Press Release

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Finding Love, Faith, and Hope in the Long Goodbye of Alzheimer's

New Memoir from Guideposts Editor-in-Chief Edward Grinnan Arrives September 2023

A Journey of Faith: A Mother's Alzheimer's, a Son's Love, and His Search for Answers

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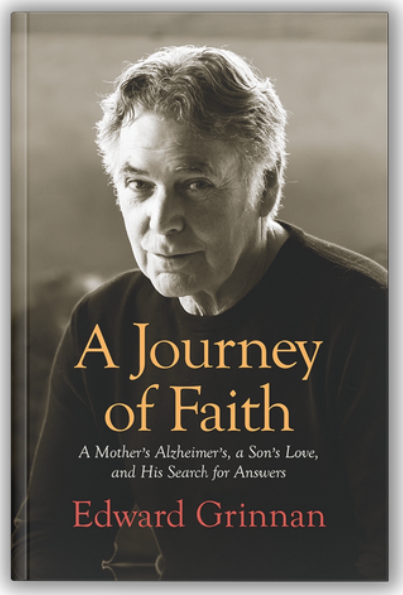


DANBURY, CT (July 3, 2023) – Forgetful moments are very common in an aging brain. Yet one can't help wondering, *What if it's something more? What if it's dementia or Alzheimer's?* This fear is especially acute for those who have watched someone they love suffer the ravages of Alzheimer's. Edward Grinnan watched the disease take its toll on his lovely, funny, and intelligent mother, Estelle. It was like watching her slowly disappear as she forgot everything and everyone, even herself. And yet, faith and love prevailed.

Edward Grinnan, Guideposts Editor-in-Chief, recounts his deeply personal journey through his mother's illness and his own fears of memory loss via a new memoir, ***A Journey of Faith: A Mother's Alzheimer's, a Son's Love, and His Search for Answers*** (Guideposts, September 2023). This book is a tender tribute to Edward's mother as well as an exploration of the promise of hope, the indestructibility of love, the faithfulness of God, and an eloquent call to make the most out of every moment.

Edward Grinnan is now availble for media interviews for ***A Journey of Faith*** (September)
as well as for **National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month** (November)

"The Alzheimer's journey is a difficult one many families have traveled on, filled with pain and anger, hope and faith, and even, on occasion, joy and laughter. Our family was no different," Grinnan writes in ***A Journey of Faith.*** "My prayer is that you will see you are not alone. When all else fails, love takes over and faith prevails."

A Journey of Faith helps readers face the unknown with a heart full of hope. Grinnan writes that there are two things Alzheimer's cannot destroy. The first is the capacity to love, even when memories fade, because love is indestructible. The second is faith, which anchors a person to the very end of their journey. There is no power greater than love for one another and, most of all, the love of God. Perhaps that's why "love" was the very last word Estelle spoke to her son.

Edward Grinnan, a beloved and brilliant storyteller, recounts some of his mother's most beautiful and heartbreaking days. He eloquently describes the progress of his mother's Alzhiemer's disease as well as his own progress, as her son, through denial, acceptance, grief, and hope. Grinnan also writes of his own addiction recovery (25 years sober) and wonders how years of misusing alcohol and drugs may have harmed his brain. Thanks to neuroscience advances, new diagnostic tools are becoming available and Grinnan hopes to gain more information about his own brain health.

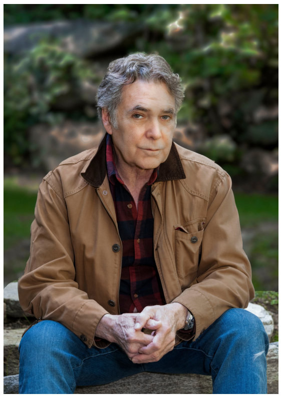
"I've embarked on this journey with open eyes and heart, and with prayer," writes Grinnan. "As I watched my mother fade away and worried about my own memory loss, God was my ever-present guide. He taught me to be present, and to have the hope that only faith can fulfill. It's made all the difference."

