

Journey Through Alzheimer's

A Psychologist Confronts his Wife's Deadly Disease

By

Rick M. Gardner

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Introduction

This is a love story. A 50-year love story that ends, as many such stories do, tragically. It is a story about my wife Betty Ann and me, and our journey together through Alzheimer's, the disease that eventually stole Betty Ann's life.

Our orbits intersected while we were both in graduate school working toward advanced degrees in psychology.

A mutual friend introduced us, and our first meeting did not go well. My friend introduced me, and I put on my best charm offensive. Betty Ann looked me in the eye and made comments that completely shut me down. At the time I thought, oh well. Little did I foresee what lay in store for me with this woman. Great happiness and unbearable sadness.

I am a research psychologist, someone who has studied and published scientific articles on memory and cognition for all my professional career. I spent my entire career in academia. I share with the reader the perspectives I have gained both from my research studies and my life experiences. I will speak to you as I have with many of my friends and acquaintances, helping them understand what goes on in a person's brain and in their lives when dementia appears. Such knowledge is crucial for anyone in a caretaker's role, especially if they are caring for a loved one. It is information that a harried physician will probably not have time to give you. It is something they may have had only tangential experience with. My voice comes to you not only from my professional training but also from my personal, and often painful experiences.

My aim with this book is to inform the reader about different aspects of dementia, specifically Alzheimer's. Within Betty Ann's story I will interweave current scientific thinking about what happens in the brain when dementia strikes. Some of this information has only recently been discovered. Equally important I will tell you what constitutes normal cognitive aging, and the warning signs for when things begin to go amiss.

I hope that the reader will gain a greater understanding of what is happening in someone they know who is suffering from dementia. Almost every family today is touched by this evil disease, and I hope to inform the reader both about what the disease consists of and contemporary scientific thinking. To this end, I will include information about recent developments in the early diagnosis of the disease, and new and upcoming drug interventions, including vaccines, that will offer an effective intervention in the disease and possibly a way to prevent this disease from beginning.

With Betty Ann, the initial signs were so understated that I dismissed them as inconsequential for several years. I was in denial when it came to my wife, despite my training in memory and cognition. After sharing with you the story of how we met and married, I will take you, the reader, with me on my journey through my wife's initial dementia and eventual Alzheimer's.

Unbeknown to either of us, our lives began down a terrible path on a beautiful spring day in 2008. Betty Ann and I were taking a drive in the Colorado Mountains. She had a passion for mountains and trees, and we often went on such drives with no specific destination in mind. As we drove up a particularly scenic canyon, I remarked on how beautiful it was. My wife commented, "At least there are not any dead bodies hanging from the cliffs." I was of course disturbed and puzzled by the meaning of this statement, but she deferred from further comment. Little did I know that this would be the opening salvo of what would eventually become several years in which such nonsensical comments occurred with increasing frequency.

In early 2014, when I first heard a neurologist make the Alzheimer's diagnosis, I knew that it would eventually take the life of my wife. And it did. I originally began writing this book in June 2017. At that time, Betty Ann was entering the later stages of the disease. There was nothing medicine could do and there was nothing I could do to stop the inexorable progression of the disease.

I had it in my mind for several years that I might someday write a book about the journey we were taking through this disease together, and I began keeping a diary of events.

This book is a chronological description of our experience, beginning in 1967 when we met and ending as her life ended. It is the most bittersweet of stories, but I hope the reader will smile at times, perhaps even laugh out loud. I believe our story will help the reader better understand the progression of the disease and tell what is like for a spouse to accompany their loved one on this long journey into night.

The aim of this book is not only to tell our story but also to inform the reader about different aspects of dementia, and specifically about the form of dementia called Alzheimer's that my wife suffered from.

I have published textbooks in psychology, but this is not the same genre as those. In scientific works I write in the dispassionate, objective manner that scientists do. That will not be the case in this book. This is writing coming straight at you from an anguished heart. It is a story that often reduced me to tears, and I hope the poignant way I tell it will move you as well.

