



# ALZHEIMER'S: THE GOOD NEWS

SUNFLOWER: symbol of courage and strength for the caregiver

By GAIL MATTHEWS

**MISSION: SUPPORT CAREGIVERS, RAISE AWARENESS, ERASE STIGMA**

**“Never let life’s hardships disturb you ... No one can avoid problems, not even saints or sages.”**

In 2009 at the age of 56, Alzheimer’s Association Early Stage Advisor Kathy Murray discovered she had early-onset Alzheimer’s. As a mother of two and grandmother of six, she relates Alzheimer’s to motherhood. “They’re not always smooth journeys. You pray for your family that in the face of all the uncertainties, the joys will outweigh the trials.” The Alzheimer’s Association is a great way to fight the disease and we are grateful Kathy Murray is a strong advocate who has chosen not to sit on the sidelines.

Funny, talented and beautiful Diane Keaton also knows the anguish one feels when a loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. She writes a poignant story in her book “Then Again” of helping her mother deal with the onset of Alzheimer’s, then watching her dissolve into someone she could not recognize. However this boomer has advice for all: “Life is constantly throwing curve balls. It doesn’t matter if you can hit ‘em. You just have to keep on your feet and keep swinging.” I prefer to throw all the balls in the air and see what falls out!

In August of 2002 Charlton Heston made an Alzheimer’s announcement as a goodbye. Heston’s disease progressed very rapidly. In 2005 family and friends were reported as being shocked by the progress of his illness saying he sometimes couldn’t get out of bed. He died in April of 2008 at the age of 84, five years and four months from his diagnosis.

What Heston said and wrote

back in 2002 must be read again and again especially if you are dealing with this disease. It is good news he was willing to talk about AD.

“My physicians have recently told me I may have a neurological disorder whose symptoms are consistent with Alzheimer’s disease. So, I wanted to prepare a few words for you now, because when the time comes, I may not be able to. I’ve lived my whole life on the stage and screen before you. I’ve found purpose and meaning in your response. For an actor, there’s no greater loss than the loss of his audience. I won’t exclude you from this stage in my life. For now, I’m not changing anything. I’ll insist on work when I can; the doctors will insist on rest when I must. If you see a little less spring in my step, if your name fails to leap to my lips, you’ll know why. And, if I tell you a funny story for the second time, please laugh anyway. I’m neither giving up nor giving in. Please feel no sympathy for me. I don’t.”

He closes his letter with a quote from William Shakespeare who, at the end of his career, wrote his farewell through the words of Prospero in “The Tempest.” It ends like this:

*“Be Cheerful, sir.*

*Our revels now are ended.  
These our actors,*

*As I foretold you, were all spirits and*

*Are melted into air, into thin air.*

*And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,*

*The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,*

*The solemn temples, the great globe itself,*

*Yea all which it inherit, shall dissolve*

*And like this insubstantial pageant faded,*

*Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff*

*As dreams are made on, and our little life*

*Is rounded with a sleep.”*

What gifts Charlton Heston gave us in his career but more importantly the gift he gave us when struck with AD. He helped raise awareness and share what he was feeling. His grace in dealing with it all is an inspiration and that is the good news.

Last week we received a note from Kittery Point:

This is such amazing Good News ... what a beautiful organization KNP is. I have been struggling so with all the negative, hateful stuff that has been going on in our country lately, but this is the USA of my childhood: community coming together to help each other ... we know Cindy is an incredible human being, but 70 volunteers immediately! How absolutely wonderful ... how beautiful ... the description of the organization sounds perfect: filling needs, long term, short term. It lifted my spirits to read this great good news. The book written by Glen Campbell’s wife sounds excellent too and I have it on my reading list. Wonderful news and wonderful article!

Find Gail Matthew’s book “DID I DIE? Managing the Mayhem of Alzheimer’s... A Caregiver’s Guide to Peace and quality of Life” at Morgan Hill Bookstore or Amazon Kindle. Proceeds go to Cure Alzheimer’s Fund.