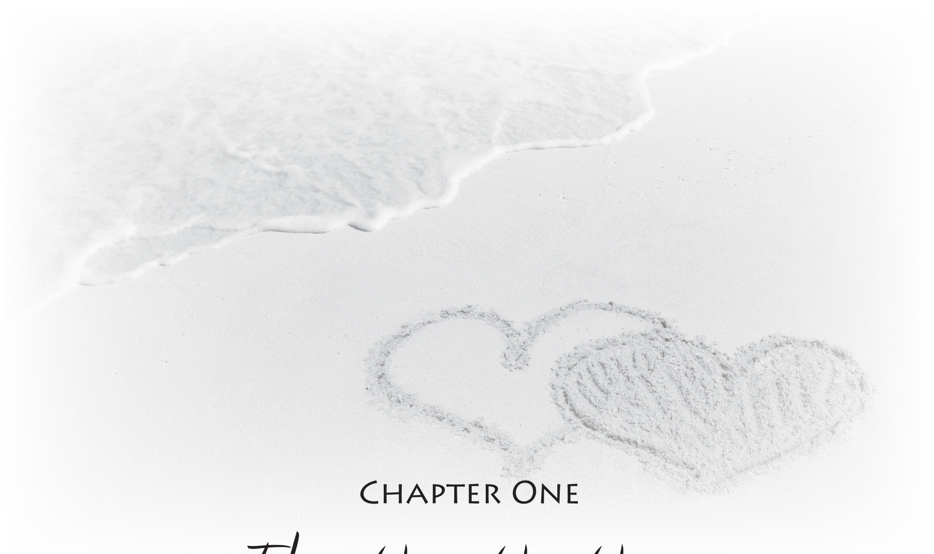


## CHAPTER ONE

# The Way We Were

The instant Drew wrapped his arms around me, my racing heart settled into a steady beat. Moments before, we had been sprinting around together from room to room with my checklist and then carrying boxes, suitcases, posters, and registration packets to the car. Now that everything had been loaded into the trunk and back seat of the Camry, it was time to say goodbye as we always did before one of my events—standing together in the living room with him holding me close.

The aroma of lilacs from outside lingered around us as I closed my eyes and nestled my head into his neck and shoulder. The room was silent except for the ticking of the clock on the mantel. He spoke, and the sound of his voice vibrated with authority in my ears and in my chest.

"Master," he prayed, "Candy is heading out once again to do Your work. She has put a lot into this weekend, and a lot of nice ladies are coming. Let it be good for everybody. Give Candy peace." He paused. "And confidence. Most of all, keep her safe and bring her back to me. Amen."

Simple words. Powerful words. Loving words.

In our entire marriage, I have always felt that Drew loved me more than I loved him. I know you can't measure love, but the word "supportive" in the dictionary should have "Drew Abbott" as the definition. Until the last decade or so, we both held full-time jobs, but I was often preoccupied with the kids' homework, after-school activities, and meal planning; immersed in writing books and publishing for others; attending choir rehearsals, leading Bible studies, or teaching Sunday school. It seemed like I was always dashing out the door for an appointment or a meeting and giving him a quick hug and kiss.

He, on the other hand, was always thinking ahead to make sure I had everything I needed (gas, money, a helping hand, a night out) and gave me his full attention when I got home. He was quick with compliments. He saw needs and filled them without fanfare. He did the laundry, cleaned up the kitchen, and kept us supplied with bread and milk. He was as good a father to my daughter as he was to his own children. He took care of the vehicles, finances, and lawn. Filled with an extra measure of common sense and intuition about which situations or people might be toxic to me, he served as my constant sounding board. As the kids grew up and began having children of their own, he continued as our family anchor and encourager.

Thirty-five years into our marriage, all that began to change. You'll see as you read on that a terrible disease crept into our home and changed that dynamic completely. It could have torn us apart, and yet it is turning out so differently. I want to share the story that led me to be able to say, "I've never loved him more."

In a society that is becoming increasingly filled with noncommittal, "what's-in-it-for-me?" relationships, some spouses run from stressors like Alzheimer's, spouting, "I didn't sign on for this," or "I want to remember him as he was."

