

# Losing the Battle for Normalcy

Richard Taylor, PhD

**RICHARD TAYLOR**, PhD, is a retired psychologist who lives with and writes about Alzheimer's disease (AD). Richard has agreed to maintain frequent E-mail contact with *ALC* to provide us with a diary of his impressions, struggles, and conquests. Richard Taylor's reflections on AD follow.

**June 6, 2007**

## Ask Dr. Alzheimer?

Prior to my diagnosis, I thought of myself as just a regular person. I was an "old hippie." Resigned to the fact that I was and was to be perpetually upset with most of the actions of governments and especially the Supreme Court.

I knew I was smart. I knew I had an above-average vocabulary. I felt and thought as if I pretty much knew myself. I felt in control of myself and situations around me. People came to me for advice. Frequently I helped others solve their own problems. It was relatively easy for me to see the "whys" in other people's behaviors. I had answers for them and for myself.

I knew sometimes I was not all I should be or could be. I felt like I knew myself, warts and all.

I did not always follow my own advice, but I knew I was ignoring it as it was happening. I did not have a photographic memory, but it always seemed to serve my needs. I knew what I could do and what I could not do, and at this stage in my life, I was pretty comfortable with both.

Now, I am not sure. I'm not sure



Richard Taylor, PhD, provides reflections on his battle with Dr. Alzheimer.

about myself, my abilities, my perceptions, my memories, my reasoning, and did I mention, I'm not sure about myself.

*Why do I feel like I am lost when I walk down my own street to get the mail?*

*Why can't I connect familiar faces with familiar names—even my own family?*

*Why can't I now seem to learn, retain, and consistently use most of the features of my cell phone?*

*Why can't I recall the name of*

*the person with whom I was just speaking on the phone?*

*Why can't I find a note I just wrote down on some piece of paper so I wouldn't forget to do something?*

*Why do I always seem to feel so frustrated?*

*Why can't I figure out where to put the gasoline in my lawn mower?*

*Why can't I just cut my grass, instead of interrupting myself and forgetting I was cutting the grass?*

*Why can't I recall the next morning any of the great writing*

*ideas that seem to wait until just before I go to bed to surface?*

*Why do I find myself increasingly losing track of my train of thought in mid-sentence?*

*Why has my temper shortened, increased, and sometimes I act and feel as if I am out of control?*

*Why don't I care as much any more?*

*Why do I now forget what I was going to say milliseconds before I tried to say it?*

*Why do my moods swing so abruptly, so often, and with little or no apparent reason?*

*Why do I have so much trouble following directions that require a sequence of events to be performed?*

*Why do I find myself repeating myself, not just once but repeatedly?*

*Why can't I find items that are right in front of me?*

*Why do I feel like I need to start writing before my pen touches the paper?*

I don't believe any 1 or 2 or 10 of these unanswered questions means much by themselves. When taken together, however, they mean a lot, especially to me. Most of them I can cover up, by chang-



Richard Taylor, PhD, in his "old hippie" days.

### Signing Off

*The information below appears at the end of all of Richard Taylor's emails.*

Stand up! Speak Up! Do not become a victim of your own silence.

Speak for yourself and those who will follow. Ask Carers and Friends to do the same. Today will never be here again. Time is of the Essence!! Use it wisely!!

Tell as many people as possible your perceptions of your interactions with professionals, with carers, with friends, with strangers, with your government.

They won't change unless they know, and they can't know unless and until you SPEAK UP!

Seek to create a Palpable Sense of Change and of Urgency!

Join a Crusade, Now!

Be a Crusader, Now!

Lead a Crusade, Now!

*"Aim above morality.  
Be not simply good,  
Be good for something."*

– Henry David Thoreau

ing the subject, figuring them out for myself. Unfortunately for me their frequency has reached the point where I don't seem to have the ability, the time, nor the interest to cover up any longer. These were not pressing questions or problems for me 7 years ago.

### My Self-protecting Brain

Better brain imaging techniques now seem to reveal that the disease starts 10 or more years before a brain becomes so full of its consequences that it cannot compensate for the changes. My plastic, creative, and self-protecting brain has done its best to keep me and others from knowing it is infested with Alzheimer's disease and is being overwhelmed by its consequences. It now has enlisted the conscious sections of itself to help it compensate for its perceived shortcomings. It and I are losing the battle for normalcy.

I know, and I do not know. When I am in the moment I am almost always unaware I am having a problem. Sometimes, just some-

times now, a minute, an hour, or a day later I suddenly figure out what was happening a minute, an hour, or a day previous to now.

I devote more time now to thinking about thinking. Sometimes this is good for me, and sometimes it is not. Most times this seems good, or at least of interest to others.

### June 12, 2007

Dr. Alzheimer's tsunami continues to sweep through my brain cells washing away names, memories, and connections. Using my LTC policy I now have a "companion" who I anticipate (dare I say hope) will keep me "in the game" for another 6 to 12 months.

I'm now looking for places to speak, issues to think about, new folks to interact with through June 2007. I've found if I place a fish tank hose in my left ear at night and place the other end in my kitchen sink I can drain out some of the tsunami while I sleep. Plus I am eating a lot of strawberries, and drink 1 Bloody Mary every evening.

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