In addition to Edward's moving personal stories, ***A Journey of Faith*** includes inspiring Guideposts stories told by real people who have dealt with Alzheimer's. These touching stories have encouraged Edward on his own journey, including:

- Singer Amy Grant's Greatest Walk of Faith: Amy's dad loved to sing, and he loved God. But his once-brilliant mind is broken by dementia. He doesn't know Amy's name yet he's still teaching her how to trust God in the smallest moments.
- Kristen Kemp Found Her Comfort in God: Kristen's story begins with a phone call from her mom. "I'm having trouble with my memory," she says. Kristen stiffens. Her mother's mom, MeMe, developed Alzheimer's. Fear and denial are Kristen's first responses. Sadly, her mother's diagnosis is Alzheimer's. But God gives Kristen a way to stay close to her mother, a communion deeper than words.
- Singer Glen Campbell's Courage on Stage: Glen Campbell and his wife, Kim, did the world a great service by being so open about Glen's dementia. As the disease progressed Glen performed for as long as he was able, even when lyrics eluded him at times. It was both heartbreaking and inspiring to see and incredibly brave of him to get up on stage. Edward was privileged to have interviewed Glenn and Kim, both of whom became great inspirations for Edward's own journey.

Guideposts will support the launch of ***A Journey of Faith*** with a robust consumer marketing plan including features in their magazines, newsletters, website, and direct mail. A preorder sales campaign and a national publicity campaign have already launched this summer. Interviews with and articles by Edward Grinnan are available upon request.

About Edward Grinnan



Edward Grinnan is Editor-in-Chief and Vice President of Guideposts Publications as well as Editor-in-Chief of *Guideposts* magazine where he has served for 24 years. Grinnan is a graduate of the University of Michigan, where he won the Avery Hopwood Award in Major Playwriting while still an undergraduate. He went on to study playwriting at the Yale School of Drama where he received his MFA. Grinnan is the author of three inspiration books: *The Promise of Hope*, *Always By My Side*, and *A Journey of Faith* (releasing September 2023). He lives in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts with his beloved golden retriever, Gracie.

For more than 75 years, **GUIDEPOSTS** has been inspiring the spiritual wellbeing of millions of people through the positive impact of faith and prayer. The non-profit provides support, inspiration and hope via uplifting publications, including *Guideposts* magazine, the Guideposts Foundation and Guideposts Outreach Ministries. www.Guideposts.org

A Journey of Faith: A Mother's Alzheimer's, a Son's Love, and His Search for Answers
By Edward Grinnan

Available September 2023, from Guideposts
ISBN 978-1-959634 | Hardcover | U.S. $24.95 | 256 pages | 6" x 9" trim size

Review copies and interviews available: pamela@mmpublicrelations.com, 615-294-5073

Suggested Questions for Edward Grinnan

"The Alzheimer’s journey is a difficult one many families have traveled on,
filled with pain and anger, hope and faith, and even, on occasion, joy and laughter.
Our family was no different. My prayer is that you will see you are not alone.
When all else fails, love takes over and faith prevails."
-Edward Grinnan

- Edward, some of us are longtime fans of *Guideposts* magazine, which is read by millions of people, where you are the Editor-in-Chief. For those meeting you for the first time, tell us about *Guideposts* and its mission.

- Guideposts is a purveyor of hope and faith, with stories of overcomers filling every issue. Yet your new memoir addresses a disease that no one gets to overcome: Alzheimer’s. How can one experience hope in the face of this fatal disease?

- How many Americans are diagnosed with Alzheimer’s each year? What treatments are available?

- Edward, your book, ***A Journey of Faith***, offers hope for caregivers as well as those who have a family history of Alzheimer’s or dementia. Where else can folks find resources related to Alzheimer’s?

- Your mother, Estelle Grinnan, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in her late seventies. Tell us more about your mom and her life before Alzheimer’s. Were you close?

