

I was diagnosed with Alzheimer's about eighteen months ago. It came as quite a shock as, although I realised that my memory (on which I had previously prided myself) was deteriorating, such a diagnosis hadn't occurred to me.

My husband, Richard, immediately took himself off the Alzheimer's Society to gather information. I only learned of this recently, when it cropped up in a conversation with Justin at the Society's office, where I now volunteer once a week. I hadn't realised that he'd met Richard, so was puzzled when Justin asked me to pass on his regards to Rich; for an instant, I was 'miffed' that Richard had been to their offices without mentioning it to me, but then realised that, if the boot had been on the other foot, I'd probably have done exactly the same.

I think I can say that I'm in the early stages of dementia and am by no means in despair, but frequently frustrated. Probably about a month ago I was in town and couldn't remember in which direction to find a certain shop; it wasn't a major problem and a few minutes later I remembered and took myself off there. Generally I have no problems finding my way around town or to the markets and shops. So far, I remember people's names, often their birthdays, sometimes their telephone numbers and where they live.

Our son and daughter, who both live in Australia, are obviously concerned, but we keep them up-to-date with what's happening. When I was diagnosed they were both so worried that my daughter came to visit twice last year and my son and his partner once. I think their visits put their minds at rest in that my condition was not as bad as they had anticipated and was not deteriorating quickly. While here Alan put some stickers on all the kitchen cupboard doors to remind me where I keep utensils, etc. and Mary presented me with a small box, with separate compartments for my medication.

I don't have any trouble travelling around alone on buses (frequently) or trains (infrequently). I have never driven much, but I recently returned my licence to the DVLA; although the doctor didn't say specifically that I should stop driving, it was clear that she thought that would be best. Richard sometimes drives me either to the Alzheimer's Society or to my drumming or reading group, which I think is mainly because he wants to be sure that I arrive there safely.

Before I retired, I worked mainly as a secretary, as a personal assistant or as an administrative assistant, which involved a lot of typing and composing letters, which I did efficiently. I can still touch type as quickly as ever and I still have grammatical skills which don't appear to have been affected in any way. Also, as a member of a reading group, I read a book each month and then make notes for discussion at our monthly meeting. It seems strange that I'm retaining these skills and interests, which appear not to have been affected by my condition, whilst my short-term memory (and sometimes my long-term memory) has most certainly deteriorated over the last year or two. Occasionally my short-term memory is fine and I can remember dates and times for appointments without difficulty, but sometimes I just have no memory at all of a particular issue. Richard tells me that I sometimes ask him the same question repeatedly, but again, I've no memory of this. He thinks that I have good days and bad days, possibly affected by the amount of sleep that I have; sometimes I'm awake at 3 in the morning and can't get back to sleep. However, I

feel that this is not nearly as bad as not being able to get to sleep at night, which would be far worse.

Walking is something that Richard and I do whenever we have the opportunity, which I think sometimes helps to 'blow the cobwebs away' and makes me more alert.

We took part together in the Society's 'Memory Walk', which we thoroughly enjoyed, and will probably do so again this year. When people asked what we were walking in aid of, we replied 'We've forgotten'. The only problem will be having to approach the same people for sponsorship as we did last year.

At some time this year we will be returning to the Yorkshire Dales for a week's walking and, which we enjoy just as much as in previous years, although we are finding that we can't walk quite so far as we used to.

I usually go to the monthly Memory Café in Acomb, but have missed the last three, due to two other appointments which clashed, and me forgetting about the last one until it had almost finished.

We have lived in our present house for the past 14 years, are on very good terms with our neighbours and I've got to know the people who work in our local shops and post office. We've told some of our neighbours about my dementia and they have been very supportive with offers of help, which we haven't as yet required. I hope that, if my condition deteriorates, it won't mean that we have to move away.

I recognise that my condition is likely to deteriorate, but can only hope that it continues to do so at a slow rate.

Thank you for listening.