

COMMUNITY CHALLENGE



Diagnosis Alzheimer's: Now what?

Sept. 8 walk will raise funds for research, support services

When a family member or another loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, the initial emotional turmoil can be overwhelming. Those first questions may focus on the big issues: Why did this happen? How long does she have? When will he forget my face? How do we tell our family and friends? How are we going to cope?



Bonnie J. Hackbarth, chair, 2012 Louisville Walk to End Alzheimer's

As the days and weeks go by, the questions may become more practical: Should we move closer to family now, so we'll have their help when we need it? Do we have enough insurance, and the right kind? Should I start checking out in-home care services and nursing facilities?

And as the symptoms progress, the questions get harder: Is it safe to leave her alone? How do I tell him he has to give up his car keys? How do I keep her from wandering again? What can I do about his anger?

Some couples, such as Louisville residents Barbara and Al Webb, seem to handle the process with an amazing amount of grace. When Al was diagnosed 3½ years ago, he and Barbara decided to return to Louisville from Florida so they could be near family. They joined support groups. They became active volunteers in the Greater Kentucky and Southern Indiana Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. They talked about the disease openly with friends, trying not to shy away from sharing both their hope and also the hard parts.

Most days, Barbara and Al move through the days with acceptance, humor and courage. But other days, it's just too much. In mid-May after a doctor appointment with a new neurologist, Barbara wrote on the Louisville Alzheimer's Walk blog (www.louisvillealzwalk.com): "We both liked him very much until he told Al he could not drive anymore. Of course, Al's opinion of him changed immediately. And ever since then, he has been mad at [the doctor], me, the world, even God. I mean intensely mad, like I have never seen him before."

Eventually, Al's anger abated. Barbara said that acknowledging and expressing the frustration helped a lot.

Like the Webbs, many families affected by Alzheimer's find comfort in talking about their experiences. In sharing their story with others who are struggling with the same frustrations, anger and sadness. In learning more about the disease and techniques for coping.

On the morning of Saturday, Sept. 8, as many as 2,500 people living in and around Louisville — many of whom are dealing with a new diagnosis of Alzheimer's in their families this year — will come to Waterfront Park

for the 2012 Louisville Walk to End Alzheimer's. At this annual event to raise funds for research and support services, participants will learn about the disease, new trials and research, and the resources available in our community to help them navigate the coming years. For example, they will find information about:

- » Local support groups.
- » The latest treatments.
- » Clinical trials in which they might be able to participate.
- » Safety issues and how to address them.
- » Resources to help the affected individual stay at home as long as possible.
- » Social Security and insurance issues.

They'll also learn more about how to get involved through volunteer fundraising and advocacy opportunities. They'll learn that, by participating in the Walk to End Alzheimer's, they can help support the Alzheimer's Association's efforts to ensure that the insidious disease that has attacked the memories of their parents and spouses will be eradicated before it can affect their children and grandchildren.

Alzheimer's is the sixth-leading cause of death in the United States. Nearly 80,000 Kentuckians are currently diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Without intervention, the number will increase to 97,000 by 2025.

Please visit www.alz.org/walk to sign up a Walk to End Alzheimer's team to help raise awareness and funds for research and support services. Invite your family members and friends to join your team online and to walk with you on Sept. 8. Let's stop Alzheimer's before it destroys another generation of memories.

BONNIE J. HACKBARTH
Chair
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Hackbarth's blog is found at www.louisvillealzwalk.org. For more information about the local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, visit www.alz.org/kyin.

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COMMUNITY

READERS' FORUM

Made in America

I recently had an enjoyable evening at Louisville Slugger Field watching our Bats playing baseball.

I took some of my grandchildren along to watch the ballgame and one of them was lucky enough to catch a foul ball. As we passed it around to admire, some printing on the ball caught our attention.

The baseball used in America's great game was made in China. This wasn't a cheap souvenir purchased in the gift shop. This was a baseball used in a game that is American as Mom, apple pie and, you guessed it, baseball.

Returning home I researched it and found that only the Major League baseballs are still traditionally being manufactured in Costa Rica. All other baseballs for the minor leagues are made in China. I think our locally made Louisville Slugger baseball bats might be the only American-made product used in professional baseball games.

The Chicago Cub fans have a tradition of throwing opposing team home run balls back onto the field to indicate to the other team their home run ball isn't worth anything to them.

Maybe we should start a tradition of chucking all the foul balls caught in the stands back onto the field until they become "Made in America."

JOE COVERT
Louisville 40258

Expungements

I sat in shock as I read how refusals of expungements for previous offenses such as speeding, some kind of fishing violation or other equally baleful misdeeds can prevent a breadwinner from ever winning a future loaf.

Whether one claims to have any knowledge of or connection with Christianity, the popularity of certain verses of this particular brand of Scripture dealing with "the spirit" of the law as opposed to the so-called "letter" of said law are undoubtedly known, even by someone as apparently married to the letter as seems to be the Jefferson County attorney.

I am doing my level best to avoid saying things like, "What weren't you thinking?" or "From what planet do you hail?" but in the interests of using honey rather than vinegar I will stay with something like, "Don't you see the innocent lives you have and continue to wreck?"

Please, if you do not



LISA BENSON, WASHINGTON POST

have the gumption to press this issue with a higher court (at least, one that can stand in agreement) could you maybe try to get enough attention paid to this subject that a Supreme Court might consider taking on the issue, one in which we have great faith as to their arriving at spirit mixed with letter?

Please, state court system, do this one right, and give us something to make us proud of you.

