

# SUNDAY ARTICLE

ST DAVID'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ♦ 29 JANUARY 2017



## Losing Mum One Memory at a Time

*Tim Thornborough*

Visits to my mother follow a predictable path.

She recognizes me as I walk in. I sit with her and hold her hand. She asks me how everyone is; her eyes betray the internal struggle to remember the people I'm talking about. They are her grandchildren, her daughter-in-law. The conversation is punctuated by repeated questions. My answers are honed by repetition.

"I'm ready to go home whenever you are," she says.

"No, Mum, you live here now – you've got your own lovely room over there."

"Are you staying at my mother's house?" she asks.

"No, Mum, I live close by with Kathy and the children." (I can't bear to tell her that her parents and sister have been dead for more than 25 years.)

"You must have travelled a long way to get here."

"No, Mum, I just live around the corner."

### **Slow Motion Disease**

Alzheimer's is cruel. It is slow motion time travel into the past – with no return tickets on sale.

***Mum thinks she should be making Lancaster bombers [in] 1943.***

It confuses her that she's old and hardly able to walk. Deep down Mum thinks she should be going to work in the factory making Lancaster bombers for the British Air Force – the date being 1943.

She talks warmly of that time and remembers some incredible detail. When she was more fit, we visited the Imperial War Museum where they have a Lancaster cockpit. She stood and explained specifics of the controls to us, and how she worked at wiring

the panels. She recalled the deep pity everyone felt when a group of horrifically burn-scarred airmen visited the factory. She spoke of dances and friends long gone.

And then looks at me – her son now nearing 60 – and her own frail body, and she cannot compute.

The disease has not yet robbed us of Mum's personality. We joke about people, or the TV, or the weather, and the same wry Northern wit emerges. But I know that day is likely coming. When the disease has finished shredding all the memories it can, it will turn on her patience, her dignity, her warmth, her love – and leave us mourning for her loss while she still breathes.

### Deeply Embedded Gospel

We share the recreation room with half a dozen others at differing stages of deterioration – many sleeping and silent. But one trembling man stands in the corner singing hoarsely and tunelessly. I catch the words of songs deeply embedded in his mind: "Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so", "I will cling to the old rugged cross", "Amazing grace how sweet the sound."

He may be lost to those around him, to his family, to himself even, but deep within his soul he knows he is not lost to the Lord.

Through repetition, meditation, and joyful singing in days gone by, gospel truths lodged in the deepest parts of his mind are now bringing him comfort and reassurance in these distressing hours of isolation, loneliness, and fear.

I resolve to treasure my times of singing in church each Sunday. It turns out they may not just be for that moment in time, to lift my soul and give words to my

thankful heart; they may be the means God is giving me to persevere through the valley of the shadow of death yet to come.

But for now, my mum and I hold hands. No songs come to her lips, so I kiss her head – for comfort in her confused helplessness. A kiss delivered with the tenderness and love with which she once kissed my infant brow.

And as I leave, I pray that at the end of her life she will know the truth of what David wrote so long ago: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:6)

**...not lost  
to the Lord.**



*Tim Thornborough founded the Christian publishing house **The Good Book Company** ([www.thegoodbook.com](http://www.thegoodbook.com)) in the UK in 1991.*

*Today his role includes working on editorial projects, managing the publicity and social media teams, and many other aspects of company management.*

*He is a member of Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon, where he runs a children's group and leads a home group.*

*Tim and his wife, Kathy, have a son and three teenage daughters.*

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