

# The longest loss: Program addresses Alzheimer's

Rev. Candace McKibben, TLH blogger 7:41 p.m. EDT September 18, 2015



When it became apparent that my aging parents could no longer live safely at home alone, our family, like many in this circumstance, had to come up with an alternative. As the adult children in the family, we discussed what would be best for our parents and determined that it would be for them to move to Tallahassee and live in assisted living.

They had selected me as their Health Care Surrogate and I wanted to care for them, but they lived in Jacksonville and the distance was not working. It was a bold plan and we all wondered how they would receive it. Thankfully, they agreed and even seemed a bit relieved to have some help.

We decided that the best setting would be Westminster Oaks, where they have several levels of care to offer to residents. Because of careful financial planning over a lifetime, they were able to make the move when a room became available. In preparation for the transition, we received a packet of information to complete for the staff

at Westminster Oaks, including a resident self-assessment. We had their medical records forwarded, but this self-assessment was about how the resident felt he or she was doing.

My daddy had already begun to show significant signs of memory loss. He had gotten lost several times driving to my brother's house. Though he had been to my brother's home many times through the years, and the route was pretty straightforward, he could not get oriented. For hours he and my mother drove, stopped at gas stations for directions, something he had always resisted, and finally found a road that he knew would lead him back to his own home which is where he thankfully went.

Daddy had always been the fix-it man who understood how things operated but was having more trouble with simple processes like how to make the microwave work or play the music they loved on the CD player. He was often confused in conversation and did not always remember that he had just eaten as we were clearing the dishes from the table.

When, based on the self-assessment questionnaire, I asked daddy if he felt he had experienced any changes in his memory, he answered, "No, thank God, I am OK in that category." I felt both very sad and grateful; sad that he did not even recognize his own deficit and grateful that he did not recognize it. It was one of the many "little deaths" that we experienced over the course of the four years he struggled with vascular dementia.

As anyone who has Alzheimer's disease or some related dementia knows, as anyone who loves someone with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia knows, there are so many losses over the course of the gradual decline that for many people takes much longer than four years. Acknowledging and examining the unique aspects of the grieving process experienced by those who have dementia and those who are caring for them both professionally and personally, is the focus of an excellent webinar by Hospice Foundation of America.

Big Bend Hospice, in collaboration with the Alzheimer's Project and Westminster Oaks Alzheimer's Advocacy Group, is offering a community event at the lovely Maguire Center at Westminster Oaks this Wednesday for professionals who work in this area or caregivers who live with this reality. Registration is from 8 until 8:30 a.m.; the program runs from 8:30-11:30. The webinar features excellent presenters and we will have a local panel of experts to respond to questions. The program itself is open to the public and free, but 3.0 CE's are available from Hospice Foundation of America for \$15 per participant. We hope many in our community will take advantage of this opportunity to better understand the longest loss and those impacted by it.

*The Rev. Candace McKibben is an ordained minister who serves as the director of faith outreach at Big Bend Hospice and as pastor of Tallahassee Fellowship.*

## If you go

**What:** Webinar for Alzheimer's caregivers

**When:** Wednesday, 8 a.m. registration; 8:30-11:30 a.m. program

**Where:** Westminster Oaks Maguire Center, 4449 Meandering Way

## Webinar Presenters:

Peter Rabin, MD, MPH at John's Hopkins Medical School and author of The 36 Hour Day

The Rev. Dr. Kenneth Doka, at the College of New Rochelle

Charles A. Corr, PhD., Suncoast Hospice

**Local Panelists:**

Dr. Lisa Granville, FSU College of Medicine

Patsy Kicklighter, Family member of one living with Alzheimer's disease

Rev. Candace McKibben, Director of Faith Outreach, Big Bend Hospice

Pam Mezzina, LCSW, Bereavement Services Manager at Big Bend Hospice

Debbie Moroney, ACSW, CEO at Alzheimer's Project, Inc.

Rosemary Raush, Lifelong Learning Coordinator at Westminster Oaks, moderator

For more information visit <http://hospicefoundation.org> (<http://hospicefoundation.org>) or call Lisa Baggett at 878-5310.

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