which pairs patients with the best trial/research studies available. "Often people are at a loss to find a research protocol and this program is a wonderful way to receive high level care," Elbein says. There are lots of reasons to participate and it's been a challenge in the past for people to find those studies."

"Volunteering for clinical trials is one of the most immediate ways you can make a difference, not only for yourself, but also for generations to come," Bateman says.

"Without volunteers, finding a cure is virtually impossible. With so many new treatments being developed, chances are there are Alzheimer's clinical studies going on near you. Alzheimer's Association TrialMatch will help you find the right one: there's no cost and it's easy to use. Be a hero and get started today. Talk with your doctor, call 800 282-3900, or visit alz.org/trialmatch."

Bateman is encouraged that there is now growing awareness of Alzheimer's. He travels to Chicago this week for a conference and discuss new projects with 15 members of the Early Stage Advisory Board to learn more.

"We'll be staying at the Hard Rock Hotel," he says. "In D.C., we stayed at a bed and breakfast and I was able to see my first panda."

"The Alzheimers Association wants to put a face on the disease and show that it's not only the elderly who are impacted," says Leggett.