Even those who choose to stay may view the whole ordeal through a negative lens, so they are left with a sad, bitter experience. People with Alzheimer's, sensitized to emotions, often serve as mirrors by reflecting the mood of their caregivers who would be better served by guarding their peace and intentionally setting a softer tone.

And then there are those like me, steadfast for the duration, who discover the depth of what the apostle Paul meant when he said in Acts 20:35 (NIV), "In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

My Alzheimer's journey with Drew is indeed "hard work," but the experience is changing me for the better. Of all the previous ministries I have poured myself into, none have given me the depth of satisfaction I find in ministering to the man I became one with in 1975. He is growing increasingly weak, but I am growing increasingly strong because of the truth of Philippians 4:13 (NKJV): "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

If you or someone you know has been pulled into the surreal world of caring for a loved one who has become a ghost of his or her former self, I hope that my bumps and dents can translate into a reminder to dig deeper to find an extra measure of kindness, gentleness, or humor in your day.

Let these pages serve as an eye-opener to live in the moment. After all, this moment—this very moment—is all we really have. See that? This moment has now become that moment, gone forever.

* * *

*“Feelings are everywhere—be gentle.”*

— J. Masai

## Chapter Two

# An Unwelcome Surprise

**_November 2010_**

It all began with the discovery of what was described as “an incidental finding.” On Drew’s first visit to the vascular surgeon, Dr. Katz ran a routine carotid artery CT brain scan to check for any sign of possible stroke activity. That part looked fine, but he was surprised and alarmed to find a sizeable tumor in the left frontal lobe. He contacted our primary care physician right away, and Dr. Palekar’s office called us in for an urgent appointment. After breaking the news as gently as possible, he recommended a neurosurgeon affiliated with Christiana Care Hospital.

“Dr. Sugarman is very good and in high demand,” Dr. Palekar told us, “so it’s hard to get an appointment, but I’ll see what I can do.”

Dr. Sugarman’s office called the next day with an opening in three weeks. We were shopping at Sam’s Club when my cell phone rang. Drew held our ice cream cup while I talked with the nurse and rummaged through my purse to find my calendar. When I hung up, I remember feeling equally relieved and anxious to schedule the appointment, maybe because I had been holding my breath most of the time.

### *December 2010*

When the day of the appointment arrived, I drove because Drew seemed nervous enough without having to navigate through traffic on Route 1 to find the Delaware Neurological Group in Newark. We had to wait about an hour (that's why they call it a "waiting room"), and I kept reminding him how fortunate we were to even get an appointment.

The staff was professional and courteous. Dr. Sugarman had a wonderful bedside manner, which was especially good for Drew.

After reviewing the scans, he explained what a meningioma was and said we were fortunate to find the tumor before there were any symptoms.

"It's not malignant and is located just beneath the skull and not inside your brain, so this will be a simple operation. I think we can get you scheduled before Christmas."

"Whoa, not so fast," Drew said. He didn't relish having his head opened up, and for good reason. "My dad had Parkinson's and *died* from brain surgery. Unless it's absolutely necessary, I don't want it."

After Dr. Sugarman had asked about the details, he said, "Two things: First, the kind of surgery your dad had was deep in the brain and very different from yours, which is easily accessible. Second, it was done in 1968, and the medical profession has come a long way since then."

But Drew would not be persuaded, so Dr. Sugarman proposed we "keep an eye on it" with MRIs every three to six months.

At the time, avoiding surgery seemed good to me, too. Now, years later, I'm wondering if we could have avoided Alzheimer's altogether. But this I *do* know: we honored Drew's wishes and made the best decision we knew to make at the time.

### *March and September 2011*

The MRIs from both visits were consistent with the initial one. No change, praise God! We left the office feeling optimistic and celebrated over lunch at a nearby steakhouse.

### *April 2012*

A couple of years later, I began noticing subtle changes in Drew's memory. He kept forgetting to buckle his seatbelt, a regular habit he used to be adamant about. And there were other little things, like losing interest in the men's group that met at McDonald's every morning and being more argumentative than usual. It wasn't enough to send up any red flags, but I began to suspect something was off-kilter that may have been caused by the tumor.

At our next appointment with Dr. Sugarman, the MRI showed that the tumor hadn't grown, and I didn't think to mention anything about his memory.

