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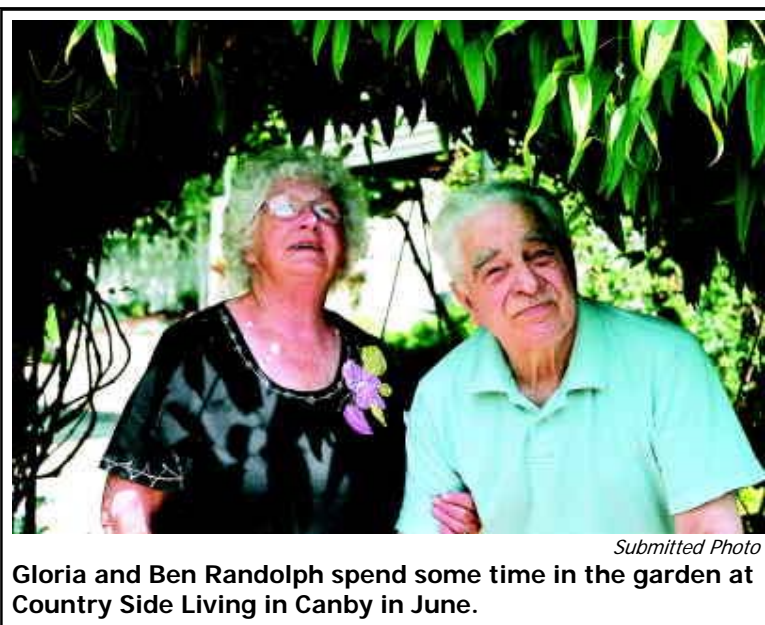
## Support groups help all who are affected by Alzheimer's

*"Here's a man that kept his mind busy all the time. I thought if a person kept busy all their life, that things like this wouldn't happen to them." -Gloria Randolph*

By [Charissa Bernard](#)

WOODBURN — When Gloria Randolph hears the word "Alzheimer's," she doesn't think about the \$100 billion per year spent on caring for the five million people in the U.S. with the disease; she thinks about her husband Ben.

A welder by trade, Ben Randolph owned his own business in the Portland area for most of his adult life, and retired to a life of traveling and beach walks on the Oregon Coast.



Gloria and Ben Randolph spend some time in the garden at Country Side Living in Canby in June.

"Here's a man that kept his mind busy all the time," said Gloria, 79. "I thought if a person kept busy all their life that things like this wouldn't happen to them, but apparently it did and so we just kind of took it a day at a time."

Ben, now 83, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's 10 years ago while the couple was living in Lincoln City. Three years later, they moved to Woodburn's Senior Estates to be closer to the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center in Portland, where Ben was receiving treatment. Eventually, Gloria had to take over reading the maps during car rides, paying the bills and other things Ben had done with ease for the majority of their 61-year marriage.

Gloria had a younger brother diagnosed with Parkinson's dementia, so Ben's similar Alzheimer's symptoms did not blindsides Gloria.

"It wasn't a complete mystery to me, and yet when it happened to him, I just couldn't believe it," she said. "I wasn't scared, I just was amazed it could happen to him."

As the years have passed, Ben's Alzheimer's has aged along with him. He suffered a stroke just after Christmas last year, requiring a 10-day hospital stay.

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"The doctor said (Ben) could not go home," Gloria said. "He just needs more care than I was skilled to give."

Up to that point, Ben had spent short amounts of time at Country Side Living in Canby, which specializes in the care of individuals with Alzheimer's or other dementia. After his stroke, Ben went to live at the facility full-time, with Gloria making frequent trips up to visit and volunteer in the office.

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"I think he's doing well up there; it's a wonderful place to put your loved one," she said, noting that she and Ben especially enjoy the outdoor gardens, which they frequent most mornings she visits. "It is so peaceful ... I read the paper and we sit and talk in the sun and the breezes blow, and it's just a little bit of heaven there."

Gloria said her children have given her someone to lean on during this tough time in her life, and she also credits her past experiences, which have made her strong.

"What I've also learned is that patience is a godly virtue," she said. "You've just got to have the patience of Job and you kind of have to put your life on hold. At my age, I've done practically everything I've every wanted to do, so it's no big whoopee."

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In an effort to seek help and give help to other Alzheimer's family members, Gloria attends an Alzheimer's support group hosted by Country Side Living at Woodburn Internal Medicine, located at 974 N. Cascade Drive. This is a group for family, friends and caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease or other memory related disorders.

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"Even if you don't have the disease, so many people will eventually get it, it's good to do your homework and find out everything you can about it," Gloria said, encouraging others in the community to attend the group.

Mary Reitan, the administrator of Country Side Living, facilitates the group, which meets the third Monday of each month from 2 to 3 p.m.

"So often, a grown child is thrust into the role of caregiver upon the death of a mother or father and they've had no time to prepare themselves for the awesome responsibilities of taking care of someone with Alzheimer's," Reitan said.

"Even a spouse who has seen a gradual decline in the health of their husband or wife has a very difficult time understanding the behavioral changes. They become absolutely exhausted physically, mentally and emotionally."

Studies show that support, counseling and education not only ease the caregiver's burdens, but they also tend to improve their health so that the caregiver is able to help their loved one for a longer period of time.

"I do enjoy going to the support group because there's always something that you can glean from what somebody else says," Gloria said. "Maybe if you're not going through it right now, you're sure to come through it eventually."

For a caregiver, attending a support group provides a safe place for people to share their worries, guilt, fear and frustration with people who truly understand what it's like to live day in and day out with someone who has Alzheimer's. The Alzheimer's Support Group, sponsored by Silverton Hospital, serves as a community resource to help caregivers realize they are not alone and there is help for them.

Woodburn Medical Center is located at 974 Cascade Drive. Everyone with an interest in Alzheimer's is welcome. For more information, call Reitan at 503-502-4509.