In telling Betty Ann's story I will interweave that story with current scientific thinking about what happens in the brain when dementia strikes. I will inform the reader about what constitutes normal cognitive aging and the warning signs for when things begin to go amiss.

In these pages, I will discuss how psychologists and neurologists attempt to diagnose cognitive difficulties at an early stage. This is not a self-help manual, by any means, but I will provide the reader with self-diagnostic tools that they can use to give themselves a cognitive check-up.

Perhaps one of the more important contributions of this book will be an up-to-date description of what behavioral researchers have recently discovered about things we can do in our younger years to help reduce the probability of eventually developing dementia. The professionals'

thinking on this has changed dramatically in just the past few years. Have they discovered the answers that will guarantee you will ever suffer from any form of dementia? Sadly, the answer is a definitive “no.” But there are things under our control early on in our lives that will help our chances significantly.

I will also describe current beliefs and methodologies for treating dementia. I include brief descriptions of the pharmaceutical treatments that doctors use and explain the limitations of these treatments. The silver bullet of a cure or even of developments promising an imminent cure remains elusive, despite the promising “breakthroughs” that we often hear about on the evening news or on the internet. However, there are promising developments on the horizon, which I will describe in detail.

I feel a strong need to tell others about Betty Ann. I cannot bear the thought that her life will flicker out without others knowing about who she was and the circumstances that brought her to take this voyage through dementia. She is not a famous person. She lived a quiet, modest, private life. She would probably not approve of me writing this book about her. She enjoyed a large circle of friends, both socially and professionally. She met a man who would love her with an intensity and devotion that defies easy description. I want to share her story with you. I only hope that I can do that story justice. I will try my best. This is her story. This is our story.

Chapter 1

Life as We Knew It – Mid-2017

In mid-2017 I returned from my nightly visit with Betty Ann at the memory care facility. Betty Ann had been in a memory care assisted living facility since July 2016. When she hears my voice and feels my touch, she reaches out her hands to grasp mine and strokes my arm most tenderly. This tells me she recognizes me. She cannot vocalize her thoughts very well anymore, and she speaks incoherently in such a soft voice that I strain to hear her. She likes to tug at my clothes, and I welcome this interaction with her.

She is wheelchair bound now. She uses her feet to propel her chair. We walk the hallways of the memory care facility together. She enjoys the freedom of movement. Fellow residents come by. They all suffer from dementia, so they also have difficulty communicating. They stop to see her, nevertheless. They give her reassuring little pats as they pause.

The facility is brightly illuminated by fluorescent lights. The lights remain on at all times. The walls are freshly painted in a subdued hue of light tan. There are Berber style carpets on the floor. They are not flush but offer some protection when residents fall. The faint smell of garlic wafts through the facility, traces of the dinner that the residents have recently enjoyed. I hear the clatter of dishes as the employees begin cleaning up after the meal. The memory care facility is a cacophony of other noises as residents speak loudly or call out for assistance.

As I do every night, I sit and turn Betty Ann's chair toward mine, so we are face to face. She wears no makeup now, as she is incapable of applying it. Her hair is no longer groomed perfectly as it was before the illness struck. A nurse's aide has carelessly run a brush through her hair. Betty Ann sits quietly, as she always does.

She opens her beautiful blue eyes and stares directly into mine. She tries to speak but I cannot understand what she says. I agree with whatever she says. As she gazes into my eyes it seems as if she is imploring me to do something, anything, to help her. And I cannot. Tears well up in my eyes. I tell her over and over how much I love her. And I tell her how beautiful she is. And what a wonderful wife she has been to me for 50 years. And how she has been an exceptional mother to our son and daughter. How grateful I am that fate caused us to cross paths so many years before. And how thankful I have been that she agreed to spend her married life with me.

We have had a wonderful life together and my heart aches to see her in her present circumstances. And the look and the longing coming from those eyes. If only she could tell me what she is thinking. It has been a wonderful love story, but it will not end well.