During the following visit six months later, I told Dr. Sugarman about my concerns but couldn't recall anything specific.

"There's nothing wrong with my memory," Drew insisted. "You're the one who keeps misplacing things."

Dr. Sugarman said that the tumor shouldn't affect his memory because of where it was located, but the edema from it could be putting pressure on that area of the brain. In front of Drew, he suggested I keep a log of specific situations so we could see if there was a pattern. I was relieved to have something tangible to do that would provide proof.

Drew was understandably defensive. “So you’re going to be watching my every move, trying to catch me doing something you can write down?”

The doctor saved me from having to answer by leaning forward and looking at Drew with compassion. “She’s going to do what I’m suggesting because she cares about you. MRIs can’t tell me everything I need to know about what’s going on with your tumor. Symptoms are subtle, and the best way to detect if there is pressure on your brain is to record any unusual incidents so I can make an informed evaluation.”

### *July 16, 2013*

For our next appointment, I brought three copies of the following log with me so Drew and I could follow along as Dr. Sugarman looked it over:

### *January – July 2013*

- Slower movement when eating. Fork to mouth sometimes seems like slow motion, which might be a good thing because he eats less. Has been losing weight and Dr. Palekar is pleased with that. His lab results are excellent on all counts, and his blood pressure is perfect.
- Driving habits are changing. When turning off the highway, instead of moving to the right so traffic can pass, he slows way down and complains about people hugging his bumper. Sometimes they beep their horn, which irritates him.

- He poked along at 15 mph looking for the turn for our daughter's street and would have missed it if I hadn't pointed it out.
- When going to restaurants we frequent in nearby towns, he knows the general vicinity but can't remember where to turn. Lately, I've been offering to drive, and he's fine with that.
- Didn't remember that he has used Quicken for taxes for the past five years. I reinstalled the program on his new computer so he could do our taxes, but it looked foreign to him, so he did everything by hand this year.
- When my 1099 came in from my pension, I gave it to Drew and mentioned that it was important for taxes and to put it in a "safe place," but he didn't know where it was when the accountant asked for it. I eventually found it on the sewing machine.
- He sleeps well, but his habits are changing. He used to fall asleep around 9:00 after watching TV but is staying up later (11:00 or sometimes midnight) and waking in the morning around 9:00 instead of 5:30, which used to be typical.
- A delightful new occurrence: he sings happy little songs from childhood, i.e., "I've Been Working on the Railroad" and "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain."
- He sometimes tells waitresses that he is ready to pay the bill and insists that they wait while he s-l-o-w-l-y counts out the money.
- Our eye doctor expressed concern that Drew couldn't remember we've been tracking beginning signs of macular degeneration and cataracts for some years. Drew told Dr.

Robinson, "You must have me confused with my brother, Howard, who has macular degeneration." Howard does have this problem, but the doctor wasn't at all confused.

- Confusion over how to serve communion in church. We had been given instructions on which aisle to serve, and instead of serving his assigned aisle, he followed me, creating some awkwardness for us as well as the congregation.
- His perception when parking the car is off (sometimes too far back, sometimes over the line, sometimes crooked), and he fusses with me if I point this out.
- Trash pick-up for recycling is every other week. In the car, I mentioned that we would need to put both receptacles out when we got home. At bedtime, I asked if he remembered and he said "yes." But the next day, I realized he had only taken one bin out to the curb. He insists I never mentioned both. This could be hearing-related or memory-related or both. The solution is to circle the calendar on the appropriate dates.
- He says I have been making negative remarks, which I guess I have, but I'm only trying to be helpful. If only he knew how many times I've held my tongue and ignored the changes I see in him. I will work on being more positive by acknowledging the many things he still does well and without fanfare: doing yard work, emptying the dishwasher, cleaning the bathroom, making the bed, shopping for groceries, picking up prescriptions, taking care of the cars, repairing brickwork on the front porch, feeding our dog and cat, etc.

- Bill paying has become confusing for him, so I help him on occasion by being more intentional about a place for mail that requires action.

All the way through the list, Drew argued that these things were not true—instead, I had exaggerated or made them up.

When we finished, I asked the doctor, “Is it possible we might be dealing with two things? The tumor and maybe some kind of dementia?”

