

Title: Memories Forgotten by Young Faces

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//Strapline//The challenges of caring for a young people with early-onset dementia.//

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Maybe one day your aunt forgets where she last put her lipstick, searching frantically for the item she just put down. She finds the beautiful purple shade, applies it and then the cycle happens again. You sit, wondering why she is acting this way and think surely she can't have memory loss, she's barely in her 50's?

Dementia isn't just a disease that affects the older generation and it can hit at any age.

A lot of research is currently underway with dementia and it's thought that around 5% of people with Alzheimer's disease are actually under 65. Like typical dementia, the memory loss is gradual, but younger people are also thought to have more atypical symptoms. These can include a difficulty in understanding information, whether in language or visual cues and they can even suffer with decision making. These atypical symptoms can make it tricky to tell if someone close to you is experiencing dementia, or something else.

Roger Davies who cares for his sister with early-onset dementia, found it difficult to know what she was experiencing. "I didn't know quite what was wrong. It

was a more gradual process than I thought, obviously beginning with confusion and her repeating the same phases. But then it seemed to suddenly flip and she got worse a lot quicker.”

The Health Line website has set out a list of symptoms to look out for when trying to conclude a diagnosis of dementia, including changes in moods and difficulties when doing normal tasks.

Roger continued to say that he began to monitor her daily tasks as her changing routine was one of the first things he noticed. “She’d forget she had gone to the toilet or whether she had eaten or not. I noticed her getting thinner and thinner, but she wouldn’t eat unless I put a lot of effort into encouraging her. She kept thinking she didn’t like the foods I was making her, then she’d take a bite then finish the entire plate.”

From personal experiences with early-onset dementia, the mood changes were one of the first signs of deterioration. My family member began getting more emotional and I’d ask ‘why’, of course she didn’t know why. But she did sometimes blame ‘the cat’. Inevitably, this became her obsession, every question we asked she responded ‘the cat’.

It can make you think, why doesn’t she remember me but she remembers the cat?

It obviously wasn’t anything personal. She’d had a lot of memories with the cat and it used to be her constant companion, Perhaps their memories were on a constant loop inside of her head. Even so, if the cat brings her comfort then who am I to stop her? A teddy bear in cat form was shortly brought after as a cuddly friend who she could sleep with and talk to.

It does seem wrong to be worried about early-onset dementia happening to yourself, especially with everything else going on in the world. Yet, a few people in my family have it so it's okay to be worried about it from time to time. But I have to remind myself, there is currently a lot of research going into the diagnosis and treatment of dementia, focusing on what actually happens to the brain during the disease and researchers are making progress. In 2019 alone, dementia research identified a new type of dementia, made jelly sweets to combat dehydration, designed new blood tests and much more. The process to combating dementia might be a long road, but funding these research projects might pave the way from a brighter future for us all.

I hope that someday this disease is eradicated and maybe someday young faces won't be forgetting a lifetime of stories.

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