

Enhance care and support through volunteer work

By Sarah Fixmer

My great-grandma, Noreen, has lived with Alzheimer's for as long as I can remember. Despite this disease, she is one of the healthiest people I have ever met. However, the effects of Alzheimer's alone are enough to make her almost less human, and my family has watched the disease slowly take more and more away from her.

She was diagnosed late, so the doctors couldn't do much when they found she was living with the disease. Soon after, we moved her to an Alzheimer's ward at an assisted living facility in Exira, Iowa.



Four generations attend the Exira Care Center Christmas Party in 2010.

It took a while for the symptoms to set in, but my family had to watch as she slowly progressed more and more into the disease. She started forgetting everyday things such as brushing her teeth and where she put her shoes. Now, she doesn't recognize me and barely recognizes her own children.

Every year just before Christmas I would go to my great-grandma's house to bake cookies and sit for hours as she played the piano while singing carols. I took those days for granted, because now I would do anything to have them back.

My great-grandma's story has led me to become a passionate advocate for the Nebraska chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. I feel it is extremely important to ensure people living with the disease are under the correct care and the generations to come will be, too.

As someone who could potentially develop the disease, I want to do my part to bring awareness to it and make sure people get their diagnosis before it's too late. While we can't eradicate the disease, we can slow its progression.

I just started my journey as an advocate, but I plan on maintaining it for years to come. While my great-grandma's story is not necessarily unique, it has taught me so much about this long-lasting disease. I want to be a part of the change to come, and I hope others will join me.

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