“Well,” Dr. Sugarman said, “it’s possible. I could refer you to a neurologist for testing, but he would tell you that we first need to remove the tumor to make sure it’s not the culprit.”

I’m not even sure what was said or how Dr. Sugarman convinced Drew, but we left the office with surgery scheduled for August 28, 2013. This came more as a relief to me than a blow. He would have the surgery, and then he would be fine.

### ***August 28, 2013***

The surgery was successful. Following recovery, they placed him in a room in ICU that had a window by the nurses’ station. That evening, while his daughter Dana, son Troy, and I were gathered around the bed, Drew even cracked a few jokes between mini-naps.

“You say funny things,” Dana said. And then he would fall asleep again.

We talked softly until he stirred again. This time, he stared at a picture on the wall across from his bed and said, “Why is there a pig in the room?” There was no pig in the room, just a picture of the faces of a man and woman.

We laughed about the pig in the room and Drew picking at the air because he was trying to catch invisible bugs. Troy said he thought he was hallucinating, but we brushed it off as the aftermath of surgery.

Another patient's family members were milling around in the hallway, waiting their turn to visit in the room that was, no doubt, as small as ours. A bony man who was so wrinkled he must have been the great-great-grandfather slouched against the wall. I felt sorry for him. His dark face had sorrow etched in the crevasses, making him look, well . . . dreadful and older than old.

The next time Drew woke up, he glanced at the man in the hallway just in time to see him jump, double over, and scurry past the window as if he had a sharp pain and had to find a bathroom quick.

Drew whispered to me with fear in his eyes, "I just saw a demon."

I knew what he'd seen. The guy had all the characteristics of what you'd think a demon might look like—hunched frame, sunken cheeks, distorted facial expression, and bulging eyes. I cocked my head and said, "You just saw a what?"

"A demon."

Dana echoed my question. "Dad, what did you say?"

Drew's eyebrows knit together, and we waited for him to repeat it. Instead, he shook his head and said, "Never mind."

After our stressful day, Dana, Troy, and I laughed so hard that we cried. Drew was puzzled over what was so funny, and the more we tried to explain that he said he saw a demon but then thought he'd better not say so, the harder we laughed. Although he had no clue about what was so funny, he laughed right along with us.

### *August 31, 2013*

I was just leaving the motel to go to the hospital when the nurse called to ask how soon I could get there. Apparently, they'd had "an incident," and Drew was asking when Candy would be there. He's always been a kind and gentle man, but the nurse told me he had almost pulled out his catheter and been so combative that morning it took four security guards to get him back to bed.

When I walked into the room, he was relaxed, and I congratulated myself for having such a calming influence. I convinced the nurse to untie the restraints they had on his wrists.

"They're mean to me," he said softly. "They won't let me go to the bathroom, and I have to pee."

"They're not mean, honey. You have a catheter that's catching the urine, so you need to stay in bed."

Moments later, he was struggling against me to get out of bed. His grip was strong, his eyes were wild, and his voice rose with every word. He got halfway to the bathroom dragging me along with him before the nurses and security guards were able to take over.

So they tied him to the rails again.

Drew glared at me with a look of betrayal. "You're my wife. You're supposed to help me. Why won't you help me?"

It was a long afternoon for me sitting there feeling like a bad wife.

Drew kept picking at the strips of cloth that bound him and finally pulled one loose just about the time our grandson, Trevor, arrived. I whispered what was going on, and he jumped right in.

