



Fran Cooper Never Forgot the Fragrance of Life

Fran's Song: My Mother's Triumph over Alzheimer's
by Ron Cooper, Author

Every day in Mom's memory care unit, she and her fellow residents engaged in exercises to strengthen their minds. One day, the activities aide held up a flash card of a tree and asked Mom and her companions to identify it. They answered in a chorus, "Tree!"

"Good!" the aide said.

Then the aide held up a picture of a rose. It was a black-and-white drawing, but still these people with tenuous memories recalled a symbol of beauty and nature.

Clara identified it as a "flower" and several of her friends agreed. Mom didn't respond. You could tell that she was thinking. The aide pressed for more specifics, and Mom answered:

"A rose is a rose is a rose."

For a split second, Fran Cooper had defeated this deteriorating disease that makes a mockery of your remembrances and steals your yesteryear, bit by agonizing bit. This, I thought, needs to be chronicled! I got out my notebook. And so began a remarkable year of watching Mom interact with fellow residents and staff of her unit, singing, praying, loving.

I wrote my book to dispel the common myths surrounding Alzheimer's. It's simply not true that Alzheimer's steals everything. As memories fade, the mind still ponders the wonders of life. The heart still loves intensely. The spirit still worships and prays. And the urge to sing is stronger than ever, and the notes are sweeter, more poignant.

And so it was with Mom. She gave me thoughtful advice on the eve of my wedding. She exchanged sweet love letters with Dad. She voiced her faith through prayer, and was a song leader in her memory care unit. At the Christmas pageant, she held the audience spellbound with her beautiful rendition of "Silent Night, Holy Night." Many years after her diagnosis, Mom was still able to say and do some remarkable things.

In "*Fran's Song: My Mother's Triumph over Alzheimer's*," I wanted to honor my mother's memory as a special loved one with a steadfast faith and a lovely voice, not just someone losing her mind and failing to remember my name. Her story was not about my loss, but instead her new life in a most sacred space.

I also wanted to help others, so that in some small way family caregivers might be inspired by Mom's unique journey. There is no reason we should walk this journey alone. Those living with Alzheimer's need companionship, a gentle hand, respect, dignity and a good quality of life.

These dear loved ones think, feel and love like us all. And, yes, they can distinguish a rose from an ordinary flower. The rose brings wonder to all who embrace it, who see in it youthful freshness even when the bloom is gone and the scent is faint. The rose is as much of a symbol as a reality, and strikes deep into the tenderness of the human spirit.



For my precious Mom, the rose was much more than a fading memory.