

My World Passes

Donovan Harrison

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In this endearing story, author Donovan Harrison takes readers into the mind of Sharon Phillips, a tiny, vivacious woman in her early fifties, as she deals with early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

From the earliest manifestations of the disease, when she could still keep it a secret from her friends and family, to the time when hiding it becomes impossible, readers witness the way Sharon's increasing forgetfulness and disorientation leave her more and more insecure and fearful in her once-familiar environment. As the disease progresses, Sharon begins to lose her way in her tiny hometown of Stillwater, Oklahoma; after a time, even short walks near her home result in disorientation. In spite of her fear, Sharon begins to experience an irresistible urge to wander off at night, leaving her vulnerable to the elements.

Sharon and those who surround her accept her disease and are determined to make the best of it as they submit to its demands. The need for locks on the doors to end midnight rambles, the loss of her ability to drive, the necessity for reminders about eating and personal hygiene, her paranoia and angry outbursts—all are handled with grace and good humor by those concerned; even her grown children adjust as Sharon grows less able to recall who they are. Harrison makes it clear that, where there is financial abundance, skilled and caring household help, and years of love to build on, it may be possible that even a condition as devastating as Alzheimer's need not destroy a family. While he does not directly address the devastation this disease can cause in less affluent families or for those who must suffer its ravages alone, his vivid portrayal of life inside the mind of an Alzheimer's victim will allow readers to imagine its effects upon those in less favorable circumstances.

Although a brighter, more hopeful view of the disease is welcome, this is unlikely to be the experience of most Alzheimer's sufferers. Sharon's belief, that "each day will be better than the one before" because each day will seem bright and new, belies the deep and troubling emotions that, for most people, are associated with watching a loved one face the inevitable physical, mental, and emotional decline that accompanies the progression of Alzheimer's.

Harrison's book, which he considers to be the most important of the eight he has written, may serve as a call to our society to compare what the ideal (absent an actual cure) situation might be for a victim of Alzheimer's with the painful, and much sadder, reality that so many of them face in America today.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May 18, 2010)

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