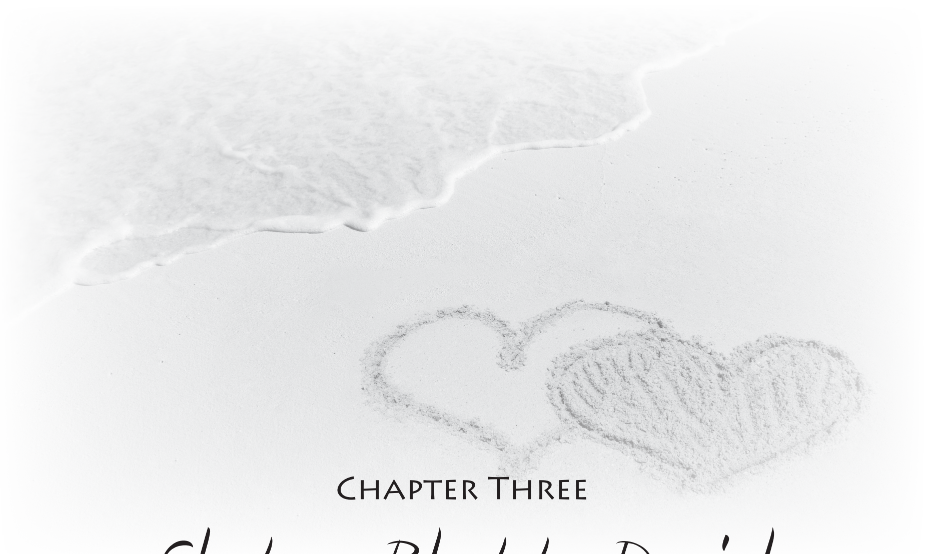
"Here, Granddad," he said, "let me help you with that." And he retied it.

The next day when the doctors did their rounds, we discussed the drugs he was on—ones to keep the swelling down in the brain, along with anti-seizure medicine. One of them was Haldol, which makes some people delusional and combative. The doctor discontinued it at once, and Drew's confrontational behavior drained away, leaving me hopeful again. When we got him home and on the road to recovery, life could get back to normal.

### *October 2013*

In the months it took him to recover, it seemed to all of us that his memory was improving, but maybe we saw what we wanted to see. Maybe we explained away too easily the memory glitches of a forgotten story that he used to enjoy telling over and over or a forgotten name of someone he should have known.

* * *



## CHAPTER THREE

# Shotgun Blast to Denial

***January 6, 2014***

When we met with Dr. Sugarman this time, he said Drew was healing well, and the MRI showed no sign of the tumor trying to come back. The next appointment was in six months, which suited me just fine. I could breathe again.

Or could I? Inside my "knower," I knew that something wasn't right.

***April 2014***

By April, the reality of what was happening hit me full force. The shotgun blast that blew away any lingering denial of Drew's condition came in the form of the stark reality of our finances.

From the beginning of our marriage, Drew has always done a masterful job of managing our household finances. Our rule of thumb was to put most of our expenses (gas, food, medicine) on credit cards so we'd have a record, and then pay them off completely each month. When the bills came, I routinely handed them over to him and never gave them another thought.

The first major blow was the time I tried to use our Master Card at the grocery store. It was declined.

“Try it again, please. It should be fine since we have a pretty high credit limit,” I said.

The cashier tried it three times, but each time it was declined. *That’s odd, because we had a $14,000 credit line. Must be a mistake.*

No mistake. It was maxed out. I used our Discover card.

That same day, the envelope from Discover came in the mail, and I thought I’d better open it instead of handing it to Drew like usual. My hands began to shake when I saw that the minimum payment for that month was $2,000-plus and then noticed we were dangerously close to our $18,000 limit on that card. It felt like someone reached into my chest and twisted my gut into a pretzel when I realized Drew hadn’t been paying on any of the cards, which put us in the 29% interest category, so the balances were climbing exponentially. Feeling lightheaded, I had to grip the kitchen bar to steady myself.

About the time I was coming to grips with the whole scenario of losing him to “some sort of dementia,” I suddenly had to take responsibility for not only handling but also straightening out our finances, which were now in shambles. In this case, ignorance was not bliss. It was devastating on so many levels, especially since I have an aversion to working with numbers in the first place.

The reality of my grief had been building up for days, even though I had held the tears and fears back as long as I could, to put on my happy face for Drew. But that day it needed to come out. He caught me staring out the window with tears welling in my eyes.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

The grief of not being able to tell my confidant and soul mate about this life-altering heartbreak threatened to consume me, but I plastered on a smile.

“Oh . . .” I searched my heart for a quick and satisfying reply. “I was just thinking about how much I love you, and it’s pretty overwhelming sometimes.”

### *April 10, 2014*

I kept the tears bottled up inside for the next day or two—and then came Thursday. For more than eight years now, several women and I have met in the prayer room of my church every Thursday morning to spend an hour in praise and thanksgiving, confession and repentance, personal petition, intercession for others, and meditation and assessment. That day, it was all about *me*. I went early and sat alone with God and my thoughts. From the moment Wilmetta stepped into the room, I began sobbing and choked out the words I’d been rehearsing in my mind but dared not say aloud until now: “Drew has some sort of dementia.”

