

Memory Moment

Our nation is no stranger to Alzheimer's disease & related dementia. The only top ten cause of death with no cure, prevention, or cure, Alzheimer's is the devastating reality for nearly 5.4 million Americans living with this disease. While growing awareness has made Alzheimer's disease research studies a common topic of the media, I've always felt that these reports miss the most powerful component: the human experience. Like many Americans, my first experience was when a family member, my grandma, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2002. Her struggles truly made these statistics come to life.

My relationship with my grandma was special. Growing up only a mile away from her home, I visited often and got used to her being a constant figure in my life. When my parents told me my grandma was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, I was not able to grasp how this would affect our family. The next twelve years were spent caring for her, first in her home, then in a local long-term care community. Alzheimer's took away what made her unique, and her care put an immeasurable strain on my family as we tried to adapt to the unpredictability of the disease.

The sad part of our story is our family's experience is not unique. Nearly every person I meet has been touched by Alzheimer's, whether a loved one has died from this disease or they are currently caring for a loved one. This horrible disease touches almost every family. The truly devastating part is that we are not talking about how we can support our fellow neighbors in need. There is a lot of stigma that surrounds Alzheimer's and other dementia, which makes living with the disease as well as the job of caring for a loved one isolating. If you have cared for a loved one with this disease, the best gift you can give to a family who is just starting their caregiving journey is an "I understand. I have been where you are at right now. I'm here for you."

My grandmother's journey with Alzheimer's inspired me to become a geriatric social worker, and to begin researching ways we could support families dealing with dementia. After my grandmother died from the disease in 2014, my family and I began Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness in the hopes of helping families who are in similar situations as we once were. We help get information about dementia and caregiving out in the community through education programs and our Forget-Me-Not Resource Center at the Effingham Public Library, as well as Memory Moment, this new monthly article in the Effingham Teutopolis News Report and Newton Press Mentor. Our hope for this monthly article is to provide a little insight and information about Alzheimer's disease, different types of dementia, caregiving, and healthy aging, but most of all, to support those who are living with this disease right now and to those taking care of those who do. To all of you reading this right now, you are not alone.

Written by Amy Sobrino, MSW, Co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness

For more information about Memory Moment & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nobsch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.