

Memory Moment

The Power of Love

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW

When I think about relationships I've been able to witness throughout my life, I consider myself privileged that almost every day I see examples of 'great love' in my work with families affected by dementia. I recently began reading a book called *Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade*. This book was written by some of the same authors who created the Five Love Languages. One of the core tenets that they subscribe to is that true love is a choice. Even though someone may fall in love or be born into a family to love, it really comes down to each person's choice to love, regardless of the circumstances. And throughout our lives, we do this exact thing. We make the choice to schedule quality time with our loved ones; we make the choice to spend time searching for a perfect birthday gift; we make the choice to share our feelings with people. *Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade* explores how people make the choice to love when a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or other related dementia is present. How do we love someone as the relationship we've known our entire lives changes or how the way that we express we love them isn't the same anymore?

One of my most memorable clients, John* cares for his wife Betty* who was diagnosed several years ago with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Only in their 50s, John has to balance working a full-time job with meeting Betty's care needs. As her Alzheimer's has progressed, Betty now needs complete supervision and assistance with her activities of daily living (going to the bathroom, dressing, bathing, etc.). The first time I met John, he was in bad shape. He was struggling to find a consistent caregiver who could help Betty while he went to work. Beyond the practical struggles of caregiving, he was also feeling that the love of his life, whom he had built a home & raised 3 children with, was gone. In the midst of feeling the grittiness of providing total care for someone, John was struggling to find any joy and meaning of their marriage. Over the course of the year I coached and supported John, I saw a number of changes. First, we were able to find an adult day program for Betty to attend while John went to work. This program made a noticeable difference in Betty's quality of life. Every morning when John would drop her off, he said that the moment they would turn the corner and the adult day program building would come into view, Betty started beaming and showing excitement. John felt at ease that Betty was enjoying her day, and that, in turn, caused him to really think about what brings them joy. The last time I spoke with John, he was telling me how his entire mindset has changed. When I first began working with him and Betty, he was ready for it (the Alzheimer's) to end. He was tired of the suffering, and could not find any happiness in their lives. Now, he had made the choice to see the ways that their love

and marriage were alive, even if they look a little different prior to the disease. Instead of waiting for Betty to pass away, John is now looking at each day as an opportunity to bring her and himself happiness.

Amazingly, John & Betty's story is not unique. Each and every day, I see the power of true love in the families I meet. It's humbling to see the strength and power of these families' love for each other. Regardless of the challenges and changes that Alzheimer's disease has brought into their lives, these families choose to focus on their love and how to show it each and every day.

For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.