

## The Steel Magnolias

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The reason I use the Magnolia as a symbol for Alzheimer victims is an interesting story.

In 1986 I flew into Knoxville Tennessee to visit pharmacology research patients. I had been following them from my clinic in Southern California. I was met at the airport by George Rehnquist, who had organized the visit and a speech.

When we got to the car Lucille, George's wife, was patiently waiting. She gave me two of the most precious gifts — double chocolate brownies and a porcelain magnolia blossom. Lucille had made both gifts!

Lucille was a very special person. She had courageously taken an experimental drug over the year prior to this visit. She was the first person to ever take an experimental drug for the treatment of Alzheimer's Disease. The results were dramatic. Lucille required assistance in many aspects of daily living. After treatment she cooked. She did housework. She even drove a car with George's supervision. The long-term effects of the drug were unknown. But, she had lived a nearly normal year. They were grateful.

The experimental drug was Tacrine (Cognex®), which later became the first FDA approved drug for Alzheimer's Disease. In spring of 1986, the concept of treating Alzheimer's was stranger than believing that aliens landed in Roswell. Lucille was a hero of modern medicine.

The other hero was George Rehnquist, Lucille's husband. He was the Steel Magnolia that stood behind Lucille. He gave "the 36 hour

day" to his bride and life-friend. Like a magnolia blossom he looked fragile, but was incredibly durable against the winds of distress. The successful outcome of treating Alzheimer patients relies on the caretakers who stand behind the patient.

One in sixteen Americans are involved in the care of an Alzheimer patient. Fifty-three percent of the caregivers are adult children. The spouse is the caregiver thirty-six percent of the time. For 11%, the caregiver is a neighbor, friend, or professional. These people typically spend \$175,000 of personal money per victim in caring for their loved one. It is a stressful job. 27% of caregivers will visit an emergency room each year. Typically they visit the doctor six times each year for a host of problems. 14% of the caregivers will be hospitalized each year. Many die before their loved one.

These "Quiet Heroes" do an incredible job.

The government will spend over \$250 billion to care for the demented patients in nursing homes.

This incredible expense cares for only one out of five victims of Alzheimer's. Four out of five Alzheimer patients are living in the community.

The worst fear of the elderly is not a heart attack, or even cancer. It is to end up living in a nursing home unable to care for themselves. When a person reaches 65 they know someone who is in a nursing home. They have visited them. Their fear of nursing homes is based on experience, not a vague concern.

When I use the magnolia blossom in advertisements and literature, it is meant to be a salute to those quiet heroes that help the Alzheimer victim ..... The Steel Magnolias.