



**Book Review of:  
*My Parents and Alzheimer's A Daughter's Story*  
By Janet M. Stone**

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**'A Daughter's Story' on Alzheimer's Caregiver's  
book offers positive experiences  
By Wendy Killeen, Globe Correspondent**

When Janet M. Stone decided to write a book about caring for her dying parents, she felt she needed their permission. Although they had passed away several years before, she imagined visiting them in the living room of their Haverhill home, each sitting in a favorite chair.

She envisioned telling them the book would be about the family's experience with Alzheimer's disease, from which her father suffered as her mother was slowly dying from natural causes.

"Are there people out there who really need to hear what you have to say?" she imagined her father asking. Her reply, "Definitely."

"Well then, what are you doing here talking to me?" she heard her father saying. "Go write it!"

And that's exactly what she did. Over the course of five years, Stone wrote about the six years she took charge of the daily care of her mother and father and the family home. She wrote about the fears and challenges of dealing with aging parents, the logistics of organizing home nursing care, the difficulty of admitting her father to a nursing home, and about their deaths.

She also wrote about the deepening of their relationships during those years, about the creative ways she kept her parents engaged in life and dealt with her own stress, and about childhood memories and her own supportive family.

"My Parents and Alzheimer's: A Daughter's Story," published in December by Vantage Press of New York, is a very personal, anecdotal look – touching, sad, and funny – at this family and deep love and devotion.

"I want people to know that it is possible to turn tragedy into vibrant life," said Stone, 62. "I cannot recall another time in my life that filled me with such exhaustion, and ironically, such pure energy and joy."

Stone was 48, with a husband and three children other own, when her parents, Ted Marble, a Haverhill car dealer, and Alice Marble, a homemaker, became ill in 1986. First it was her mother, a tiny woman whose body was slowly giving out on her. Then her father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Stone, thereafter, devoted most of her time and energy to assuring her parents were, in their final years, able to live by the high standards they had set for themselves and their family.

After her mother declined for several years and died of heart failure in 1989 at age 89, Stone continued to care for her father at his home for two years. He then went to live in the Alzheimer's unit at Glynn Memorial Nursing Home in Haverhill.

While visiting him, she continued her practice of telling him stories and helping him draw on memories. Soon, she was conducting a reminiscence program with 14 patients, many of whom became friends.

"I'd go in [the unit] and their heads would be tipped to the side and they would be staring off into space," Stone said. "But when I left 55 minutes later, those who could would be laughing as a group.

"I would talk about how something smelled and how something felt," she explained. "I'd talk about my grandmother's cellar, about baked beans and hot dogs, about radio programs. And I would help them bring back their own memories."

Lauren Maloof, activities director at Glynn at the time, said Stone "brought out a spark in the group. They would talk about things in the past and it would give them these moments of happiness."

Stone continued to run the program, which she describes in the last chapter of the book, while her father was at Glynn and then for another 1½ years after he died of a heart attack in 1992, at age 91.

In 1994, Stone, who had not written for publication before, decided she wanted to share her experiences. "I felt I had a story that I really needed to tell, and it was about our unique attitude toward dying," Stone said. "My parents never saw themselves as victims. They saw dying as part of life's process. I had learned those positive attitudes from them.

"People were coming up to me all the time and saying, 'What a hideous situation you're in,'" she said, "I wasn't seeing it that way at all. In many ways, we were having the time of our lives because we were involved in a very long, loving goodbye."

A lifelong student, Stone found herself taking courses in psychology, philosophy, storytelling, and expressive therapy. Often, she would talk into a tape recorder while driving home after late classes as a way to stay awake and mull over the material.

She used that same technique when dealing with her parents. "Sometimes, when I left my parents' house feeling frustrated and fearful, just wound up, I would talk my feelings into the tape recorder," she said. "When the time came to write the book, I had all these tapes." As she transcribed them, the emotions flooded back.

Stone was also served well by an observant nature and sharp memory. "Most of what went on in my parents' house over the six-year period I could remember in great detail," she said. "I knew it was all inside of me. It was just a matter of retrieving it."

Those remembrances, as well as flashbacks of her childhood, paint a picture of Haverhill from the 1940s to the 1990s. The portraits of her parents describe a generation.

The book is also an informal guide for caregivers. "The balance between commitment to my parents and self-care was very important," Stone said. "I kept a ritual of meditation for 20 minutes each morning. I made sure I signed up for classes that supported my creativity and would nourish my soul. Whenever I didn't know what to do, I prayed."

What's not in the book are clinical facts about Alzheimer's. "I chose not to learn or read about Alzheimer's because I didn't want statistics to interfere with my positive feelings," Stone said.

As someone who admittedly does nothing in moderation, Stone dove into her writing. She rented an office in Plaistow, N.H., near the home she moved to in Atkinson, N.H., in 1992, and would go there every other day, sometimes for up to 12 hours, to write.

"Plenty of times I said, 'This is so hard, so hard.' But it never occurred to me to say forget it," Stone said. "I never thought for a moment I wouldn't finish it." It took from June 1994 to June 1999 to complete the book.

Jo Ann Jordan, former coordinator of the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Program at the New Hampshire Division of Elderly and Adult Services, said many people express loss through writing, but that Stone's book is different.

"It's not pleasant being a caregiver," said Jordan. "So often when folks write about it, the books are heavy and downers. "[Stone's] book has a good balance. I thought it was one of the more gentle, comforting books, and people could relate to the story. She did have a lighter side to it."

Jordan, now manager of quality development and education at the New Hampshire agency, said she would recommend the book to her students. "It's a realistic case study and a good trigger for discussion groups," she said.

And that's good news to Stone, whose goal is to get the book in the hands of nursing students and those who provide home care, so they can understand what families facing illness, death, or any tragedy are going through. The message is "be positive," Stone said. "For us it really worked."