

Clarion Review ★★★★★

AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

Released to the Angels: Discovering the Hidden Gifts of Alzheimer's

Marilynn Garzzone

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Alzheimer's. Just the mention of the word brings thoughts of suffering, loss, pity, and fear. How could there possibly be any good associated with such a hideous disease? Marilynn Garzzone knows firsthand about the painful aspects of Alzheimer's, but she also knows how to cherish the moments of joy that can peek through when least expected.

Released to the Angels provides insights into the highs and lows of a caregiver's day-to-day world, and Garzzone proves to be a wise and thoughtful guide through this scary land.

Garzzone met her future husband, Patrick, when she was a teenager living at Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico. Her father was the Protestant chaplain and Patrick was his Catholic counterpart. Falling in love with a Catholic priest presented obvious challenges for a young Lutheran woman. But more daunting challenges would soon come as she would experience the declining health and eventual deaths of two loved ones—her husband and her father.

As Alzheimer's began to invade her husband's mind, Garzzone realized that she could not change the course of the disease, but she could choose her attitude and outlook about it, and how she approached her role as primary caregiver. Without being melancholy or overly optimistic, she gives examples of both the pain and joy of coping with Alzheimer's. In the process, she unveils how love, devotion, and faith provided her with the strength and focus she would need to perform the repetitive, tiring, and unpleasant tasks that would progressively worsen.

Once, they arrived early for Easter Mass, forgetting the starting time had been changed. Pat entered the church and sat in the quietness. Garzzone found a place to be alone and was overcome by her personal sadness while watching Pat sitting with his thoughts. When she went to sit beside him, and when they had finished praying, they sat quietly for a few moments, and then he gently leaned over and kissed her. Even in the midst of Alzheimer's, their love endured.

But there were also times of joy and humor. At a buffet, she told Pat that he could eat all he wanted of anything he liked. She was quite surprised when he came back and placed an entire chocolate cake on the table. During a solemn Christmas Eve service, Pat, confused and disturbed, blurted out, "Let's get the hell out of here!"—right in the middle of "O Holy Night."

Garzzone does not attempt to explain how to be a caregiver: she shows how. She also offers glimpses into the true meaning of themes such as friendship, marriage, perseverance, faith, love, and many others. *Released to the Angels* is more than just a memoir. It's a passionate, inspiring and compelling example of facing any of life's challenges with hope and strength.

JEFF FRIEND (November 9, 2010)

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