- Your mom was a diehard Detroit Tigers fan, right? How did your shared love of baseball reveal early signs of her congnitive decline?

- You write in your book that there are two things Alheimer’s can never take away. What are they?

- How did prayer sustain your mother, even as her disease progressed? How has it sustained you?

- There are some shared milestones for families who are caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s. One milestone is when it becomes necessary to take away the loved one’s car keys. Another is when it becomes clear that a greater level of care is requred than can be provided at home. How did you and your siblings prepare for these events?

- What advice do you have for those who act as daily caregivers for loved ones with Alzheimer’s or dementia? What guidance do you have for those who live too far away to help with daily care?

- Many people have a family history of Alzheimer’s - is the disease considered hereditary? If so, are there preventitive options available? Are their diagnostic tests available, and if so, will you personally make use of those tests?

- Your book beautifully shares your family’s experience with the heartbreak of Alzheimer’s, but you also share some hope-filled stories from others who have walked that path. Where did these stories come from? Would you share one with us now?

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Excerpt from ***A Journey of Faith*** by Edward Grinnan

I peered out the kitchen window into the moonless winter night, the fresh snow blanketing our yard barely a shadow, and wondered, Did I remember?

“Can you see her?” I called upstairs to Julee.

“No.”

Julee’s vantage point was superior to mine. She was better able to track our golden retriever Gracie’s movements, thanks to the bright green collar light I always turn on before letting her out at night up here in the Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts. But had I? Had I remembered? I always remembered, until recently, it seemed.

“Maybe the battery is dead,” Julee said. No, I’d just replaced that collar light. At least I remembered to do that.

A sickening panic stirred within me. Not out of fear for Gracie. She could handle herself at a lean, fearless seventy-five pounds. Besides, the bears were all asleep for the winter. No, this was fear for myself.

There is a strong history of Alzheimer’s dementia in my family. My mother died of it, as did both her sisters, one of her brothers who may have fallen victim before a stroke killed him, and my Pop-Pop, the only grandparent alive in my lifetime. My memories of him are fuzzy and I was too young to understand why he had such trouble remembering my name or whom I belonged to. That memory deficit came in handy, though, when he couldn’t recall if he had given me the customary quarter he always bestowed when I visited and slipped me another one, and sometimes a third. “Did I give you your quarter yet?” he’d ask, and I’d shake my head in mock shyness, thinking it was all a game.

Among the current generation some of my older cousins on my mother’s side are already showing possible signs. Maybe that’s why I have developed this near phobic reaction to even the most minor misfire of memory. The slightest lapse can set off an inner frenzy of doubt about my own brain health and start me brooding about my family’s history and my own susceptibility. It feels at times as if I am trying to outrun my own shadow.

“There she is!” Julee shouted. “Down by the apple tree.”

A minute later, a cheerful bark at the side door proclaimed that Gracie was ready to be let back in and receive her bedtime treat. Removing her collar, I noticed that the light was indeed off. Julee guessed that Gracie might have extinguished it herself, rolling in the snow, which she enjoys, crazy golden that she is. I wasn’t so sure.

My mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s about thirty years ago and died eight years later, several years after her older sisters, Marion and Cass, both died in memory care units. This book, in part, tries to sketch out that journey and the impact the disease has had on her children, who ultimately became her caregivers: my brother Joe, a lawyer; my sister Mary Lou, a school psychologist; and my sister-in-law, Toni, also a lawyer and the most practical person I’ve ever known. Then there was me, the youngest who everyone said was Mom’s favorite, living in New York, which sometimes felt like light-years away from Michigan, where Mom and my siblings, who took on so much responsibility for her care, all lived.

The Alzheimer’s journey is a difficult one millions of families have traveled, filled with pain and anger, empathy and hope, faith and prayer, and even on occasion joy. Ours was no different, as you will learn.

