

**The Purple Flower Speech**  
**Written and Delivered by Carrie Knowles**

*September 29, 2018 at Triangle The Walk to End Alzheimer's  
In Memory of One Who Has Been Lost to Alzheimer's*

With most terminal illnesses death comes as no surprise, despite whatever ragged hopes we might have held onto for a miracle. With its lack of remissions, coupled with the lack of medical treatment and promised cures, Alzheimer's feel more like some exhausting never-ending treadmill rather than something that will eventually end.

Alzheimer's is unlike other terminal illnesses. It is a long road of lost memories, physical decline and fragile family moments with little hope along the way.

As we watched our mother's life erode, my brothers, sister, and I felt our own lives tumble. Unless you have been there yourself, it is hard to explain to someone else how, as your loved one loses memories, yours become challenged and faded as well. Knee deep into the tangled lost memories of Alzheimer's, it is hard to remember who is right about the past, who is wrong and what really happened in your life. Your memories like your loved one's become darkened and fade.

In the early years of Alzheimer's you spend a lot of time talking about the past in an effort to snag the best of what had been in order to keep it close. But, as the disease wears on, and so much more is lost, you quit talking about what used to be, because what used to be is so far away by then you are not really sure what life before Alzheimer's was anymore.

The lost memories of Alzheimer's are like little deaths, each one demanding some time of grief. And, before you realize it, you are awash in a gully of grief that becomes so much a part of your every day you can't quite imagine a life otherwise.

Our mother's death was the first moment in the sixteen years of worrying about and caring for her that gave us any sense of hope. Throughout the progression of the disease and Mom's decline, we never quit clinging to the notion that when her body gave in, and she at last died, whatever small bit of her wild spirit that was left and had been untouched by her disease would be released from her body and would be free to recapture its memory again.

Attending Mom's funeral was truly the first step of finding our way down a long corridor of healing that would take us back to our own lives and to the mother we wanted to remember.

Her funeral was gift. It took place at the small chapel in the Methodist Home during the time when the shift was changing on the medical wing so the staff could attend. One by one the staff stood and told stories about Mom. They laughed and cried, and through it all you could feel Mom's strong personality shining through to the very end: her feistiness, her strong opinions, her generous heart and her love of life.

The funeral director suggested we select a picture of Mom for the memorial announcement. While Alzheimer's raged through Mom's mind and memory over the last sixteen years, it robbed her face of both mischief and heart. We couldn't bear to use any pictures we had of her from that time.

Shortly before Mom died, one of our uncles gave us a very special picture of Mom. It was a black and white snapshot and it looked like it was probably taken with an old Brownie camera.

In the picture Mom is wearing a pretty cotton dress and she's laughing as she comes skipping down a pathway along a fence. There is something wild and free about the picture. It helps me to believe there is a heaven.

It is easy to imagine that, spread before her on the path, are all the memories she's lost. This my mother now, I tell myself when I look at the picture. I want to think she's laughing because she's rediscovered her wonderful wild life, like flowers in a field, one precious memory at a time.

It has now been eighteen years since she died, but I think about Mom and miss her everyday. Missing someone, fortunately, is sweeter than grieving.