



MICHIGAN MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**MICHIGAN ALZHEIMER'S
DISEASE CENTER**

The Wellness Initiative is a program of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at the University of Michigan. This initiative supports family caregivers of adults living with memory loss through providing innovative wellness programs emphasizing stress resilience to ensure continued health and well-being on the caregiving journey.

APRIL 2021

Monthly Wellness Update



*I look out through my mask occasionally,
To see who is there or if I have to speak. Can you see me?*

*Too bad my voice is so broken but my mask and I
Know who I am. Can you hear me?*

*I've lost a lot of memories, but plenty remain.
My mask and I stand stoically as memories shift in and out.
Do you know who I am?**

*~ Selections from the poem, My Mask & I, by Ken Saulter.
Published in Shapes of Memory Loss - Stories, Poems and Essays*

As we resurface, like perennials reemerging after a long, hard winter, we are still figuring out this strange, pandemic landscape. We are managing as best we can with the precautions, now oddly routine, and with the newness of vaccines unsure what impact this may have on our personal lives. It's exhausting to live behind our masks. Layers of protection, be they physical or emotional, are tiring to maintain and it's the "keeping a happy face" that caregivers and individuals with memory loss begin to resent most as they carry on through their daily lives. Masking the need for genuine connection and most importantly, recognition of their wholeness and the depth and significance of their changes.

*The world is smaller with a heavy mask on and where is my smile?
Where is the touch of my hand? Will I always feel lonely?*

*My body and mind grow stiff. My mask and I know why.
Maybe I'll turn to stone someday. Will I learn anything, anymore?*

*I look out through my mask, occasionally,
To see who is there or if I have to speak.*

*My voice keeps getting smaller. Can you hear me?
And my body becomes less and less.
Can you touch my hand? Must I take that pill?*

Whoever you are and whatever you have experienced over the past year, you are changed. No longer the same person you were prior to the pandemic, you have been shaped in ways which are still coming into view. It can be scary and disorienting and also, it presents each of us with an opportunity to reorganize our lives with greater intention and appreciation. Living through uncertainty, like a pandemic, is a familiar pathway for adults with memory loss and their care partners who have experienced a similar existential confrontation: the deeply personal and seminal process of reconstructing an identity after a diagnosis and many times thereafter. As more changes are revealed, alongside losses and obstacles, there can also be significant personal growth and connection. Whether the changes are welcome or unwelcome, the process of adapting and moving through life-threatening changes is a tender one and ultimately reshapes significant aspects of identity, and subsequently the shape of one's relationships and life. Oftentimes, it can feel like wearing a mask.

These significant changes do not need to signal further crisis however. When redefined and willingly explored with continuous support, including the skills of compassion, creativity and curiosity, threats to identity can become an opening, heralding a transformational process of wellbeing. When our identity is challenged, it can be an opportunity to step forward and grow, even when we are frightened and even when we are not sure how to proceed. Thankfully, we do not have to do this alone or quickly. Even when the traditional script may primarily tell a story of diminishment, shame and guilt (as is often the case with dementia and caregiving) we can remember how it's only one lens of judgment and it's neither true nor kind.

I have witnessed hundreds of transformations in identity through catastrophic change in my career and through circumstances many would describe as intractable. I have been inspired by the courage and ingenuity it takes to face what most Americans consider to be the greatest threat to their lives - and one often conflated with identity and personhood: the mind. There are individuals who flip the script and rewrite what it means to be human, for themselves and on their own terms. And while it actually takes tremendous inner faculties of mind, it's ultimately a matter of heart. In these times, we can appreciate how essential and strength-based being guided by heart truly is. You can ask yourself, who listens to my heart? Who and what in my life contributes to my happiness and reflects the truest expression of myself as valued and loveable, just as I am?

*And then, suddenly, someone different looks at me
And hears me and smiles at me and I see things in a new way.
And I become more, rather than less.
And my mask melts day after day and
People look at me directly and see me as I am.
And there's no more "through a mask" living.
The table has turned as has the burden of the mask.
... Do you see the bright colors I've chosen for my canvas?
... Isn't my voice strong?
... Yes, and I see that you are listening to me now!*

When we can look beyond the singular worship of our achievements and the relentless accumulation of knowledge in our culture, we have a chance to uncover hidden wisdom. Like presence, wisdom in practice is rare. There are only a few ways to accumulate wisdom in this world and they all seem to involve an authenticity of being humbled and opened through the experience of loss, loving and change. Like rocks shined and thrown through rough seas, we can be softened by life's hardness and in response, resurface to share and help others access their own safety through creativity, growth and relational depth. I call these elders our wisdom keepers. And the poet whose words have been interwoven through this text was one such extraordinary human. A true wisdom keeper, Ken Saulter shared his generosity of spirit and helped so many others understand their own struggles through memory loss and transformation. There is an art to living, especially one that includes illness and transformation. Ken was determined to do so and his quest for understanding, closeness and artful expression spanned a lifetime. He experienced great struggles and he experienced great success, the pinnacle being his capacity for connection and the love of his family. I had the privilege to know and learn from Ken over the past 13 years, from the time of his diagnosis to his peaceful passage last month at the age of 80.

