

A Letter from Heaven's Heart - Alzheimer's is creating new unexpected challenges

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Wiveka and I are amazing! That's my opinion anyway. Over the last 40 years we have lived in many places and traveled to many countries, raised a beautiful family and served others as often as possible. It has been a life filled with many wonders, more than a few doses of pain and sorrow, and friendships that have made us richer than we could have ever imagined. We have been so blessed that it is almost impossible not to believe in a loving God. What we have received through living lives focused on others makes it almost impossible to complain when things are harder than normal. We just need to think about the love so many have shared with us and we get filled up.

Over the last few years, Wiveka's Alzheimer's has progressed and this is creating new unexpected challenges. It's like slowly losing someone. It is like parts of her are being erased, leaving blank spaces that were once filled with strong emotions, opinions and a very Swedish sense of humor. For me, this is the hardest part of the disease. Conversations are limited to good morning with coffee kind of talk as the reference points for deeper or practical conversations are hard for her to pull up. For Wiveka, this is very difficult as she struggles to find the right words. God, this is heartbreaking. She wants to help but can no longer drive, cook, clean, wash clothes, use the computer or read a book. She often gets overwhelmed by the things she can no longer remember.

She can still dance to her favorite music, enjoy good food, go for long walks and find joy in nature. She is still a beautiful person that makes me laugh and smile. Laughter really is the best thing to help the heart, mind and body. We try to laugh often especially when the Alzheimer's creates odd moments.

I have found that it helps so much when I remind myself that my wife is still my love and that it is the disease manifesting itself, not her. This makes things less hurtful, as I know they are coming from the disease, not her heart. I would like to get a full night's sleep one night but the sharing when she wakes up

or the things, she is agitated about bring us closer for a few special moments. One night she turned on all the lights and was looking for a swimsuit. It was a yellow two-piece that she wore before we had children (we have not seen that one in over 30 years). Another night she woke me up and explained that she knew I was Mike but that I was not her Mike - that was an entertaining conversation. She still has really good days and has, I believe, become kinder and happier, and this makes being her main caregiver easier and her friends stay closer.

Our son and his wife Felicia bought a house for us next to theirs. They cover the mortgage payments and the utilities. I mean, who does that? The love they share with us and the level of care they offer is humbling and the financial sacrifices to do this for us - well, it's just unbelievable. This allows us to make it on the \$1,100 Social Security we get each month without the stress of looking for ways to make money. It gives me more time to spend with Wiveka, focusing on the quality time we still have.

It has been difficult to shift from a life of independence to depending so much on others, especially on family and friends. Mika and her family often have Wiveka over for sleepovers and invite her on their adventures. Friends come over and spend time with Wiveka, going for walks, reading books out loud, playing board games, going out for lunch or ice cream and just talking.

There are many things we would like to do but don't due to the lack of fun money. Those who know us well know that we were never savers but chose to spend what we had each month down to the last penny. Organizing cookouts and big dinners for friends has always been the norm for us. Helping friends when they needed something has always been a source of joy for us.

Adjusting to not having that financial freedom, I think, will be one of my biggest challenges but over time it will work out.

We are blessed beyond any measure with all we have. So many do not have the family, friends and the love that we have. Our children and their families were there 110% when we needed them and that fills both Wiveka and I with so much hope, feelings of security and peace of mind as we manage getting older and exploring ways to cope with the unknown challenges Alzheimer's can bring.

We want to send out a big thank you to all those sending prayers and healing energy, and we will send ramblings as things develop.

Lots of Love - Mike and Wiveka