

# Effect of Alzheimer's on family inspires appreciation for each day

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My grandpa never was one to say much.

For as long as I can remember, he's always been the quiet type but always part of my life. He and my grandma would be at every sporting event — rain or shine.

We'd have the occasional sleepover at their little three-bedroom, one-floor house in Kansas City, Mo. It would always consist of the same thing — “The Sound of Music,” my two younger sisters and I playing in our homemade cardboard houses and cars, ghost stories before bed and a cookies and cream ice cream cone from 7-Eleven.

We'd laugh our heads off as my grandma would tell us stories of her childhood on the farm in Eldon, Mo. She reminded us of simpler times when she would buy a candy bar for 5 cents and how she and her friends would run around for hours during the summer.

My grandpa would sit in his chair and laugh with us, still never saying much.

Years later, my grandpa still doesn't say much. But it's not because he doesn't have anything to say, it's because he doesn't remember.

My grandpa has Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's is the most common form of Dementia and causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior.

Although he can remember stories from back when he was in the army, he has trouble with his short-term memory.

He can't remember how to do habitual activities, nor can he remember what he had for breakfast.

He can't remember his birthday. He can't remember his family members' names.

He's starting to become too much for my grandma to handle, so she has to send him to a daycare a few times a week.

Whenever the family gets together, we ask him basic questions just to see if he has a vague remembrance of the answer.

He doesn't.

He's wandered off a couple of times — left the house and

gotten lost.

He sometimes falls and hurts himself.

They try to hide it from my sisters and me, but we all know the inevitable truth.

Despite everything he's gone through, though, my grandpa always has a smile on his face. And on the rare occasion that he does speak, it usually makes me laugh until I cry.

He's taught me so many things both directly and indirectly.

He taught me how to find the only four-leaf clover in a cluster of hundreds of three-leaf clovers. He taught me how to draw a dog using the outline of my thumb. He taught me how to see the good side of everything and how to laugh at myself.

My grandpa still doesn't say much. Whenever he and my grandma come over, he pulls out his newest collectable he found in an old drawer or on the side of the road. He then retreats to the kitchen table and picks up whatever has words on it and begins to read it. It can be the newspaper, instructions or a food label. Doesn't matter to him.

Observing him intrigues me. You can tell he's still in good shape. Just looking at him, you'd think he was the picture of health.

Then you try to have a conversation with him. Usually, what you say just slips in one ear and out the other.

Physically, he's there. Mentally, he's not.

It's hard.

It's hard to see someone you love change so drastically and know there's nothing that can be done.

However hard it may be, though, I'm going to make the most of the time I have left with him.

I want so much for him to be able to see me graduate and to see me get married one day, but I know that's a big wish.

For now, I'm going to appreciate him while I have him. The same goes for everyone else in my life. No one knows what's going to happen tomorrow.

I'm not going to waste any more time worrying or stressing about frivolous things.

I'm going to appreciate the life I've been given, and I'm going to appreciate the people I've been blessed with even more.