

United in Health



My parents marry in a local park, surrounded by friends and family. Over the next thirty five years, they experience challenges and harmonies, setbacks and celebrations. Dementia ravages my mother's brain while my sisters and I are in college and high school. We do not understand how she forgets her birthday, and she cries that she is broken. My father second-guesses his decisions about her care but stays dedicated. At the age of 59, Mom can no longer live at home. We move her to a care home, and Dad visits her almost every evening after spending all day at the office. He helps her eat when her fingers forget how to grasp silverware and she can no longer hold her plastic drinking cup and straw. When she begins sleeping through most meals, he sits by her bed. She clasps his hand, silently pleading for him to stay.

My mom fights against the disease that claims her memories, speech, and muscles. When Dad walks in the room, Mom shares the only thing she has left to give: a smile. This precious link to who she used to be and who she will always be helps relieve the sadness of her decline and fear of life without her. Dad gives my sister and her husband advice for their first anniversary. "Your mother and I have had our years," he says, his voice quiet and strong. "Enjoy your years, together."

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association*



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--Heather Stauffer