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Role Reversal—the Impact of Young Onset Alzheimer’s

Portland, OR—Rebecca Channer, a Portland resident, was in her early thirties when her mother began exhibiting bizarre symptoms. Channer, having returned from a two-year stint in Southern Africa working as a Peace Corp volunteer, was launching a career as a non-profit manager. During her time in Africa, Channer noticed her mother, Lynn who was in her early fifties, had difficulty tracking their weekly phone conversations. Channer blew it off initially as stress, since her mother worked as a high level professional. Over the course of the next two years it became apparent that something else was wrong. Lynn lost a number of jobs, forgot to pay bills, and was involved in a couple of fender benders. After 18 months of doctor visits she was finally diagnosed with Young Onset Alzheimer’s.

The diagnosis of Alzheimer’s completely shifted Channer’s life. Channer had to put her career on hold to manage her mother’s care. Lynn (now 58) requires 24-hour supervision which comes at a tremendous cost. The family was forced to deplete Lynn’s life savings and retirement accounts. “This happened at a time in my life I never expected,” says Channer. “I had no idea what to do. I didn’t have a plan or any idea how to navigate the health care system. I didn’t think I’d have to worry about that for decades. It’s a complete role reversal which is difficult and sad for both of us.”

Channer’s story is not unique. The *2009 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures* released by the Alzheimer’s Association in April anticipates that if a treatment or cure is not found, over 16 million Americans will have Alzheimer’s by 2050 – that’s more than triple the current number of 5.3 million. Currently 76,000 Oregonians have Alzheimer’s or a related dementia and 10% of those have Young Onset (Alzheimer’s under the age of 65).

Alzheimer’s disease costs American businesses \$61 billion per year. Of that, \$24.6 covers Alzheimer’s health care, and lost worker productivity has been calculated at \$36.5 billion. These costs include arriving late to work, leaving early, absenteeism, interruptions of the workday and worker replacement, all due to caregiving responsibilities.

Portlander’s can join the fight against Alzheimer’s and raise funds for families like the Channers at the 18th Annual Portland Memory Walk which takes place on Sunday, September 27th at 9:00am in Pioneer Courthouse Square. Participants can register online at www.mw09.kintera.org/pdx or call 503-4160-0201.

About the Alzheimer's Association:

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; to advocate for policy change; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. For more information visit www.alz.org/oregon

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