Chapter 2

The Start of Something Beautiful

My future wife and I met in 1966 during our second year in graduate school at the University of Nevada - Reno. Her name was Elizabeth Ann Miller, but everyone called her Betty Ann.

The field of psychology, like so many professional fields in the mid-60s, was dominated by men. In the graduate programs at the University of Nevada, Reno, including clinical psychology, social psychology, and experimental psychology, there were only a few female graduate students. Betty Ann was one of them. I casually dated almost all the unmarried female graduate students in psychology. Except Betty Ann.

In her undergraduate college career, she had wanted to be a mathematics major. She was gifted in mathematics. Her undergraduate advisor strongly advised her against it. He said it was a field dominated by men. It still is today. Fortunately for me, Betty Ann took his bad advice and majored instead in psychology. Lucky for me. I would never have met her if she had pursued her interest in mathematics. Score one for bad undergraduate career advising.

Betty Ann and I were both struggling graduate students. She was pursuing a master's degree in clinical psychology, and I was working toward my Ph.D. doctoral degree in experimental psychology. It was near the middle of our second semester as graduate students. Since Betty Ann was in clinical psychology, she was on the third floor of the building housing psychology. Graduate students in experimental and social psychology were on the fourth floor. Only one floor separated us, but those of us studying experimental psychology had little occasion to visit the floor below us and the clinical students likewise only rarely ventured upstairs to our floor. We didn't take the same courses so did not formally meet for that reason either. This seemingly small separation explains why after over one academic semester had passed, I had not previously met

the person who would become such an important part of the rest of my life. It seems likely that we had passed each other in the hallways, and probably exchanged an inconsequential “hi” as we did so, but I have no recollection of the event if it did occur.

Our first meeting was inauspicious. It was not “love at first sight” for either of us. A fellow graduate student, named Stan, and I went to downtown Reno. Stan was also a first-year graduate student in experimental psychology and he and I had developed a friendship.

Stan was different from the other graduate students in at least two respects. He was about 10 years older than most of us and it appeared he had money. Lots of money. He drove a fancy car and owned several expensive cameras. He was unassuming in appearance. Somewhat overweight and on the shorter side of height. Neither his dress nor manner revealed his financial status. He dressed casually in unpretentious clothes. Despite the differences, we became friends. Going to graduate school with someone must be somewhat like what I have read about people who serve in combat together. As graduate students we were all facing the same struggles to survive, academically if not with our lives. Data shows a large proportion of graduate students beginning a Ph.D. program never complete the degree. As it turned out, Stan would become one of those casualties. We all faced an uncertain future at that early point in our graduate educations. I was running scared.

We stopped in a casino and I put a dollar down on the craps table, a game where people throw dice down a table. I knew the game well, as I had worked the previous summer in a casino as a craps dealer. By some miracle of good fortune, my one-dollar bet grew into thirty dollars, a significant increase in my net monetary assets at that time.

We were celebrating our good fortune when Stan asked me if I had met a clinical graduate student named Betty Ann Miller. I told him I had not and was not even familiar with the name. He said he had dated her a couple of times, but it was nothing serious. He said he knew where she was working downtown and asked if I would like to meet her. I said sure. What the heck. I was unsure of what Stan’s motive in introducing us was.

Was he trying to fix me up? I didn't inquire but welcomed the opportunity to meet this fellow graduate student. And reportedly an attractive female graduate student, as well.

Betty Ann worked part time in a downtown casino called Harrah's. We walked a short distance to the entrance. Casinos in the mid-1960s were very different than what they are today. There were no doors at the entrance in the traditional sense. There were air doors, which you walked through to gain entry. No physical barrier of any kind to impede your entry or to block the view of the excitement and noise emanating from the inside. Just walk through the wall of air and, voila, you were inside.

