



The Memory People Page

Life has its turns and sometimes we can find ourselves on a road that we never could have dreamt of. That is what happened to Charles Schoenfeld, author of "A Funny Thing Happened on my Way to the Dementia Ward."

In this issue of our Memory People newsletter, Charles tells the story of how dementia came into he

and his Mother's lives, and the dramatic effects it had on them both.

Charles, tell us a little about yourself and how dementia came into your life.

I was born, raised, and live in Wausau Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, golf, and quite a bit of volunteering are how I spend my days. I've been married to Maggie twenty-five years. We have four grown children. I'm a high school grad and Vietnam veteran. After my service I worked five years in a paper mill, then twenty-seven years as a delivery driver for UPS.

My independent, widowed mother *finally* agreed to live with us at age ninety-six. A year later a broken hip forced placement in the nursing home a block from my house. After another year had passed she was moved to a dementia unit. I normally visited twice a day.

Initial apprehension at visiting a dementia ward turned to commitment as I grew to know and enjoy the other residents and their families. At age fifty-six I retired from UPS and signed up for CNA training. [70% pay cut.] I spent six and one half years working on three different dementia wards. The most profound, rewarding experience of my life.

I then authored a book, *A Funny Thing Happened on my Way to the Dementia Ward/Memoir of a Male CNA*. As a first time, self-published author I've learned gaining a wider audience is my greatest obstacle. Computer illiterate and socially inept does not help. However, I'm enjoying success in Wisconsin, speaking at a wide variety of health care events around the state.

My book was the top selling non-fiction at our local book store twenty-seven straight weeks, and this coming May I am honored to be a Presenter at Wisconsin's Annual Alzheimer's and Related Dementia's Convention.

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What did you find to be the most rewarding part of your job, Charles, in working with dementia patients?

For me the rewards from caregiving for dementia patients were of a personal nature. They didn't show up on the front page of the home-town paper or in my bank account. They did however provide the opportunity to measure my own self-worth. That is a treasure many people will never get the chance to realize.

Learning to be humble-to expect nothing in return-to count my own blessings-the sensation of God's hand on my shoulder. Those are the rewards that caregiving blessed me with.

We all search for the purpose in our lives. Mark Twain said: "The two most important days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you figure out why." The first time I saw a dementia patient in need and I was able to help, I had my answer.

What would you say that you learned from working with dementia patients?

I have a girlfriend at the nursing home. Her name is Theresa, and she's no dream date. She has Alzheimer's and all the issues that go with it. With the exception of the nursing home doctor whom she likes, I seem to be the only person who can calm her down when she struggles.

Theresa is in a wheelchair, so most of our dates consist of me pushing her up and down the hallways. In the three years or so we've been "dating," she has lost her ability to communicate in a way that can be recognized.

Mark Twain said: "The two most important days in your life are the day you were born, and the day you figure out why."

However, she does like to sing, you never know when it's coming, and if it is a song and melody I'm familiar with, our ability to communicate takes a giant leap forward. She began singing to me one day with words I recognized: "Jesus loves me this I know, cause the bible tells me so."

What I've learned: If we take the time and look close enough, we can all still see what heaven sees. That illness changes circumstance, not people.

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What advice would you give to a caregiver for someone with dementia?

Since my mother developed dementia at such an elderly age, most of my experience comes from a professional point of view.

Family care giving is difficult when compared to professional care giving because you knew the person your loved one used to be.

This is some advice I would give:

- *Guard your own health - recognize when you've reached your limits.
- *When it comes from someone you trust, accept help when offered.
- *Even on days when you have struggled, accept you are doing your best.
- *Never take things personally, it's always the disease.
- *Be willing to accept the day you may no longer be able to provide the level of care needed.
- *Will you have regrets? Probably. But guilt does not belong to you. It rests with those who cringed when you stood up.

Professionals can struggle because those under your care soon become an adopted family, and you lose them, one by one, time after time.

You hang their picture on the wall, and turn your eyes towards the door, for the next person, and family, to enter your life.



For the professionals, this is the advice I would give:

*There are days when your efforts seem to go unnoticed, and setbacks outweigh rewards. Here is a lesson I learned. The last few months of my mother's life she wasn't speaking to me anymore, often wheeling away after I'd just sat down. But, just three months earlier, an activity aide sat down with my mother, and helped her cut out and sign a paper butterfly to present to me.

After a decade it is still in my wallet. Today, when I remember my mother, I don't think of the woman who wheeled herself away, I reach for my butterfly. "No matter how small the task may seem, never underestimate the significance it may hold for others."

*Don't get caught up in the dramas of a large facility, or by others who don't share your passion. "Drink upstream from the herd."

*Even in tragedy there can be humor. Search for it, use it, and share it. It is your shield, and the life blood of human kindness.

~ Thank you so much Charles! ~

3,000 Members!

Memory People hit another milestone on March 28th, as we welcomed our 3,000th member!

While we never could celebrate that so many individuals are in need of support and information in this struggle with Alzheimer's and dementia, it is wonderful that 3,000 are now walking this journey with those who understand and offer love and support every day.

Some might say that Memory People is all about the numbers. And we could not agree more. Each new member, each tick of the number count, means one more life has found the 24/7 love and support, hope and help, in Mp.

Each number is a member. A very special, loved member that is no longer alone in this journey. We encourage all of our members to pass that on to friends and family and anyone who needs support for Alzheimer's, dementia, or memory impairment.

Here's to the next 3,000!



We want to remember those we have lost to these diseases. They are gone, but never forgotten. We hold them close in our hearts every day. Our work is for them. We fight on for them, and all who are affected by Alzheimer's and dementia.

The Memory People Page is a publication of Memory People™, an Alzheimer's and memory impairment support and awareness group on Facebook. If you would like to start receiving this newsletter, please email leeannechames@gmail.com and we will be happy to include you on our email list. If you or a loved one has been touched by a memory impairment, if you are an advocate, or if you just want to know more about these diseases, please join us at Memory People. Just type 'Memory People' in your Facebook search bar and click on 'Join Group'.

"bringing Awareness, one person at a time..."