

# Thoughts from Adrienne

By Adrienne Rosenberg



**H**ow does a caregiver respond to the death of a loved one with dementia? While the majority of relatives and friends respond to the death of a loved one with feelings of grief, loss and sorrow, the death of a person with Alzheimer's often brings a sense of relief. It is not that there is not a feeling of sadness, but

the abnormal behavior and strain of seeing a loved one who is confused and often does not recognize you, is difficult to balance with the person who was once vibrant, happy and participatory in life's activities. Perhaps a story from a person's own perspective may help explain it better.

"The November day in 1979 was gray and overcast. Deep shadows cast against the kitchen wall. I lingered over a cup of coffee as I waited for a call from the neurologist. It was the day the neurologist would share with Dad his diagnosis of what was wrong with Mom. My anxiety grew as the cold autumn day fore-

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told a storm coming. I wondered if it could be any of the things my Dad and I had discussed. We wondered if she had my grandfather's disease, senility. Perhaps it was a brain tumor. Perhaps it was a mental disorder. Certainly it was something that could be fixed. She was only 56. It took great courage for my father to enter his wife of 33 years in the hospital. But she could barely function.

I was glad Dad had agreed to get help for her. Symptoms had been slow in coming. For the past couple of years, she had been complaining of leaving a room and then forgetting what she wanted to do. Once in a while she burned a pot of soup or other foods on the stove. She remembered something was cooking only when the heavy odor of burning food permeated the house. Her checkbook, usually carefully in order would be incorrectly balanced. Birthday cards, something she had always been diligent about, were sent late or not at all. It became easier for Mom to

remember things from the past and to confuse what was happening in the present with persons or events from the past. These were not too difficult to handle, and we attributed this to normal forgetfulness.

In the next phase of Mom's deterioration, she entered into a state of confusion and fear. She became aware that something was happening to her which she couldn't understand, and it frightened her. During this period, Mom was even more confused about people, places and things; she became agitated when out in a crowd. She began hiding things in the house and putting on several layers of clothes, some often backwards or inside out.

Attempting to get her to quit were often met with resistance and hostility. We were afraid to leave her alone or let her drive. Mom had been an active, out-going, fun-loving person. Now she was withdrawn, secretive, and was

slowly losing touch with her former life. She would sometimes call Dad by another relative's name or accuse him of not taking her home. This was hardest on him.

The telephone's shrill ring interrupted my thoughts. I took a deep breath and answered. Dad said the neurologist stated he firmly believed Mom had Alzheimer's Disease. He stated she would only get more confused and would eventually be incapacitated. He could not tell how she would progress. But it turned out that those who get it in their 50's usually have it progress faster than those who are older when it first hits. It may be we would have to put her in a home when she could no longer be managed at home. Finally, he said there was no cure.

I was devastated. The hard facts of what the doctor said made me shudder with disbelief. After I got off the phone with Dad, I leaned my head on the kitchen table and sobbed. Emotional pain swelled up and seemed to choke my breath away. I felt anger that my mother and dad should have to suffer at a time in their lives when they had planned to enjoy themselves. And what would this mean for the quality of my life? I felt guilty at that thought; but, nonetheless, it was there.

The next 12 years were ones of making sure Mom was taken care of. We all were affected emotionally, financially, and with worry. It was hard for all of us to reconcile this woman who gradually became a vegetable with the woman, wife, and mother she had once been. It was especially hard on Dad. What helped us was to attend an Alzheimer's Support Group once a month. There we learned we were not alone and could talk to others who were experiencing the stress and nightmare

of watching a loved one slowly deteriorate in mind and body. We learned how to deal with the memory loss and the difficult behavior--as more and more brain cells died.

So, when I got the call that Mom had died (by that time, she was living in a nursing home), I felt relief that the burden we had all felt was over. I felt free from the worry. In some

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ways, I felt guilty that I felt this way. But the mother I had known had "died" many years before. Now we would not have to watch her, my dad and others suffer because of a disease for which there is no cure.

Jewish Family services co-sponsors an Alzheimer's Support Group with the Alzheimer's Association on the third Monday of each month from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Shalom Park building. There is no charge for this group. To learn more about this and to gain support from others who are going through the stages of Alzheimer's, please call Jewish Family Services at 364-6594 or 364-6596 or the Alzheimer's Association at 532-7392.

## ROLE OF THE JEWISH PRESS

### A Local View

By Maurice A. Weinstein

During the 50 years of the American Jewish Press Association, the major source of news has been the events leading to the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel and thereafter: the wars, the immigration of Jews from Arab countries, relationships with the U.S., peace with Egypt, the immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union and the changing political circumstances within Israel.

If the Declaration of Principles with the PLO succeeds, if the Washington Declaration with Jordan emerges into a peace treaty and the shuttle diplomacy with Syria evolves into a peace-treaty, then Israel will be at peace with its immediate neighbors. Of course, there will be continued but diminishing terror.

Israel has diplomatic relations with 147 countries - the most recent being Russia, China and the Vatican. Israel and Morocco agreed to establish mutual liaison offices. There should be an abandonment of the Arab boycott or a substantial diminution of it. Israel will become a normal nation-state with a substantially improved economic future.

Eventually there will be a severe reduction in news from Israel. The role of the Jewish Press should be enhancement in the dissemination of the entire spectrum of Jewish thought—continuing Jewish education.

Philip M. Klutznick once said: "An uninformed Jewish community will be the tragedy of the future."

Mr. Weinstein is a prominent local attorney and past chairman of the International Council of B'nai B'rith.

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