

Alzheimer's Face of the Day



ELLEN HANKES

My first introduction to Alzheimer's disease came around 35 years ago when my Uncle Allen was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. I watched and learned how his family coped with the impact of the gradual loss of memory, physical and mental skills and daily living functions. My valiant Aunt Doris traveled to family gatherings as long as she was able to bring Uncle Allen with her. Together, they taught us all more about the impact of the disease and the toll on caregivers and family.

As a certified professional organizer in chronic disorganization, I frequently meet with family members who are concerned about their loved ones' challenges with excess and constant clutter. Issues related to clutter can be especially difficult for families touched by Alzheimer's disease. In addition to the individual diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, caregivers and family members are directly impacted by excessive clutter in the home.

When the kitchen table is piled high with newspapers, old medicine bottles and weeks of unopened mail, there isn't space for eating a balanced meal. Critical nutritional needs of Alzheimer's patients and their caregivers are not likely to be met if there is no place to prepare or eat meals. Stacks of reading material or piles of clothing can make safe movement between living areas difficult or impossible. Emergency personnel access is always a worry in a home with excessive clutter. Excessive clutter can contribute to a caregiver's depression or anxiety.

While I work one-on-one with individuals with clutter issues, I constantly am learning why chronic disorganization and even hoarding occurs with some individuals and not with others. I found the Alzheimer's Association Midlands Chapter presentation on understanding dementia an excellent way to learn more about the disease and resources for those diagnosed with Alzheimer's, caregivers and family members.

Today, I serve on the Alzheimer's Association Midlands Chapter Iowa Advisory Council and on the Council Bluffs Memory Walk Committee as a tribute to my Uncle Allen and his family. It is also a continuing effort to learn more about how I, as a trained and experienced professional organizer, can better support the community of those impacted by Alzheimer's disease.

*- Ellen Hankes, CPO-CD,
Calahan Solutions
Member of the National
Professional Organizers Association
and National Study Group on
Chronic Disorganization*