Yet looking at my family only makes me look at myself, at my own complicated relationship with the specter of Alzheimer’s. Watching my mother slip inescapably into dementia, like a schooner slowly disappearing into a fogbank, its sails billowing with an implacable wind, compels me to dwell on my own vulnerability. I understand one’s genetics are a fifty-fifty proposition. Although my father died in his early seventies of heart disease a few years before my mother showed symptoms of dementia, I take so much after my mom, from her grass-green eyes to her eruptive giggle. “You’re just like her,” I’ve always heard. The resemblance is unmistakable.

So is the bunion on my right foot whose pain level rises and falls with the barometer. Only recently did I understand why Mom would moan, “My toe is killing me.” What else might I have inherited from her? And if there is a ticking bomb concealed in my brain matter, do I want to know? Wanting to know is the key. Knowing is one thing—you can know something without wanting to know it. Wanting to know is quite another. Wanting to know is what makes us human. Wanting to know the future, wanting to know love, wanting to know ourselves, wanting to know and love God. If there is a way to predict that I, too, will slip into that miasma, do I want to know it? Accept it? Prepare for it? Deny it? Dread it?

I hope to answer these questions in the pages that follow, as well as let you hear from other families and individuals who have known the struggle of Alzheimer’s, especially those who have told their stories in Guideposts magazine, of which I am the editor-in-chief, and at Guideposts.org, where I publish a weekly blog about this journey and invite your contributions. It is especially those responses that have inspired and motivated me, like this one from Mary G.

“I’m there with you, Mr. Grinnan. My sister passed away with Alzheimer’s and my mom passed away with it in 2003. To see what that awful disease can do to a person is frightening. For quite a while I let the fear run my life and beat myself up when I would forget any little thing. But with a lot of prayer and God’s great mercy I am doing much better and trying to enjoy each and every day to the fullest. I’m not letting the fear take over my life. And I keep telling myself it may never happen anyway. Take care and be happy!”

I have become convinced we are a country collectively and individually trying to come to grips with a disease that steals our memories, our very ability to think. If the great French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes was correct—we think, therefore we are—Alzheimer’s deprives us of the very faculty that makes us a person, that defines our existence. What other disease does that to the ones we love? To ourselves? What other disease erases who we are?

The night of what I’ve come to call the “collar light incident” I lay in bed staring sleeplessly at the ceiling, pondering the state of the 86 billion neurons—give or take—thrumming inside my skull. I couldn’t dispel one researcher’s words I read describing the disease’s preclinical stage: “By the time [early] symptoms appear, protein build up has already damaged the brain neurons. The plaque is destroying the neurons’ ability to serve as a giant communications network to allow different parts of the brain to communicate with each other and to internal organs and other body parts. Until we find a cure, from the time Alzheimer’s begins, it is a slow march to the grave.”[1]

No wonder I couldn’t sleep. Even an owl’s gentle onomatopoeic hooting didn’t soothe me. Fear was winning and I couldn’t let that happen. Yet nothing could be more frightening than something brewing undetected in your brain that will ineluctably strip away everything that makes you you, and knowing there is nothing you can do about it. You don’t even know it’s happening until it’s too late.

I thought back to the signposts of my mother’s illness. When did it start? What did we miss? Is there a moment when you know or is it an accretion of incidents? It’s hard to say. I remembered visiting her once back in Michigan with Julee. Mom was making coffee for our breakfast. She was a whiz at cooking bacon and eggs and toast and timing it all perfectly. But suddenly Julee shouted. Mom had forgotten to put the carafe under the drip basket and coffee was overflowing all over the place. Mom couldn’t remember what she’d done with the carafe, but I finally found it in a cabinet and got it in place while Julee sopped up the mess. Mom seemed strangely indifferent to the whole episode and Julee reminded me that Mom usually had tea in the morning. We didn’t mention it again, and I hadn’t even thought about it until now.

