

# Health & Wellness

**Mary Beth Sallee**  
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**Dorothy Meredith, or Nannie as she was called, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2005. She passed away in 2017.**

Dorothy Meredith, or Nannie as she was affectionately called, was a homemaker. Described by her granddaughter, Beth Harp, as being an avid sewer and seamstress, Nannie loved all things that involved crafting.

"We (my sister and I) grew up living next door to our Nannie and Papaw, and she was always there when we needed her," Beth said. "Her house was an extension of our own. When we got home from school, Nannie was there to watch us."

"We had always planned for our daughters to grow up the same way," Beth added, "But they were never able to know the Nannie that we knew when we were growing up."

Beth, her sister April Hennion, and the rest of their family noticed changes in Nannie's behavior which raised concerns.

"We started noticing that there were some issues with Nannie when she began repeating herself during short conversations," Beth said. "She also started being confused during daily activities like cooking or laundry. She was a homemaker all of her life and cooked for our family often. She began mixing up ingredients and using wrong ingredients, and she didn't even realize there was something wrong after she finished."

Nannie herself also noticed the changes, and spoke with her son and husband about her own concerns. Both men then spoke with Nannie's primary care doctor. After cognitive exams were performed, the doctor noticed some cause for concerns.

"I had worked for a neurologist in the past, and we made an appointment for some more in depth tests," Beth said. "After performing an MRI and seeing some definitive changes that are commonly seen in patients with Alzheimer's and dementia, Nannie was officially diagnosed and treatment began."

There is no cure for Alzheimer's, a disease that more than 5 million Americans are currently living with today. However, once diagnosed in 2005, Nannie began taking oral medications that only slow - not stop - the progression of memory loss.

"Doctors encouraged us to help Nannie to remain active and engage her mind, allow her to complete any activities she could without assistance as long as she was able to do so safely," Beth said. "She often served as the 'chauffeur' for her sisters, but she voluntarily gave up her keys when she forgot the way home one day. The way to her house that she had lived in for more than 40 years had become another forgotten memory."

As her memory began to fail, Nannie began isolating herself. Beth said that her grandmother's once spunky, loving, and social personality faded and then eventually disappeared, becoming a figment of the past.

"She recognized that she forgot most anything anyone said to her and repeated herself so often and just grew tired of apologizing for her fading memory," Beth said. "She would ask several times during a conversation, 'Did I already tell you that?' Of course, we never corrected her, but when she recognized it herself, she would feel very defeated."

Watching their grandmother fade was difficult for both Beth and April.

"One of the hardest parts was explaining who I was every time I went to see her," Beth said. "It is horrible to know that a person who loved you with all their heart for 20 years of your life forgot your name. I seen her nearly every single day of my life for over 20 years, and Alzheimer's caused her to forget me. It caused her to never know either of my daughters...Although I truly believe she loved our daughters just as she loved April and myself, her mind did not allow her to remember them and express her love to them as she was able to with us."

"For me personally, one of the hardest parts of watching Nannie suffer through Alzheimer's was knowing that we had no way to help her," April said. "Since Alzheimer's has no cure, the hopelessness you feel is overwhelming. It's not like most diseases where you know there's at least a chance of survival or meds that can cure or keep the disease at bay. So, we knew that when the diagnosis was made, she would not be making any improvements. Even though we were told what to expect throughout the stages of the disease, you're still not fully prepared to watch a loved one forget who you are. And then to know you can't help them regain that memory is heartbreaking."

Nannie was able to stay at her home where she was cared for by her husband Elmer, her son Michael Meredith, and her daughter-in-law Sharon.

"It was a sad day when she told me she didn't know me," Michael said of his mother. "She told me she had forgot all her children. I had to tell her she only had one, and it was me. We both cried together."

"Imagine how it must feel to trust family to take care of you, and you don't know who they are," Michael added. "You don't know if they are there to help you or hurt you. It is miserable."

## REGIONAL NEWS

### Alzheimer's Awareness

# Nannie's Story



**Team Meredith participated in the 2019 Walk to End Alzheimer's each year in memory of their loved ones they have lost to the disease. Bottom row, L to R: Ryann Davis, Meredith Hennion, Sherry Stratton, Zoey Stratton, Alissa Stratton. Middle row, L to R: Sydney Hennion (standing) Beth Harp, Kyndal Harp, Makinley Harp, Michael Meredith, Anthony Hennion. Back row, L to R: April Hennion, Ray Harp, John Michael Mills, Laurie Mills Tommy Stratton, Paul Stratton, Blake Talley, Christie Talley, Chris Talley, Angela Saling.**

The Alzheimer's eventually affected Nannie's physical health as well.

"Her mind forgot how to tell her body how to function," Beth said. "Her body failed because her brain failed...She forgot how to eat. She forgot how to walk. She forgot where she was. She forgot the family that she raised, and then her brain failed her body."

Nannie passed away in February of 2017. Her cause of death was the direct result of Alzheimer's.

"With Alzheimer's, you mourn the loss of your loved one twice," Michael said. "There's the living death when they forget who their family is and the final death when they actually pass away."

Nannie was not the only family member that Beth, April and their families mourned. Their maternal grandmother, "Mamaw" Flossie Logsdon was diagnosed with dementia and passed away in November 2019. April's grandfather-in-law, Lestel Childress, also suffered with Alzheimer's and passed away as well.

"It (Alzheimer's) has affected our family in a variety of ways," April said. "Obviously, the loss of our loved ones is the biggest change. I worry about how the disease could affect my family and my children in the future. We are constantly reading and trying to understand ways that may help prevent the disease. My daughters were old enough at the time to understand more about the progression of Alzheimer's in Nannie. So, both of them have taken an interest in fundraising and awareness... Alzheimer's has had a profound effect on how I view the importance of talking about the disease,



**Each year, Team Meredith participates in the Walk to End Alzheimer's event. Pictured from the 2018 walk are Beth Harp, Elmer Meredith (Nannies husband and care giver), April Hennion, Michael Meredith, and Sharon Meredith.**

even the most terrible parts that no one wants to mention, so that caretakers know they are not alone and so that people who have not had to deal with Alzheimer's realize how devastating the disease is and how desperately we need support for finding a cure."

Beth and April have taken a stand to raise awareness for the disease and a need for a cure. Both sisters are Alzheimer's Congressional Team Members. Beth is the ambassador for Senator Rand Paul's team, while April is an advocate for Congressman Brett Guthrie's Team.

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