Then Sharon arrived, and more tears and fears spilled out of me. “I’m losing him,” I gasped between words, “and I don’t know . . . what to do.”

After receiving their counsel and comforting words, I bowed my head on an unseen altar in that little 12 x 12 room, a sacred space in my time of need. They laid their hands on my head and shoulders and prayed for me.

Sharon had to leave early to go to work, but Wilmetta stayed until I was able to collect myself. As we left, the pastor came out of his office, and all it took was one glance for him to ask, “What’s wrong?" His advice was immediate and on the mark. "You are Drew's advocate," he said. "It's up to you to speak on his behalf and make decisions for him."

I couldn't go home to Drew with my eyes all puffy and red, so I drove around aimlessly praying, "Help me. Help me." And then more words came. "I'm scared, Lord. I feel so inadequate."

The Holy Spirit's gentle whisper spoke to my spirit. "Fear not. for I am with you. Moment by moment and day by day, I will show you what to do. First and foremost, your job is to love Drew." Immediately, a verse from the famous love chapter popped up in my mind: "Love is patient, love is kind."

I looked up the passage as soon as I got home.

> "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 NIV).

Here is the insight I gleaned from this passage:

- *Be patient.* I'm sure there will be lots of times when I'll want to snap at him, but there's a better way.
- *Be nice.* I can do that. It's not difficult to be kind to the husband who has been kind to me for forty years. But it will be even more important to be nice if the time comes when he no longer knows how to reciprocate.
- *Don't envy*. It would be easy to envy others who don't have this cross to bear.

- *Don't get puffed up.* My bragging rights are nil. Without the Lord to see me through and the support of family and friends, I would be a basket case.
- *Do not dishonor him.* I will treat my husband with respect and build him up every way I can.
- *This is not about me*. It is about pouring myself into my husband's life and not seeking accolades. I already know there is great satisfaction in giving to others without expecting anything in return.
- *Do not be easily angered.* With God's grace, I will think before I speak and respond in kindness. If the situation is ugly and kindness doesn't work to calm the atmosphere, I can go to another room and take deep breaths to guard my own peace. Someone once said that the person who acts the ugliest needs love the most.
- *Do not keep a list of faults or grievances.* I will forgive quickly and thoroughly, leaving nothing behind to fester. This is how Drew and I have always resolved our problems, and I will continue to practice this habit.
- *Do not delight in evil.* This disease is devastating enough. There's no room for revenge or paybacks for any cruel things he might say or do as his mental capacities decline.
- *Rejoice in the truth.* I married a wonderful man who has been my steadfast defender, provider, protector, and friend. And the truth is, he will always be precious to me and his children and grandchildren.

- *Protect my husband.* As the days unfold before me, I'll be called upon to make many decisions—some big, some small—and I am committed to making them all with his best interests in mind, not for my comfort or convenience.
- *Trust God.* In trusting God, I can trust myself to discern whom else I should trust and turn to for advice as I find my way along.
- *Do not lose hope*. Regardless of how things appear, I hold onto the hope of knowing that God honors and rewards hidden acts of love.
- *Persevere.* I can only imagine how many times I'll want to throw in the towel as the disease advances, but love sees things through to the finish line. Lord, help me to have the staying power I need and a good attitude to go with it. I realize You are not pleased with those who shrink back.
- *Love never fails.* Because I anticipate faltering and making mistakes in my attempts to navigate unknown territory with Alzheimer's in our home, it's good to remember that God is love, and love never fails.

I realize these are lofty goals, but spelling them out and keeping them front and center from the very beginning certainly establishes a hopeful tone. Only time will tell how closely I come to keeping them.

### *April 11, 2014*

The next morning, Drew and I began searching together through a mountain of paperwork on his desk to find any bills that hadn't been paid. I brought the big stack to the kitchen table and sorted them by their due dates. With him looking on, I wrote checks and put them in the envelopes. His job was to affix the return address stickers and stamps. I was struck by how slowly he moved and how long it took him to do this simple task.

