

Along the track

Someone will Remember for You

Alzheimer's or any form of dementia is cruel. It is difficult to stand on the sidelines as this insidious disease takes hold. If we were witnessing an accident or some mishap, we would step in and do what we could to fix it. But there is no cure. It just keeps on keeping on until the end. Everyone involved feels this pervading sense of helplessness.

Alzheimer's has claimed two of my relatives; one recently died. Things began to unravel for him some years ago. At first, we noticed his mild confusion and difficulty in remembering words, then in following lengthy conversations. As time went on, his sight began to fail. But he fought it all the while aided by new discoveries, new drugs which made some welcome improvements to his situation, if only for a short time.

In a recent popular TV series, the main character was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The last exchange between he and his daughter struck me as important:

'It's just moments now. Everything. It's just moments now. They don't join up.'
'What don't?' his daughter asks.
'My memories. My life doesn't join up. I can't remember.'
His daughter says to him: 'Someone else will remember. Someone will remember for you'.

Nothing can make up for the absence of someone we love. There is no substitute – that's why we loved them in the first place! Alzheimer's seems to take that person away, ever so slowly at times but it is still important to tell them that we love them and it is all the more important to remember for them, treasuring memories, theirs and ours particularly in circumstances such as these. Alzheimer's is a hard disease. Appreciating the little moments and seeking out the simple, beautiful things in life can help keep things in some sort of balance. In his final days, I watched as his children and grandchildren sat by his bed and talked about what was happening in their lives, telling stories and recounting memories and, when all else failed, they read to him.

As my relative began to slip away, too often I heard expressions like: 'I wish I had told him...', 'I wish I had.....' 'We should have...' I heard more than one person say; Oh, if I could have just one more minute with him....' Of course that will always happen, there is never enough time, but don't wait.

Do it now. Tell those who are dear to you that you love them. And do it often. For some of us, that does not come easily so it is all the more special when we say it. Don't wait to do things we want to do with others. Too often, we wait until the time is right, and it never is. Too often, we leave it until too late. So take stock sometimes. When was the last time I told my loved ones that I did! When we look at others, do we think that theirs is a life I should have had, or am I doing what I love, with those I love? Do I keep in touch with friends? Do I say 'sorry' sooner rather than later, or not at all? Am I making memories to keep or just money and possessions to hand on? Memories are some of our most precious possessions, or they can be anyway. Do I launch out each day, armed with my wishful thinking, but never really doing much to make that come to some sort of reality?

We live on in the memory of others. We each have memories of loved ones that we treasure. Over the years, if we share those memories, we are able to recapture in a sense the person who has died. He or she is still with us. And it goes both ways. Clive James wrote a poem lamenting that too many of his friends are dead.

Well, good to see you. Sorry I have to fly.
I'm struggling with a deadline, God knows why,
And ghosts keep interrupting. Think of me
The way I do of you. Quite often. Constantly. (We being ghosts Spectator, Feb 2, 2008)

For those who believe in life after death, in the 'communion of saints,' we believe that we are still connected, still in touch in some way or other. We think of each other, or we ought to, not in some maudlin sense of never letting go, but just being that 'Someone else who will remember, the Someone who will remember for you.'

Regards
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