And what greeted you inside was a smoke-filled room, which I used to refer to as "dens of iniquity." Places where people smoked excessively, drank excessively, and risked more money than they could afford to lose. Gamblers in those days were almost inevitably smokers. Some casinos even handed out free cigarettes, to enable the habit further. And free booze for those who were gambling.

Also, inside were banks of slot machines, which were very different than what you experience in casinos today. These were mechanical slot machines. You had to put an actual coin into a slot and pull a handle to start the mechanical reels spinning. The machine would go "clunk, clunk, clunk" as each reel stopped spinning. And if you won anything, coins would noisily be dispensed all at one time into a metal tray on the bottom of the machine. Get three bells on the pay line and 18 coins would drop into the tray. The crash of coins into the tray was unmistakable and I can still reconstruct the noise in my mind today. And what a cacophony of noise this multitude of machines made. If a jackpot was hit, bells would begin ringing and lights on top of the machine began flashing. Other slot players would glance at your machine with envious eyes to see what you had won.

Since you had to put a coin into the machine to play, slot players needed a supply of coins. You could buy rolls of coins from change people, almost always females, who wore fabric belts around their waist that contained

numerous rolls of these coins. A roll of nickels would cost you \$2, a roll of dimes \$5, and a roll of quarters \$10. Real silver dollars had disappeared from circulation by this time, and players wishing to play the dollar machines could purchase a \$20 roll of “slugs”, which were metal discs of the same size and weight of a silver dollar.

Betty Ann was a change girl. We found her in the rear of the casino past the table games, wearing her very heavy change belt full of rolls of coins of various denominations. We approached her from across the casino which gave me ample opportunity to form an impression of her.

First impressions are a topic that have been studied extensively by social psychologists. Such impressions are made quickly, oftentimes in a matter of seconds. And first impressions tend to be lasting impressions. I knew the research findings only vaguely at this early point in my training, but I always tried to make a favorable first impression, especially when meeting women for the first time.

My first impression of Betty Ann was of her immaculate appearance. She wore a crisply ironed uniform consisting of a white blouse and black dress, the required dress of all casino employees at that time. Her hair was flawlessly groomed, and as we drew closer, I saw she had beautiful blue eyes. She was very attractive. She stood with excellent posture, greeted each customer with a warm smile and quickly and efficiently sold them the rolls of coins they needed. She held an impressive wad of paper bills of differing denominations in one hand and dispensed the rolls of coins with the other hand.

Stan introduced me, and to get a conversation started I told her how lucky I had been in winning thirty dollars at a craps table. She looked at me and said, “I think gambling is dumb.” She quickly added “I also think guys who gamble are dumb.” Taken aback by this I said, “o.k., well. . . see you around” and I slinked off with my tail between my legs. I told Stan, “That didn’t seem to go too well.” So much for making a favorable first impression. If Stan had told me that I had just met the woman who I would marry and enjoy a happy fifty-year marriage with I would have told him that he was crazy.

Still, there was something about her that dwelled in the recesses of my mind. I thought I would eventually cross paths with her again, since we were both first year graduate students. I resolved that I would do better the next time we met.

Around this time the psychology faculty in their wisdom decided that all graduate students should learn computer programming. In 1965 computers were just beginning to become prevalent on university campuses. Computers were at that time massive affairs often taking up the entire floor of a building.

The standard computer language then was developed by Microsoft and was called Fortran. The psychology department arranged classes for us to learn how to write programs in this language. The Fortran classes were in addition to the other classes we were required to take, and we received no credits toward our degrees in acquiring this new skill, which provoked considerable grumbling amongst the graduate students. The doctoral students were unhappy because we were already required to learn to read two foreign languages to receive a Ph.D. At my mother's urging, I had taken several years of Latin in high school. She assured me this would help me in learning other languages. I could translate E Pluribus Unum but other languages? Fuhgeddaboudit.

Little did we know in those days how prominent a role a computer would play in our futures. The idea that in less than 20 years a computer small enough to sit on a desktop or rest on our lap would have hundreds of times the capability of the existing mammoth computers was inconceivable. And cell phones with computer enhanced abilities? Who would have even imagined it?