When we finished, Drew took me to IHOP for a late breakfast. There I sat at the table, trying to muster enough energy to hold a coffee cup that suddenly held the weight of the world. Drew sat across from me, looking as carefree as a boy about to visit a toy store. With a contented smile, he raised his forkful of pancakes dripping with syrup and announced, “I love my life.”

I mustered a convincing smile and thought, *Of course you do.* As his life became more simplified by the minute, mine was caving in on me.

### *May 11, 2014*

On Mother’s Day in 2014, Drew and I went for a long drive in search of where I lived as a child on Clayton-Dulaney Road, way off the beaten path, between Delaware and Maryland. Although the house that used to have rose arbors had been torn down and rebuilt, and the strawberry patches, fields of corn, and a mini-orchard of apple and pear trees were all overgrown, the surrounding area and roads hadn’t changed. It was a beautiful day with lush greenery everywhere. As we drove, we talked heart-to-heart about our dads and their work, things our parents said and did, favorite Christmas toys, bike rides, and lemonade stands—things we had never discussed before. Just being in the vicinity triggered memories like Mom chasing my naked brother, Mike, around the yard with a garden hose because he had painted himself in poop.

Old memories suddenly seemed new to Drew as if he recalled them for the first time. That day, it was as though he saw *me* again for the first time.

It was like that balmy evening in May of 1975, when his Aunt Fannie (my daughter's babysitter) walked me across the street from her house to his and in the back door. "I brought you somebody," Fannie said (as if I were a gift). And the first words out of Drew's mouth were, "You sure brought me a pretty one." I let myself go there and saw him for the first time all over again, too.

And so, that Mother's Day of 2014, we began our second courtship—with a bank of thirty-nine wonderful years to draw on. We basked in it and gazed deep into each other's eyes, giving one another special little winks at Twin Trees Restaurant.

This "love fest" continued for a full week.

### *May 20, 2014*

On a Tuesday night, as executive director of Mothers With a Mission, I dressed to attend a reception hosted by a non-profit organization for other non-profits. Drew sat in the bedroom watching television, and the smell of my perfume must have catapulted him back to the days when his first wife cheated on him. He demanded to know where I was going without him.

Even when Karen, our fund-raiser, came by to go with me, he crossed his arms over his chest and wouldn't hug me goodbye.

With his flawed memory, I thought for sure he would forget by the time I got home, but the suspicion only accelerated while I was gone. I reminded him that in all the years we'd been married, I had never given him a reason to doubt me. My words just bounced off him.

"I'm your faithful wife," I said.

"I've heard that before," he yelled.

This was a good clue. The jealousy had a root, and it made sense. His first wife left him for another man.

“I’m Candy, not Catherine,” I said.

But his demeanor stayed the same. With his chin in the air, eyes narrowed, and a disbelieving smirk on his face, he grilled me about the event and who the people were.

The invitation that had come a month ago was addressed to me as the director of our non-profit organization, and I was allowed to bring one guest.

“Why didn’t you ask *me* to go with you?” he asked.

“I did. I asked you *first* to be my guest, but you told me, ‘You know how I hate those stand-around-and-talk-about-nothing things. Why don’t you ask one of your girlfriends?’”

I saw a flicker of truth register in his eyes—and then pain, followed by remorse. He fell all over himself apologizing. “I don’t know what came over me,” he said. “I’m so, so sorry, so sincerely sorry.”

In the midst of my hugging and kissing him and saying, “It’s okay,” he said, “I promise you that you’ll never see that side of me again.”

Of course, I know that it could happen again. If and when it does, I will cling to the knowledge that the real Drew is my protector and defender who would never intentionally give me even a moment’s grief—certainly not jealousy.

### *May 25, 2014*

I tried once, and only once, to talk to Drew about his condition. “Your memory isn’t working like it’s supposed to.”

Those few words put panic on his face. “What? Are you saying there’s something wrong with my brain?” His hands trembled and flew immediately to his face.

If I didn't know better, I would have thought he'd just stared into the eyes of the Devil himself. His agitation was so great and startling that I immediately began backpedaling.

"Well," I said, "you had that brain tumor removed, you know, and I think it may have damaged your memory."

His eyes darted from side to side, and then he squeezed them shut in a long blink. "Well, other people my age can't remember things, either."

