
M R. ALZHEIMER'S

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I was in eighth grade when my mom first told me there was something wrong with my dad. We didn't know what it was. My mom attributed it to stress, but there was something worse going on. At first, I started looking for signs, anything that could tell me what was going on. But what I didn't know was that I didn't need to look for it. It would find me.

Later that year, my dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's is terminal. Alzheimer's would murder my dad. Not quickly like his dad had been killed, but slowly. Slowly, it would poison his brain. Slowly, it would steal him away from me. Every part of him would disintegrate into dust before we even buried his body.

Alzheimer's is a sadistic psychopath. A serial killer who tortures the minds of the elderly, and occasionally dips into the minds of the youth, to fulfill his sick thirst for blood. For Alzheimer's, it isn't enough to kill his victims. They needed to suffer. Alzheimer's would torture them. Alzheimer's would torment their soul. They needed to be destroyed. Every one of their relationships needed to be smashed, every memory needed to burn, and every will needed to be crushed.

Alzheimer's makes sure that his targets and those around him beg for death. He torments his victims until he becomes like a saint when they finally pass. Alzheimer's kills.

Within months of my dad's diagnosis, Alzheimer's began his work. I laid on the couch next to my dad on a lazy Sunday morning. The TV blared. Meet the Press was on. The day was January 28th, 2009. It would mark the beginning of the end.

A review of Barack Obama's inauguration came on. The analysts were deliberating when my dad broke our silence.

"Did I ever tell you about the time I went to Barack Obama's inauguration? He called me up to stand next to him. I was on the stage when the first African American president was called into the Presidency of the United States."

Exactly a week before, I sat next to my dad and watched the inauguration on the TV.

At first, I thought it was a joke. But the severity and seriousness suggested otherwise. He wasn't kidding. This memory was real to him.

The diagnosis the doctor had made was real. The minor forgetfulness and disorientation was real. My dad was dying.

Tears welled in my eyes, but I buried my face into my dad's shoulder. He wouldn't understand why I was crying. The doctor said about half of Alzheimer's patients never understand they have it. My dad would never know he had Alzheimer's.

For nearly all of high school, it wasn't discussed. No one asked. No one looked. Mental illness is not the type of thing people talk about. The elephant in the room that no one would talk about.

The process of neurodegeneration was taking place. Days would go by and my dad would forget what he wanted to say. Then, he would forget where he was. Then, he would forget who I was. The good days were far and few in between. So much so, that I never wished for a good day. On those days, I felt as tangled as my dad. I felt like Alzheimer's was injecting my brain with his poison. I felt as if all my neural pathways were being tangled and overrun with amyloid beta plaques. On those days, nothing made sense. On those days, I wished they would just end. My brain couldn't make a switch like that. Alzheimer's was holding my dad hostage. He was boasting.

Alzheimer's would dangle my dad right in front of me, daring me to take the bait. I'd clutch on to my dad, but he would rip him away from me again. Alzheimer's did not offer mercy. Instead, he derived pleasure in utter misery. He derived pleasure in seeing one's family and friends as weak as the victims themselves. He derived pleasure in playing with the human soul like an eight year old boy would smash together his playthings and throw them on the ground. When Alzheimer's offered hope, it was because without hope he could not lead you into more despair.

Some days I'd come home, and Alzheimer's was playing a trick on my dad. He'd strap my dad down in his chair and show pictures until they became real in his mind. One day, he refused to leave the house because Alzheimer's had convinced him he was being hunted. Alzheimer's told him he had inherited 500 million dollars. My dad wanted to give it away to charity, but he couldn't leave the house. "The people" would kill him.

On other days, I wouldn't even leave the house and my dad wouldn't recognize me. Alzheimer's would whisper into his ears and cover my dad's eyes until my face and voice no longer made sense to him. My dad would yell, "Get away from me. Where's my son?"

Misplaced guilt would overwhelm me. I was exactly what my dad was looking for but I was unable to give it to him. Why couldn't I help him? I'd try desperately to calm him down. I'd have to leave the room so he'd forget that I was the demon who stole his son.

My dad's life would end with me screaming his name as drool dribbled out of his mouth. His blue eyes vacant and rolling to the back of his head.

Alzheimer's work was done. Within minutes, my dad would forget to breathe.

The man that killed my dad hasn't been caught. A few times before, the investigators thought they'd identified him. He lingers deep in the dark alleys of the mind, always just out of reach. He cowardly hides behind what's most precious to us, to ensure any uncalculated steps lead to self-destruction.

With an aging population, Alzheimer's will continue to take more and more victims. While no time should be wasted in life, plans shouldn't be thrown out altogether. It's easy to disregard Alzheimer's a criminal affecting only those at the end of their lives, but he's a threat for anyone who wants to live. Alzheimer's is not a natural way to die; it's a cold-blooded murder of the mind and body. Dementia is a serious issue that needs no exaggeration, only the truth.