

Alzheimer's: A Love Story

Film Review

by Michael Horvich

Educator, Advocate, and Care Partner

Gregory, my husband of over 41 years, was diagnosed with dementia, most likely Alzheimers, in the 29th year of our relationship. He was 55 years old.

We walked the Dementia/Alzheimers path together for twelve years. He was **not a victim** of Alzheimers ... but rather a **hero**. I might add that **we** lived as **well** as possible with dementia, refusing to accept the diagnosis as a "death sentence." Also, I never referred to it as **his** diagnosis but rather **our** diagnosis.

In some ways, we were relieved when we received the diagnosis because now we had an idea of what we were dealing with; although at the time we did not really understand the nature of the roller coaster ride we would be on for the next twelve years.

As you know, Dementia/Alzheimers is not just a memory problem! It includes cognitive issues as well as physical, mental, physiological, psychological, social, emotional, etc. ... and is complicated by many ways in which it expresses itself, usually differently, for each person affected!

The times were not easy, but we persevered and did a good job! I was able to keep him safe and support him by helping him to be free of worries, responsibilities, and fears. I was able to help him compensate for his abilities while always trying to make sure that the respect and communication which had defined our relationship never faltered.

I made sure that our daily life was full and rich and meaningful. Our life was filled with much laughter as well as many tears; joy, as well as sorrow. And above all, it was filled with love.

I had all of our legal arrangements in order. I held Power of Attorney over Gregory's health care and also over financial matters. Our wills were in place. Being a same-sex couple, before marriage was legal in the United States, we also had to have all types of special "permissions" in place.

There were many gifts which we were able to recognize while also dealing with the symptoms of our diagnosis of Alzheimers Disease. We were fortunate in that I was retired, we closed Gregory's business and our time was now our own. Our love continued to grow, we were able to travel the world, we enjoyed our condo and living in a very active downtown Evanston, Illinois. We entertained, enjoyed our family and friends, and were buoyed up by our pets with their unconditional love. We were able to simplify our life, only keep the most meaningful parts, and continue to be compassionate with each other, ourselves, and those around us.

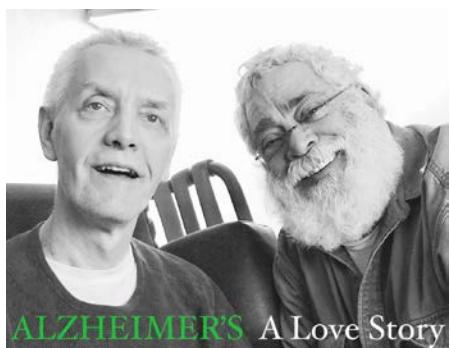


I was able to write about our experiences and in doing so process my understandings and feelings and share them with others. I took care of Gregory at home for over ten of his years with dementia. It was not easy, but it was a joy supporting him and the only thing I could rightfully do.

Gregory's medical and physical needs became so great during his last year and a half, that short of turning our home into a fully staffed 24/7 hospital ward, I was not able to provide for his needs. I was able to find an excellent memory care facility just ten minutes from home so I could visit every day.

Gregory's new sense of community and belonging, the safe clean environment, the delicious meals, the medical support, and just the presence of many people around him were all positive attributes of my decision and contributed to his well-being. I hired a day care worker to support his physical, as well as social/emotional needs since by now Gregory could not do much for himself.

For the most part he was happy and content and peaceful in his new life. When problems rarely surfaced at the care center, they were cooperatively and easily taken care of. Now and then Gregory would become frustrated or angry ... once in a great while he would strike out but that was more out of his frustration than it was due to violence. He did not complain much and was usually kind and compassionate with me, himself, and others.



ALZHEIMER'S: A Love Story, a documentary which briefly follows Gregory and me towards the end of his life, has been accepted by more than 90 film festivals both in the United States and around the world. We have won over 35 awards, including two from the American Pavilion at the Cannes Film Festival and a large financial prize from the Florence Film Festival.

The story, which I believe is a beautiful one, gives you an up-close look at our 41 year love relationship and our twelve years living with Alzheimers, and distills it into a moving fifteen minute documentary.

I think you will agree ... as you experience the story ... that **love is love** and LGBTQ **love** is an important part of that. Every love relationship deserves the right to be treated with respect.

Gregory died on October 4, 2015. Great love means great grief. I will always grieve the loss of the love of my life but that love also carries me forward as I continue to live a meaningful life and to support others facing similar experiences.

Whether you are the one who supports and/or loves the person diagnosed or the one yourself who has received the diagnosis ... the way in which dementia progresses and expresses itself over time can be one of the most challenging, painful, frightening, confusing, and frustrating experiences you will ever encounter, but you can succeed in getting through it.

You will not always be at your best ... but if done with love, understanding, kindness, and forgiveness ... it can also be a time of renewed love, creativity, and many unexpected

gifts.

My goal in sharing Gregory's and my story is to let others know, "You are not alone. You can do this. Take care of **yourself** as well as your loved one. Don't be afraid to ask for help from others."

How to view the film:

[Watch the Trailer - *Alzheimer's: A Love Story*](#)

[Watch the film on Amazon Prime](#) (free for members)

[Rent or buy the film on Amazon](#) (\$2.99/\$3.99 rental. \$7.99/\$8.99 purchase)

[Rent or buy the film / trailer on Vimeo](#) (Join free. Rent \$3.00 Buy \$8.99)

[Watch the film / trailer on Spark and Seed](#) (Free trial \$6.99 a month)

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Michael holds his BA in Liberal Arts and Sciences from the University of Illinois at Urbana, additional degree work at the Hunter College in New York, his MA as an Education Generalist with a concentration in Gifted Education from the National Lewis University in Evanston, and an Advanced Certificate in Education Administration and Supervision, also from the U of I in Urbana.

After a 30-year elementary school and university teaching career, Michael has been retired for 20+ years but has been more than active as an educator, speaker, story teller, writer, poet, photographer, blogger, artist, jeweler, book binder, lecturer, actor, supernumerary, museum curator, flea circus ringmaster, and dementia/Alzheimers caregiver partner for his life partner Gregory Maire (RIP).