"That's true," I said and vowed that never again would I confront him about Alzheimer's. He was finding a way to cope, so I grabbed hold. "Yep, you know Aunt Addie lived to be 103, and she always said, 'Old age ain't for sissies.'"

Some people like to be involved in their diagnosis, but others can't handle it. For Drew, denial is a comfortable fit. Indeed, denial can be an effective tool.

### *May 27, 2014*

Over the last couple of years, responding to a nudge from God, I began weaning myself away from some obligations and responsibilities, and now I would need to part with other roles:

- dropping out of singing in the choir (which I had done for thirty-five years);
- closing out my Mary Kay business;
- streamlining the Fruitbearer Women's Retreat that I hosted; and
- prying my fingers loose from other ministries like Mothers With a Mission and Delmarva Christian Writers' Fellowship.

Feeling unplugged from friendships and leadership roles, I prayed, “Lord, who am I without all the things I do?”

And I heard Him whisper a few words that put everything in perspective, “You are My child and wife to Drew. There is a time and a season for all things.”

### *May 29, 2014*

I’m doing most of the driving because Drew can’t remember his way to the restaurants anywhere but in town. At first, I would pipe up, “You missed your turn,” or “Don’t you want to go over there?” But he took offense, and rightly so. After I had learned to stop offering “advice” and wait until he asked for it, my transition into the off-balance world of Alzheimer’s became easier to navigate. Instead of pointing out that he just missed a turn, I bit my tongue and allowed him to feel the awkwardness of trying to find the way on his own. After enough wrong turns and embarrassment, he began asking me to drive.

I’ve found a number of methods to keep him calm and happy, the most effective being to keep things simple and not over-explain or give too many details. Now and then, we recapture the bliss of that loving emotional place we discovered on Mother’s Day, and he says he enjoys having me chauffeur him around. His memory continues to deteriorate, but he explains it away, which makes him content.

I had a hard enough time facing the situation myself, but breaking the news to the family was especially difficult. It had to be done face-to-face. One at a time, I filled them in. All three of our children had noticed changes over the years, so it didn’t come as a major shock. Dana, my stepdaughter, asked if she could meet us for dinner once a week to make sure she had some quality time with her dad. Troy, my stepson, threw himself into the task of sketching out plans so we could add a deck to the back of our house. My daughter, Kim, and her family gave us support through phone calls and offers to help mow the lawn. And our grandchildren made time in their busy schedules to drop by for visits.

When I broke the news to my brothers and their wives, the family support and prayer base broadened. I began to feel less like it was all up to me.

My brother, Mike, made a simple statement that has stayed with me: "Don't forget your sense of humor." Nothing seemed funny at the time, but those few words have served as permission to view things through a more lighthearted lens than I might have otherwise. Faced with added responsibilities and life-altering decisions, it took a while for me to see the humor in anything. Eventually, I began to recognize and appreciate the amusing side of caregiving. I'll share some of those things later.

But first, it was important for me to grasp and manage the serious side of caregiving.

### *June 4, 2014*

I'm feeling particularly loved and secure today. Drew is happily running errands and humming little tunes, and it's a gorgeous June day. God's grace and the words of my sister-in-law that came through her e-mail are hugging me. Lots of publishing stuff to focus on today, and I'm taking time out to get my nails done. It is good to savor the happy days.

### *June 5, 2014*

I thought yesterday was a particularly normal day until we were on the way to Fenwick Island for dinner. But then, the signs I'm becoming all too familiar with began again. Drew was gazing out of the passenger window and didn't recognize that Indian River High School was our grandson Trevor's school, and when we passed the Pyle Center, he had no recollection of the many, many Little League games we had enjoyed there. The rest of the evening was enjoyable, and then in gentle conversation on the way home, passing through Roxana, he said, "Dana just had one child, right?"

"Yep, she and Troy both had one," I said. "Dana had a girl, and Troy had a boy." And then I rambled on about them being born ten days apart in December.

A little time passed, and then he said, "What's Dana's daughter's name?"

The moment I said, "Natalie," he recognized it and then said, "But we don't see her very often, do we?" That gave him an excuse and made him breathe easier. Then he added, "She and Trevor are both twenty-five, right?" And, by George, he was right.

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