

# Purple Pride

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Growing up, Doris was our “adopted” grandma. She was an older woman from our church that would come and stay with us after school until our parents got home from work. She would bring us to the pool on sunny summer days. She loved the color purple and let us play dress-up with her jewelry. Not only did Doris take care of and put up with us kids, she also endured my mom’s weird sense of humor. That poor woman nearly had a heart attack when my mom rolled up a brownie to look like...well, like something the dog left on the floor...and then she took a bite out of it! We laughed every time Doris fell for that one...which happened often over the years. And we always talk about the time she came in our house and the dog started barking. “I think someone’s here!” she said. Yup, Doris. It’s you.

Doris was always there when we needed her and after many years, she needed us as well. She only lived a few blocks from us, so when she was no longer able to drive and chauffeur us around, we would pick her up and bring her to our house every night for dinner. She spent Thanksgiving evenings with us as well as Christmas mornings. We brought her groceries and we brought her to church.

It wasn’t until I was in high school (and she was in her late 80’s) that we started to recognize her “forgetfulness.” It became more difficult to have a conversation with her as her sentences became less detailed, and instead were filled with more “whatchamacallits” and “doohickeys.” She was getting dates and events confused and had trouble remembering us, her family. It was difficult to see her decline in between my visits home from college. Admittedly, I was always her favorite, so as an older teenager, it was shocking when she no longer knew my name. (She also told me I had gotten fat...so I knew SOMETHING must be wrong.)

Though Doris was never officially diagnosed, looking back there were certainly signs of Dementia, perhaps specifically Alzheimer’s. According to the Alzheimer’s Association, some of the 10 warning signs of this disease include: Memory loss that disrupts daily life, Confusion with time or place, New problems with words in speaking or writing and Changes in mood and personality. And although she was unable to live in her own home the last few years of her life, she was cared for in an assisted living facility where my dad worked as a nurse. The thought of him pushing her wheelchair down the hallways still comfort me to this day.

Dementia, Alzheimer’s and other serious mental decline in elderly loved ones is NOT a normal part of aging. Learn more during Dementia Awareness Week (Sept 18-24<sup>th</sup>) and join us on September 24<sup>th</sup> for the Walk to end Alzheimer’s here in Bemidji. Normally my Purple Pride refers to my football team. But this month, I wear purple to raise awareness of Alzheimer’s and in remembrance of Doris. I will Walk to End Alzheimer’s.

For more information on Dementia Awareness Week or The Walk to End Alzheimer’s, contact Carol Priest: 218-333-8265.