

DETROIT NATIVE SUN

Enlightening the Community

Taking memory for granted



By Evelyn M. Bingham
SUN COLUMNIST & POET



Most of us never stop to realize the importance of memory to each of us as we live and interact with one another each day. We take the gift of memory as just something that we're entitled to, or something that is supposed to be. Each of us has or

will have a lapse or loss of memory for a short period of time, probably each day, and are very annoyed and downright frustrated when we cannot recall a face, a name or a fact. These occurrences are normal for most of us and we usually remember later, but what happens when faces, facts, past memories, loved ones and in essence your whole life disappears and leaves you forever, never to be recalled except perhaps for a few days when you are considered to be lucid and then will relapse again.

Many of us know or have heard of age related problems of the elderly such as losing their memories, foggy or dim memory, dementia or the dreaded Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's is no longer a disorder of the elderly, early symptoms have been documented as early as 45 years of age.

Alzheimer's disease was named after A. Alzheimer, a German physician who first described it. It is a progressive, irreversible disease characterized by degeneration of the brain cells and commonly leading to severe dementia. In this country there are 5.4 million people who are afflicted with Alzheimer's. Out of the 10 deadliest diseases in the U.S., Alzheimer's is the only one without a way to prevent, cure or even slow its progression, yet there have been great advances in understanding the disease and progress is being made each week, each month, and every day, needless to say, there is still a tremendous amount to do!

The earliest recognizable signs of Alzheimer's include:

- Difficulty performing tasks like balancing a checkbook or playing complex card games---tasks that take some thought, but used to be easy
- Getting lost on familiar routes
- Language problems, such as trouble finding the name of familiar objects
- Losing interest in things previously enjoyed---having a flat mood

- Misplacing items
 - Personality changes and loss of social skills
- Your doctor may make a diagnosis by:
- Complete physical exam; including neurological exam
 - A review of medical history and symptoms
 - A mental status examination
 - Rule out other causes of dementia, such as anemia, a brain tumor or severe depression

There is a greater awareness about Alzheimer's today, and we need to realize that you don't wake up with it one day, it is the manifestation of things happening to the brain over a long, long period of time.

The brain is made up on 100 billion neurons, and it changes as we age. But the brain of an Alzheimer's patient changes in a very specific way. Physically, there are plaques -- deposits of a protein fragment called beta-amyloid, and tangles---twisted fibers of a protein called tau -- in the brain of a person with Alzheimer's. Doctors are now closing in on what causes the buildup, and precisely how it short circuits the neural pathways. Some of it might be genetic predisposition, though some doctors are quick to point out that your parent's Alzheimer's doesn't automatically destine you to the same disease.

This disease has very close ties to my family. Two of my fathers brothers, the son of one of the brothers and a male first cousin were all diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease years before they died. It is an extremely debilitating illness which affects the persons personality and ultimately completely erases all memory of people, surroundings, loved ones and renders them totally helpless in their ability to care for themselves in any way.

As we age it is extremely important that we remain as healthy as possible, with special attention to proper diet and regular exercise. It is imperative to remain mentally stimulated through puzzles, books, games, hobbies or work which is challenging and enjoyable. We must remain both physically and socially active.

The Southfield based Alzheimer's Association---Greater Michigan Chapter is an excellent source of education, information and assistance and support to families and caregivers of Alzheimer's patients.

There is an incredible Academy Award winning movie out now about a doctor, who is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. The movie is entitled *Still Alice*, and it recounts a personal experience of a doctor as she is living and adjusting to the debilitating effects the disease is having upon her life and upon those who love her.

An un-bee-lievable spring day

By Evangelist Barbara Colbert
SUN COLUMNIST

Along with Punxsutawny Phil, my co-worker, a Beekeeper, told me that his bees had already doubled in capacity this year, and that this too, was a sure sign of an early spring. For me, having grown weary of the drudgeries of winter, this was truly encouraging news. It even brought to mind an experience I'd had many years ago. Another time when I became enraptured by the prospect of the springing of spring.