Soon after this I was taking the stairway down from the fourth floor of the psychology building to the third floor. And who should I see coming up the stairwell? Why, it was Miss Betty Ann Miller. I quickly noted how smartly she was dressed, and her hair and makeup were again perfect.



The stairwell of the psychology building where I met Betty Ann for the second time. This picture was taken in 2018

There was something alluring about her that I couldn't quite put my finger on. I noted that she was available. There was no ring on her finger. Of course, she was informally dating my friend Stan, but he assured me it was nothing serious. It was time to make my second impression.

We exchanged the usual pleasantries, and then I took a deep breath, hugged my books to my chest, and forced myself to look her in the eye. "Would you like to join me for one of the Fortran seminars?" I asked.

She looked me up and down. "Ok," she said.

I struggled to look as cool and nonchalant as she seemed to me, but inside I was thinking, "Alright, Rick, you've made it to first base!"

And a series of events were set in motion that would lead us to many years of marital happiness. It was perhaps one of the earliest instances of "computer dating."

Learning Fortran came easily for me, but not so for Betty Ann. Her difficulty in this task proved fortuitous as it required us to work many hours together trying to master the topic.

For readers old enough to have used computers during this era you will remember that writing and running a computer program was a cumbersome task. First, you had to write the program, one line at a time, using a very prescribed set of rules. Any error, no matter how insignificant, would result in your program not "running." After writing the program instructions (it was called code), we went to a keypunch machine that looked like an enlarged typewriter which punched small square holes in an IBM card. One card for every line of computer instruction. Even the simple programs we were writing then consisted of many, many lines of computer code and thus a large stack of IBM cards. One wrong keypunch and the program would not function correctly. To make certain the IBM cards were punched correctly they had to be inserted for a second time back in the keypunch, and we typed the program again. The machine then "verified" that we had typed the same thing both times.

Typically, we made an error and had to go through this laborious process several times. Betty Ann and I got to know each other better and better, as we carried boxes of computer cards back and forth across campus to the university computer. We laughed, we joked, and we cursed at the recalcitrant computer. A relationship was forming.

Eventually, our relationship extended beyond only learning Fortran. I was on a full graduate scholarship, which meant the school paid my tuition and fees, as well as a princely salary of \$230 a month. One of my assigned duties was as a graduate research assistant to assist one of the faculty members, who was also my mentor, in his research. He was conducting a study with rats and I and several other graduate students were assigned the duty of 'running' the rats in an apparatus my mentor had designed. He was studying an obscure aspect of their behavior. I will spare the reader of any further details about the research.

In addition to my mentor's research, I was also collecting data for my master's thesis. This was also a study with rats, on the fascinating topic of why rats prefer to turn right or left to receive a reward, when either turn would be rewarded. Most rats prefer to turn right, even if a reward is available in both directions. These are called position preferences. I was using a device that looked somewhat like an hourglass. The animals were on water deprivation and very thirsty so getting a small drink was a great reward for them. They could turn slightly right or left and press a plastic panel to get their drink of water. I was investigating how to alter the tendency to choose the right-side panel. In retrospect, I can't remember or imagine what possibly inspired me to conduct research on this topic.



Miss Betty Ann Miller and me shortly after we first met. Circa 1966

Between working on my mentor's research and my thesis, I was spending a lot of time in the rat lab. Data collection went on at all hours of the day and night. It was taking place in an old Quonset hut (steel building) left over from WWII. I was spending up to twenty hours a week in this building, and Betty Ann would, with increasing frequency, I noted, drop by to see me. A courtship flourished in that rat lab, perhaps one of the more unusual places for a courtship to occur. The rats were tame and

housed in individual cages. The animals had to be lifted one at a time by hand from their cage and placed in the research apparatus.