Not very long ago I’d done the exact same thing with our single-cup coffee maker. I’d put the pod in place and dutifully started the brewing process only to hear Julee yell seconds later, “You forgot the cup!” Admittedly it was Monday morning, but it was to be my second cup of coffee and I had no excuse. And as I tossed and turned, I tried not to recognize the similarities between my slip of memory and my mother’s and having to sop up the mess with paper towels. It had been the start of a busy week. I’d stayed up too late the night before. I had a lot on my mind. Yet still…

The next day I unburdened myself to an old friend. I told him how every little slip of mind, every time I found myself confused when I shouldn’t be, eroded my faith in my ability to think, to someday be able to even function.

“I’m convinced these incidents are becoming more frequent,” I said. “I’m keeping track. I want to know what they mean.”

My friend stared at me for a long time. Then he exploded in laughter. “You want to know what they mean? Are you kidding me?” he said. “If I stressed out every time I forgot something, which I do all the time, I definitely couldn’t function. Dude, we forget more stuff than we ever remember in life, trust me. Lighten up. Remember, we put our lives in the hands of a loving God. We are not in this alone. If your faith can’t help you with this, I don’t know what can. There’s your answer.”

He was making a reference to the language of AA, where we’d met years before when he was just trying to get clean and I was finally finding my feet in sobriety after years of struggle. Some days it felt like I was still finding my feet. Today, after more than twenty-five years without a drink, I worry that years of alcohol and drug abuse increase my chances of brain decline. Alcohol in particular can cause dementia—wet brain, it’s called—all on its own. How wet was my brain before I eventually dried out? I’d had neurological symptoms during my many withdrawals—convulsions, hallucinations, panic attacks. I suffered several concussions during my drinking years, and perhaps a few more I wasn’t even aware of. I wanted to know if these insults to my brain matter increase my susceptibility to dementia.

By comparison, my mother was very healthy. She never smoked, was a light alcohol user (I never saw her even tipsy), and certainly didn’t use drugs. She wouldn’t even take an aspirin. She exercised, played point guard for her college basketball team even. And yet she succumbed to a fatal dementia that seemed practically inescapable in her family.

“We can’t control what we can’t control,” my friend added, quoting one of the program’s popular slogans, which he knew I hated. Finally, I cracked a smile. “I know,” I said, “a day at a time. Keep it simple. Live in the now. Let go and let God.” And still, I couldn’t help thinking—isn’t that what Alzheimer’s does in its own insidious way? Traps you in the now. Shrinks the aperture of our perceptions until all we know is what we know at that moment, life reduced to a confusing pinhole in time. I thought of my mother toward the end. The past was the present, the present the past. Her mind was a house of cracked mirrors.

I’m fairly sure that writing this book won’t answer all my questions or quell my angst. I plan to undergo neurological testing and whatever else that can predict or even diagnose Alzheimer’s. I’ve already done a number of cognitive tests, albeit online, inevitably followed by a barrage of ads for potions and supplements and elixirs guaranteed to restore my mind, even improve it. The results of some of these tests were clearly suspect. I don’t think I could have passed them even in graduate school. But they made me a mark for marketers. Others, though, seemed more legit, and some of the results had me worried.

I’ve embarked on this journey with open eyes and heart. I’ve prayed about it without being sure I got an answer, which might itself be an answer. God’s silence challenges us to draw on our own inner resources. Or maybe He just thinks I’m crazy.

It is the wanting that pulls me, the wanting to know, that primal yearning. It’s not how everyone feels. I would say from the responses to my blog it’s about fifty-fifty. Some people want to prepare themselves and their families. Some want to arrange caregiving and finances. Some want to enroll in experimental treatment programs. Most say they will lean into their faith—hard. Others simply don’t want to know and are afraid to even think about it. I can’t blame them.

Some, like me, just want to know because knowing is better than not knowing, as a matter of principle. Knowledge is armor. And if I find that answer, elusive as it may be, I plan to share it with you. In the meantime, I will defer to the advice of Mary G: I will take care and be happy…and try not to spill the coffee all over the place.

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