Even though it was officially Spring, dark clouds loomed overhead threatening snow or rain, signs way too reminiscent of the recently departed winter. As I felt my spirit begin to weigh heavy, suddenly, a golden ray of sunshine streamed across my path. Elated and instantly rejuvenated, I saluted the heavens, "Hallelujah!!"

My house was nearly 100 years old. There were doors and windows that had not been disturbed for at least 40 years. But today, because I felt extra jubilant, I was fully charged - invincible and unstoppable! I surveyed the kitchen and the brilliant sunlight streaming across the room. My overzealous imagination convinced me that the sparkling sunbeams were actually chiming "Let me in . . . let me in!" I had a brainstorm. Why not open the backdoor of this stuffy old kitchen, and really let the sunshine in?! So, with hammer in hand, I began to bang and pry at the door with vigorous determination. It seemed that the door's weathered wooden frame had fused to the house itself, stubbornly resisting separation. Finally, it began to creak open, and a brisk breeze slithered through the rusty screen panel. Inhaling the fresh spring air, I smugly thought, "What a great idea to finally open this door!!"

The first bee attacked while I was eating my sausage. Jumping up from the

table sending sausage, eggs and grits, clear across the room, slapping my cheek, I bellowed "What the . . .?!!!" Then, from out of nowhere, came twenty, forty, sixty, countless more! Forming a unified front, the hostile yellow jackets surrounded me, positioned for battle. I grabbed the newspaper from the table now blanketed with black and yellow striped bees, and began to wildly swing like a human propeller. Unthreatened, the little creatures not only multiplied, but began closing in, ready to make me their Sunday breakfast. Hopelessly trapped and gripped with fear, I bolted under the table, arms over my head, pathetically sobbing like a baby. Clearly, I now understood why the door had not been opened.



Then, amidst the swarming of the angry bees,

and my uncontrollable sobbing, a small voice whispered "Child, get the bug spray . . ." I whined, "Oh no! I can't!" He said "I'll protect you . . . now unless you plan on staying under the table the rest of your life -.child, get the bug spray!" Crawling on all fours, I inched my way from under the table to the cabinet, and grabbed a rusty old can of Black Flag. As I feverishly jammed down the nozzle, there was nothing. Zilch. Nada. The bees hovered around amused and undaunted. Then suddenly, the nozzle exploded, releasing a midst so powerful, the bee brigade began to instantly drop, literally, like flies.

Battle worn and bewildered, I wondered what in the world happened? How did a day of joyful exuberance turn into crazy disaster? Well, the Lord speaks to us in many ways, adages and proverbs rooted in His wisdom, warning us that if it aint broke don't fix it; leave well enough alone; and just in case we don't yield to the former, then remember, God really does watch over fools and babies!

Alzheimer's disease

By Evelyn M. Bingham

Alzheimer's is a mysterious robber
Alzheimer's is serious, and *no* joke
Alzheimer's will forcibly extract its dues from you
And then, will leave you devastated and flat broke!

Alzheimer's robs you of your memories
Also your logic, personality, your being, and is ruthlessly uncaring, and unkind
You drift in and out, on the mercy of the unknown
In short, Alzheimer's robs you of your mind!

It is extremely hard on the loved ones
It is frustrating and maddening, for the *person* to muddle through
It is equally frightening to wonder, if *you*, are carrying the gene
That could cause this tragedy to happen to you.

Just because this happens in *your* family
Doesn't mean that *you* will be affected
You can't sit around and mope, you *must* live your life
Always make sure that you and God, are heart to soul connected!

Alzheimer's could happen to any of us
This, is a fact we can't deny
Be thankful and grateful that more days make you smile
Than the *surprisingly fewer* ones, that make you cry!

Be of courage, if you're a loved one or a caregiver
Your affect and influence may be far more reaching, than you can see
But, just your normal, hopeful, positive and loving presence
May cause them to have *more* and *longer* periods of lucidity.

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