Not surprisingly, Betty Ann, like most people, had an aversion to rats. Despite my entreaties, I could never get her to hold one or even touch one. To be clear, these were not the typical rat that one would find running around in a garbage dump or hiding out in the dark recesses of a large city. These were pedigree rats purchased from suppliers specifically for research purposes. They were clean and disease free. We tamed them by handling them repeatedly before using them in the research. I never once received a bite. For those readers looking for a pet for their children or grandchildren, I can highly recommend a rat.

Thanksgiving was approaching. My mentor's rat research did not stop for such an insignificant event. My mother thoughtfully sent me a smoked turkey, and I dutifully took it to the rat lab to share with fellow graduate research assistants. We were busy with the rats. No time for hygienic niceties such as frequent hand washing. I would take a rat out of its cage, put it in the research apparatus, slice off a piece of turkey, eat it, and retrieve the rat. Betty Ann, raised in an environment in San Francisco that included all the social niceties, was aghast. Nevertheless, or perhaps despite this, our courtship flourished.

Thanksgiving Day arrived, and I was in the rat lab, as per usual. Betty Ann stopped by to tell me she was going to spend the holiday with her parents, who lived in a small town named Genoa, about one hour southwest of Reno. She promised me that she would be back at a certain time.

The designated time for her return came and went, and I became increasingly worried that something had happened to her. As the hours passed, my worry increased to where I was frantic, out of my mind with concern. I could imagine her having had an accident driving back, lying on the road injured. I couldn't call her parents because I didn't know their telephone number. Cell phones, like desktop computers, were decades away. I became so worried that I jumped in my car to drive the same road she had taken, hoping beyond hope that I would not spot her wrecked

car. I never spotted her or her car, and I returned home dejected and yet relieved.

She finally showed up several hours late. Understandably, she had spent more time than she planned with her family. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief when she finally appeared. I later reflected that if I was this concerned about her, I must be in love with her. If I were that much in love with her, it would probably be a good idea to ask her to marry me.

A few days later we were strolling along a path adjacent to the Truckee River. She looked particularly beautiful to me on that day. Her clothes were casual but most stylish. A gentle breeze only slightly disturbed her perfectly coiffed hair. Her makeup was applied most carefully. And those blue eyes, my god how those blue eyes pierced my soul. I turned to her and quite impulsively said, "Will you marry me?" She exclaimed, "Yes, yes, yes!" and wrapped me in her arms. I will never forget the feeling of that embrace. I had no ring to give her. No fancy dinner where I could pop the question. My meager salary and non-existent savings did not allow for either.

This being the era of the mid-1960s, it was obligatory to ask her father permission for me to marry her. I had met her father a few times at the family's home. He was an only child and accustomed to being the center of attention by his doting parents. Physically, he was a big man. Taller than me, and he was moderately overweight. He smoked incessantly. Camels. Not filtered. Drank a lot of whiskey, straight up on the rocks. He was losing his hair and had a buzz cut. He and his wife were Stanford graduates. He had been a successful business executive in San Francisco and had retired to Nevada, where there were no income taxes, at the age of 40. He cut an imposing figure. Scared the heck out of me.

On the occasions we'd met, he talked about himself nonstop. Never asked me about how my studies were going, or what research I might be pursuing. In fact, he seemed totally disinterested in nearly any aspect of my life.

With his steely gaze upon me, he told me he didn't have much respect for psychology, and that he considered Ph.D.'s to be educated fools. That about settled where my lofty educational goals stood in his estimation.

He was the prototypical Marlboro man. He hunted, he fished, and he owned and rode horses. I did none of those things. How, in his estimation, could I possibly be a prospect as a potential son-in-law? Betty Ann's mother, on the other hand, thought I was wonderful. One out of two, it would have to do.