Here's something hopeful to glean from Ken's life. The willingness to fall forward in a particular way, to be vulnerable in our willingness to seek guidance and resources, support and new relationships. The good news, it does not require us to have it all figured out. The figuring out is in the living and it only requires the willingness to cooperate and to love wholeheartedly with the heart of someone who knows what it

means to wear a mask and to have the courage to be seen. Then, there will be no more *through a mask living*. There will be living. Strong, bright & more, rather than less.

In gratitude,

—Laura Rice-Oeschger, LMSW



Upcoming Program Registration

Catching Your Breath

A monthly well-being and mindfulness program for family caregivers of adults living with memory loss. The program varies each month and newcomers are welcome any time.

April 12, 10:00 - 11:30AM

Registration is required to receive the virtual log-in information.

[Register for Catching Your Breath here](#)

Mindfulness-based Dementia Care

Join us for an 8-week virtual program designed for family caregivers of adults living with memory loss. Learn how the practice of mindfulness can help you cope with the challenges and stresses of dementia care.

Wednesdays, May 5 - June 23 from 9:30AM - 11:30AM

Registration is required below.

[Register for Mindfulness-based Dementia Care](#)

Have a Seat

Have a Seat is a free weekly, online, guided meditation program. No registration is required, just use the link below to join the program on Thursdays at noon.

Thursdays from 12:00 - 12:30PM

If you would like to subscribe to receive weekly reminders for Have a Seat, click [here](#).

[Click to Join Have a Seat](#)

Mitten Minds Support Group

This support group is available specifically for individuals with mild cognitive impairment or early-stage dementia.

April 20, 3:00 - 4:00PM

Registration is required for each session to receive the virtual log-in information.

[Register for Mitten Minds Support Group](#)

**Please pause here and take a few slow, intentional breaths.
If possible, close your eyes and allow this brief rest in the moment**

Soothing words of the month



Desenrascanço

(Portuguese) To artfully disentangle oneself from a troublesome situation

Upcoming Virtual Programs



Issues in Aging Conference

April 19, 9:00AM - 3:40PM

The Wayne State Institute of Gerontology's Issues in Aging conference is one of the longest running, well-recognized professional conferences of its kind. The annual conference held every May since 1987 provides healthcare professionals with best practices and current research in the field in geriatrics and gerontology. The virtual event is held in partnership with the Alzheimer's Association - Michigan Chapter. We are a proud annual sponsor of this valuable event.

[More Information about the Conference](#)



Ways to Improve Your Memory Without Medication

April 28, 12:00 - 1:00PM

This event will be presented by Benjamin Hampstead, PhD, ABPP/CN, Clinical Core Lead of our Center and the Stanley Berent, PhD Collegiate Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Hampstead specializes in non-pharmacological approaches to dementia intervention.

[Register for our April Speaker Series](#)

Exposures and Dementia Risk: What Do Environmental Chemicals Have To Do With It?

May 26, 2:00 - 3:00PM

The event will be presented by Kelly Bakulski, PhD, Data Core Lead of our Center and Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Michigan School of



Public Health. Dr. Bakulski is an environmental and genetic epidemiologist with expertise in epigenetic epidemiology.

Register for our May Speaker Series

New Research Studies Looking for Caregivers



WeCareAdvisor: A Web-Based Tool to Improve Quality of Life for Military Veterans with Dementia and their Caregivers (WeCareAdvisor):

This study is seeking caregivers to test the WeCareAdvisor, a web-based tool that aims to help users learn more about and manage behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia like wandering, repeated questioning, anger, depression or apathy. This study is looking for participants who have access to a computer or mobile device with internet and are also the

primary in-home caregivers for a military Veteran who is living with dementia. **This study does not require any in-person visits; it will be completely virtual.** Contact Barbara Stanislawski at bstanis1@med.umich.edu or 734-232-0323.

Learn More about the WeCareAdvisor Study



Self-Management, Health, and Resilience in Partners Study (SHARP):

Investigating experiences among couples living with multiple chronic health conditions to learn more about ways to help both partners live well together. Study is now recruiting a subgroup of couples in which one partner has received a diagnosis of dementia or mild cognitive impairment (MCI) and has early symptoms of dementia, both partners have

two or more chronic conditions, and at least one partner is aged 50 or older. Contact the study team at sharpstudy@umich.edu or 734-232-4565. This study can be completed entirely over the phone.

Learn More about the SHARP Study

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