DENNIS VESSELS
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Environmental solutions

A high school student recently wrote a letter entitled "Environmental education." It is reassuring that students are concerned about the ecosystems which provide us with air, water, energy and food.

He is right that more people should be aware of environmental damage, so we can all make positive change. Some problems and solutions are clear. Batteries and technology containing toxic metals should not be thrown away. Pollution should be kept out of our rivers. We can be mindful of all we do, such as how often we drive, or use disposable items.

Awareness also comes from reading, such as Kentucky's own Wendell Berry. We should reflect, discuss, and be open to changing our minds.

We can also see firsthand the vast, irreparable loss of landscapes to mines and industrial farms in Kentucky. Environmental damage is real, continuing, and caused by our personal and political choices. Still, we make differences when we plant trees, support zoos, ride a bike, buy used rather than new, or request reusable cups.

I thank the student for his letter. At Trinity, 12 years ago, I had similar thoughts. Now I am a biologist working for protection of endangered species. We can make a difference.

SEAN HOBAN
Louisville 40206

Remember when?

Remember when neighbors looked out for one another? When people said "please" and "thank you" because it was the right thing to do?

Remember when men held out a chair for the ladies and opened doors for them? Remember when you got into a fight with someone you beat the crap out of one another and later shared a beer with them?

Remember when politics weren't a means to go for the opponent's throat?

Remember the days of "live" customer service? Where have those days gone?

GREG HUFFMAN
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Mr. Huffman is a former *Courier-Journal* Forum Fellow. — Editor

Teaching evolution

Now that the state of Kentucky is again making the national headlines because of the comments by certain state legislators on the teaching of evolution in science classes, I think we have what is called a "teachable moment."

That's when something interesting pops into the regular course of educational conversations that can be used by an instructor to give new information or enhance the lesson at hand.

Rep. David Givens (R-Greensburg) and Rep. Ben Waide (R-Madisonville) apparently missed the lessons in school that taught the definition of the word

HOW TO SUBMIT LETTERS

Letters to the editor are welcomed. They should be addressed to:

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The Courier-Journal
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Our e-mail address is:
cjletter@courier-journal.com

Letters can also be faxed to us at:
(502) 582-4155.

Best-read letters are under 200 words and on topics of general interest. A letter must be original and contain the signature, address and daytime telephone number of its writer. The editors reserve the right to condense or reject any letter and to limit frequent writers. Letters to the editor, opinion and editorial columns, and articles submitted to The Courier-Journal may be distributed in print, electronic or other forms.

"theory" in science.

Mr. Givens thinks that creationism fulfills the definition. Mr. Waide thinks that Darwin "made up" his theory of evolution and that evolution is "not science." And state Superintendent Terry Holliday seems to be counting on their lack of knowledge in order to placate their protests over teaching evolution by telling them that in order to fulfill the ACT test requirements, evolution is being taught as "a theory" and "not as fact."

All three should be held back a grade until they get it right.

In the meantime, I hope the science teachers in the Kentucky public school systems decide to start all their new science classes with a "teachable moment" discussion on the definition of scientific theory, especially since creationist Rep. Givens is worried about their "critical thinking" skills.

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Assessing changes in reform

I must admit, I was surprised when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's June 2012 report on health care integration (or mergers) came out with what some would describe as a cautious endorsement of competition in the health care marketplace. Statements that the evidence on cost reductions and clinical improvement "is not very supportive of initiatives to encourage physician hospital integration" and that "the prospect that the ACA (Affordable Care Act) could encourage greater physician-hospital consolidation gives some cause for concern" appear to embrace the concept that competition is important in assuring a high-value health care system. Free-market advocates have long held that if there are too few providers in the marketplace, it does not matter what type system of payment is used, the purchaser will be paying too much for health care because the provider, not the purchaser, will have

the upper hand in contract negotiations.

Although the alarm has been sounded, the transformation to a consolidated health care system run by oligopolies has, for the most part, already taken place. Large scale employment of doctors by hospitals has been spurred by the much higher reimbursements (as much as 80 percent more) a physician will receive for services by just signing the hospital's contract. If he stays in an independent practice he is faced with skyrocketing costs and reimbursements which do not keep up with his rising practice overhead.

Large hospital networks are also forming through mergers. The type of health care we are used to may change as private equity firms and insurance companies are starting to enter the market with the purchase of hospitals. Arguments of where the resources will come from to implement costly quality improvement measures take on a whole new

meaning when the budget has to juggle not just the needs of the patients but also the needs of investors.

Governance and oversight of these large corporate bodies is of utmost importance. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid recently gave these corporations the power to dissolve local community hospital boards. In the final regulations, a requirement that at least one medical staff member must be on the board was written into law, with the intent of facilitating communications between the board and front line operations. However, one month after the regulation was finalized, powerful industry lobbyists had this provision suspended.

That is not to say all is bad in health care reform. The increase in coverage is to be applauded. But similar to the reform attempt in Massachusetts, where 98 percent of citizens have health insurance, the cost of health care is still too expensive and still increasing. A good idea at the time,

but in need of revision. The rest of the nation needs to learn from and not mimic the Massachusetts experience. As stated by the philosopher George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Our current health care system's skyrocketing costs are unsustainable. If left unchecked, in 2030, the cost of health insurance is projected to be 50 percent of the average household's income. Another transformation may inevitably take place which will lead us to either a restoration of a truly competitive system or to a government-operated, and possibly owned, single-payer system. Which system the United States eventually embraces may to a large part depend upon the outcome of this fall's election.

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Health Watch USA is a nonprofit organization that promotes health care value, transparency and quality. — Editor