A date was set for me to go to her parents' house and, after dinner, seek her father's permission. As I drove up the bumpy dirt road in my little VW bug there sat his huge, imposing house on the side of a hill overlooking the Washoe Valley. Her mother had prepared a beautiful rib roast. The aroma pierced my nose as soon as I entered the house. Betty Ann's younger sister was still living at home and was present. We all settled in around the beautiful wooden dining table, located in the formal dining room. I was nervous. Damn nervous. Betty Ann had schooled me on a few of the social niceties that she knew her parents would expect to see. The order in which silverware were used, how to place the silverware on your plate after you finished eating, and so on.

Her father began slicing the roast. Betty Ann had told me that her father especially liked the end cut so I should not, under any circumstances, ask for it or expect to be receiving that cut. He expertly sliced off the end of the roast and asked me to pass him my plate. The end cut! Oh, my goodness, I thought, I'm in!

After dinner, everyone but her father and I left the dining room. Everyone was aware of the agenda. I stuttered and stammered about how much I loved and cared for Betty Ann and her father sat and listened impassively. No body language to give me a clue how he was feeling. Finally, I just blurted it out, "Sir, may I have your daughter's hand in marriage?" Her father replied, "Just her hand? Hell, take the whole thing." Did he just say that, I said to myself in astonishment? That corny response to my most heartfelt query? I nervously uttered a little laugh. He shook my hand, and it was a done deal. I breathed a sigh of relief. Thank heavens that is over and past.

We were married the following June 1967. It was a small church wedding with a reception at her parents' house in Genoa. During the reception Betty Ann's mother took me aside and told me she knew I was the perfect man for her daughter. Her heartfelt expressions meant a great deal to me.

As a wedding gift, Betty Ann gave me a poem in a small frame.

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.

Robert Browning

I have looked at that poem thousands of times since our wedding 58 years ago. It sits on a shelf in my office overlooking me as I write this.

My father-in-law discretely slipped me \$200 after the wedding for the honeymoon. I thought I had hit the jackpot. My father-in-law's gift was nearly a month's pay at my then current salary.

I was a married man. I had met and married the woman of my dreams. The world was my oyster, and I faced the future with unbridled enthusiasm.



Taken the day after our marriage

The year 1967 was the era when many young married couples donned special clothes for their "going away" on their honeymoon. My wife purchased a special outfit for this event, and I dressed in an inexpensive black suit and tie. In retrospect we looked like we were going to a formal event, not to a motel for the first night of our honeymoon.



Leaving for our honeymoon in Mexico. Betty Ann's mother watches wistfully in the background, tears in her eyes

We took off in my VW bug for Mexico. While on the way we heard on the car radio that the six-day war between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries had begun. We were transfixed by the news and listened to the unfolding events all the way to Mexico.

We spent our first honeymoon night in a nice but moderately priced motel. I figured this was no time for me to pretend to be the last of the big spenders, despite my suddenly coming into \$200. The lady at the registration desk sized up the situation quickly, and asked if it was our honeymoon? I mumbled yes, while Betty Ann turned several shades of red and looked away. I signed the guest registry as Mr. and Mrs. Rick M. Gardner and felt proud doing so.

Being 1967, it was customary, at least in Betty Ann's social circles, to have a special nightgown to wear on the first wedding night. Betty Ann chose a beautiful white lacy French chemise style gown. After a lengthy period of preparation in the bathroom, she emerged in her chemise de nuit. She appeared as an angelic vision to me. The nightgown was revealing, but only slightly so. She blushed in a way that made her even more enticing to me. And my special wedding night wear? White cotton briefs and a tee shirt. I did not own a pair of pajamas in those days. I still don't.

We slipped into bed together. I was the first man that Betty Ann had "been with." She had saved her innocence for her wedding night, and for me. I was not much more experienced in these matters myself. After some awkward fumbling and bumbling by both of us, we figured it out.

We traveled south until reaching Ensenada, Mexico. Ensenada was a small coastal resort town on the Baja California Peninsula, located 78 miles south of San Diego. We checked into yet another inexpensive motel, one that had been approved by the American Automobile Association. It was located right on the beach.

