

PLEASE TAKE ME HOME
Before Dark

ONE FAMILY'S JOURNEY WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE



BY BILLIE PATE
WITH MARY PATE YARNELL

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Chapter One



THE LONGEST DAY

WHEN I FORGET,

PLEASE REMEMBER WHO I AM:
MY LOVE FOR KITTENS AND BIRDS AND FLOWERS,
AND MY JOY IN MAKING DRESSES FOR
A CHILD LIVING IN A COLORLESS WORLD.

WHEN I FORGET,

PLEASE REMEMBER
HOW MUCH I LOVE THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS
AND HOLIDAYS—ESPECIALLY THE WONDER
OF CHRISTMAS.

WHEN I FORGET,

PLEASE REMEMBER
HOW PROUD I AM OF ALL MY CHILDREN,
AND MY COMFORT IN GOING TO CHURCH.

WHEN I FORGET,

PLEASE REMEMBER WHO I AM,
AND HELP ME FIND AND BE MYSELF,
AS LONG AS PART OF ME REMAINS.

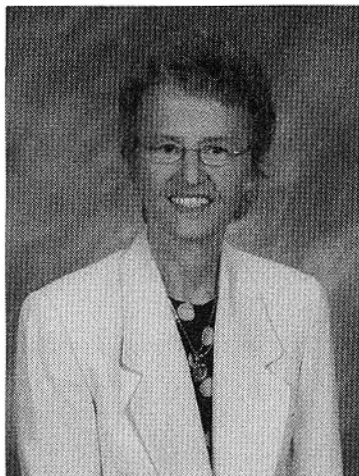
The deaths of our parents were drastically different. One died swiftly and conclusively; the other lingered for more than ten years of loving care, unrelenting grief and frustration, and sometimes battles with guilt-producing impatience. The two ways of dying do not suggest more or less grief, more or less love and caring, nor more or fewer wonderful memories. They represent two sets of expectations about death and how we are prepared to cope.

Our father's death came with abruptness and finality, the result of a catastrophic, violent event in his chest. He was pronounced dead in less than twenty-four hours. Our mother, sister, and brother gathered for the night-long vigil. I was the last to arrive because of the distance I had to travel. When I entered the hospital room, three distinct images told the story: (1) the umbilical tubes and the ashen emptiness of my father's face; (2) the shock and sadness on my siblings' faces; and (3) the pathos and bewilderment on my mother's face. The way she approached his death on this night and the grief process in the months and years ahead were benchmarks of her journey with Alzheimer's disease.

Somewhat early in our experience with Alzheimer's, my pastor shared with me an article by Beldon C. Lane. At the time, Lane's mother was traveling the long road paved with the heart-break of this disease. He used vivid imagery from both mythology and the Bible to contrast two different modes of dying and how our culture prepares us for one more than for the other. I gleaned important insights from the article that helped us along the way.¹

On one hand, death, or the threat of certain death, comes with unexpected suddenness, sometimes with great drama. We respond with theatrical courage, even heroics. The spiritual and physical energy to cope are put in full throttle. Our subconscious assures us that if we hold on, we can quickly and effectively get through the rituals to the other side of this event. In no way does this reasoning minimize the faith required to get through, nor the grief to process during and after, such a death. The attitudes and coping skills, however, are fueled by our cultural experience.

About the Authors



Billie Pate is a gifted writer with published works in education and music. She has master's degrees in both social work and education. Her professional experience includes writing, editing, training, and executive management in national organizations.



Mary Pate Yarnell is a nurturer in both her family and her profession. With her minister husband, she served several years as a missionary in Southeast Asia. More recently, she has used her postgraduate training and professional skills in administrative and caregiving functions in several skilled care facilities.



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More than four million Americans, along with their families and friends, are experiencing what it's like to lose the beauty of memory, the self assurance of sound judgment, the "ah-ha" moments of understanding, and the control of body functions over which one has reigned a lifetime. This progressive loss is the heartbreak of Alzheimer's disease.

Please Take Me Home Before Dark provides inspiration, information, and support to family members and caring professionals of Alzheimer's patients (and other forms of dementia). Using a writing style that is warm, yet instructive; serious, though sometimes humorous; and highly personal, yet medically reliable, the authors share their mother's progression through Alzheimer's to benefit others facing the same situation. Although intensely personal, the book also magnifies meanings and provides practical help. Each chapter includes a sensitive, poetic introduction; an empathetic and informative description of the Alzheimer's process; poignant personal illustrations; and at-a-glance sections to help readers map the patient's journey and provide loving care with hope and confidence.

BILLIE J. PATE is a gifted writer with published works in education and music. She has master's degrees in both social work and education. Her professional experience includes writing, editing, training, and executive management in national organizations. MARY PATE YARNELL is a nurturer in both her family and her profession. With her minister husband, she served several years as a missionary in Southeast Asia. More recently, she has used her postgraduate training and professional skills in administrative and caregiving functions in several skilled care facilities.

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