

# FRIDAY WAS THE DAY

By Ginny Larsen

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children....*  
(Psalm 103:13-17a)

Alzheimer's is a terrible disease. It takes away a loved one little by little and brings out the frailty of this life. You grieve several deaths of that loved one, as they slowly deteriorate from one stage to another. This is the story of how God worked in my own heart and caused His seed of love to grow as I struggled with my mother-in-law's deteriorating Alzheimer's. I learned first-hand how we truly are but dust and fade away from this life. Yet, we are precious to the Lord and never fade away from His steadfast love.

My mother-in-law's name was Rena. She came to live with us after we discovered her memory was failing and that she was not safe by herself at home anymore. We took care of her the best we could, but after a year of living with us, it soon became evident that she needed 24-hour supervision, which we could not give her. We made arrangements with an assisted-living home that would allow her as much independence as possible yet give her the care she needed. We decided to make the move on a Friday, which gave us about a week to prepare.

We went through so many mixed emotions that week, and Bob continually went back and forth on the decision to place her in the home. Finally, we worked it out with his cousin that she would come and take my mother-in-law for the day while we moved her things into the home. After that, Rena would be brought there and told it was her new apartment.

Even though we knew in our heads that this was the best way to do it, and we had everyone's support, we felt like criminals betraying her when Friday finally came. I got up in the morning feeling like part of me was missing. I mechanically worked through the day doing only what I had to do. I was preparing myself for my husband's grief, for Rena's confusion and maybe even anger, but I was not at all prepared for my own grief. When it came, it completely took me by surprise, rushing in like a tidal wave to knock me over.

When they brought Rena to the assisted-living home and she saw us there, we told her this was her new home. Everyone tried to make it seem like a great surprise and a very positive thing. She seemed to accept it just fine, but then she turned to me with a look in her eyes that I couldn't describe, but I still have implanted in my memory, and said, "You mean I can't live with you anymore? Why did I have to leave there? I liked it there. Can't I live with you anymore?" Then she turned to my 15-year-old and said, "Ben, are you going to live here with me?"

And that was when we all lost it and had to leave. I was up all that night crying harder than I

thought I ever could cry. I was shocked at my grief. I didn't see it coming. Why was I acting like I had just come home from burying her?

Two days later, I wrote on an Alzheimer's forum, "I haven't been able to go downstairs since Friday, but I have to do my laundry, so I have to go down there. Isn't this crazy?"

I had come a long way in my relationship with this woman. When I first met her, I only tolerated her. She didn't want me to marry her son. Then our relationship grew to acceptance and obligation. After a while, I started to see things in her that I hadn't seen before, and I began to grow in my appreciation and respect for her. She was always willing to forget herself and give to anyone who needed anything, whatever she could give.

I called the home the day after we placed her there and asked how she was doing. They said she was singing, doing exercises with them, and making friends. She loved to help by doing dishes, folding laundry, and assisting with anything else that needed to be done. She never asked about us and seemed very happy. I knew this was the most wonderful place I could have found for her and she was getting the best care she could be getting. Rena was doing much better than we were! So why was I acting as if she had died? Why was I going through so much grief? It all felt backwards. After I hung up the phone, I thought I'd be relieved she was getting good care and that the whole thing was over. However, I began facing a whole new set of emotions that I didn't even know were inside of me.

Rena had always loved me and treated me like her own daughter. Very slowly and gently, I began to love her and didn't even realize it. That Friday, it hit me just how much this woman had meant to me in the 23 years that I had known her.

God had revealed to my own heart a seed He had planted and watered and caused to grow. It was His seed of love. It was He Who planted it and He Who caused it to grow, even while I was unaware of it. His own glory was revealed in us and to us as He tenderly cared for Rena in her time of helplessness and our time of sorrow. Life lasts a short time in this world, but through all of life's frailty, God reveals to us His steadfast love and the promise of eternity.

*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*  
(Psalm 73:26)