

4,725 Miles Away from Alzheimer's

By Kenji Terawaki

*4,725 miles away from Alzheimers, one second away from my Queen*

*"Hola mamita, como esta? Soy yo su hijo Kenji"*

*Hi mama, how are you? It's me, your son, Kenji...*

*This is how I start my conversations with my mother every single  
day*

6 years ago my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, along with more than 40 million others around the World.

A woman that lost her father when she was 6 years old, because of his skin color and societal status, and who, a couple years later, lost her mother because of depression.

A woman that grew up in an orphanage dreaming of one day having a family.

A wonderful, multi-racial woman who learned to adapt and live in a Japanese culture because of the love she held for her half Japanese husband, my Dad.

A woman who had all 4 of her children at home because - she said..."I want to feel the pain of having my babies, a pain that I will remember every time I have to protect you."

A strong woman with an incredible mathematical and analytical mind, and an even bigger heart.

She is my Queen, my pillar, my inspiration ... my hero

Since Alzheimer's set in, it has begun stealing my mother's memories, her order, her dignity. Drop by drop - it is depriving her of most everything she once knew... while throwing our hearts in a sea of emotions.

I read every single article and watch hundreds of YouTube videos about this disease and about us - the caregivers

Stage 1.... Stage 2.... Stage 3.... there are 7 stages in front of us... multiplied by 40 million different experiences.

I remember the last time she was able to visit me from Chile -- for Christmas. I filled the Christmas tree with lots of presents, and an hour after she opened them - she dropped them on my bed thinking they did not belong to her.

In that moment.... IT ... HIT ... me.... All of a sudden I comprehended how difficult, embarrassing and overwhelming it must be for her to feel this cloud in her once brilliant mind.

In slow motion, I could see her regressing away from me ... and even further away from herself, and I was all of a sudden desperate to find a way to understand her soul. I could not focus on the pain of watching my mom melt - and fade away.

I had to find a way to connect with her. I had to find something that might bring her joy. I had to help her exercise her mind without humiliation ... I had to let her know she was not alone...all of this from 4,725 miles away.

During my research, I came across to a wonderful book entitled "365 beautiful thoughts" and purchased 2 copies, one for her, and another for myself. I printed labels with the names of each son, daughter, and grandchild and placed them every 25 pages on her copy.

I call my mom every day at the same time - 6 pm sharp - so we can read the book together. We've established a tradition - a routine from beginning to end.

Each day, she reads me a section from the page we bookmarked the day before... or if she doesn't remember where the bookmark is, I randomly provide a page number.

Each day for 6 years, she has read to me, her son. Each day for six years, I have listened...with joy.

We have read the book a couple hundred times now. I know each word -- period, comma, exclamation point. I know each place where she will giggle... or get amazed ...or curious ... every question she will have when she reaches a certain page.

I listen as she reads....and patiently answer her questions. We laugh and practice difficult words as many time as she wants. We never worry about whether she makes sense, whether she forgets, whether she is repeating herself. She is my Queen.

Our daily calls last 45 minutes, and I reserve the last 10 minutes as our "...let it go moments..."

During this time, I calm her down and bless her each day -- and I give her hope that we will see each other in a "JUST a couple of weeks" "en mis vacaciones."

Those last 10 minutes are important - as they prepare me for the sad day when I will call - and she will not answer.

Until then, each day, I will continue to honor her, to be patient with her, and to never turn my head or heart away from her.

Until then, each day, when she seems to forget my voice or who I am, I will believe that deep in her heart she recognizes me as someone who loves her with my whole entire heart.

Until then, each day, I will telephone her at 6 pm sharp... and continue ending each call by saying...

*"Que Dios la Bendiga mamita, que duerma con los angelitos y conmigo a la colita, te extraño, beso, beso, bye, bye"*

*"God Bless you mamita, sleep with the angels and me by your side.*

*I miss you... Kiss you, mom ... bye bye."*