We went to dinner, and I discovered that Betty Ann had never eaten Mexican food. My wife had spoken fluent Spanish in high school, and I asked the waiter to bring her something special that he would recommend. I discreetly mentioned to the waiter that she had never eaten Mexican food. They prepared a very spicy Mexican entree and watched bemusedly in the background when my wife took the first bite. She gasped, she choked, she gulped water, all to the great amusement of the Mexican wait staff.

One of the amenities offered near our motel was horse rentals. Betty Ann had practically grown up on a horse in San Francisco. She had won several trophies and ribbons in horse riding competitions. I was a stranger to the creatures. We picked out what looked like two friendly, not-excitable horses. She jumped in the saddle and rode off down the beach like the experienced equestrian she was. My horse eyed me warily as I made several attempts to get up in the saddle. I was barely in the saddle when the horse took off after his companion who was carrying my wife. I

was bouncing in the saddle like a ping-pong ball while I noticed my wife was smoothly flowing with her horse's movements. I was going way faster than what made me comfortable. The only Spanish word that came to mind was 'alto' or stop. The horse ignored my entreaties and off my wife and I went down the beach. I hung on for dear life while my wife was chatting to her horse in Spanish and both she and her horse were enjoying the adventure.

The next morning, I awoke with pain in places that I did not know could be painful. Back, legs, feet; everything hurt with the slightest movement. My wife felt fine, of course. A honeymoon is not the perfect time to be experiencing immobilizing muscle pains. My equestrian hobby ended up short-lived, and it would be decades before I rode another horse.

And what of Betty Ann's impending dementia? Were there any ever so subtle clues that such a disease might be lurking in the dark recesses of her brain? Neurologists believe that the onset of Alzheimer's might occur 20 or even 30 years before any noticeable changes in behaviors appear. It would be nearly 40 years before Betty Ann's behavior would reflect the presence of the disease. Too early for now. And what if such cues did appear, would I have been able to detect them? Most certainly not. For reasons I will shortly explain.

The unfortunate news for readers is that dementia hides itself in the early years of one's life. You will not detect it in your children or your siblings at an early age. Your son might be forgetful and absentminded, and his attention span may be short, but this should not alert you to any signs of impending dementia. Your brother may tell you the same stories repeatedly until you want to scream, but it is not dementia revealing itself. In most cases dementia reveals itself in the 60s or 70.

Chapter 3

Trials and Travails in Obtaining a Graduate Education

We were back at the university, and the academic year 1967-68 was beginning. During this year I completed my master's degree and started work on the Ph.D. Betty Ann began work on her master's research thesis. It was a study on how newborn infants learn to imitate facial gestures from their parents. A much more interesting topic than my master's thesis rat research.

Betty Ann eventually received a full graduate scholarship at this time. She was assigned the duties of graduate teaching assistant. She was helping an instructor with the introductory psychology course. She would lead a discussion section every week, going over the topics covered in the professor's lecture and the textbook. I was also promoted from graduate research assistant to graduate teaching assistant. No more rat lab for me.

At the end of the day, Betty Ann and I would discuss the day's events and specifically our experiences teaching undergraduates. We were both new at this and we sometimes struggled. We always gave each other reassurances and encouragement. Noteworthy events would sometimes happen in both of our classes, and they would make for good storytelling over dinner. Our shared experiences and struggles as graduate students cemented our relationship even further.

In one instance, Betty Ann was holding her weekly discussion session with the freshmen introductory psychology students when she noticed two military men enter the back of her classroom. They were immaculately dressed in their formal uniforms. They approached Betty Ann and stated they needed to speak immediately to one of the students in her class. Betty Ann summoned the student, and the military men went out into the hallway to talk. The military men informed the student that

her husband had been killed in combat in the Vietnam War. Betty Ann reported the crying and wailing that then commenced was excruciating to experience. The class became so disturbed that she dismissed them. She wept quietly when she told me this story that evening.

I had a few adventures of my own. I was assigned the job of graduate teaching assistant for a social psychology professor teaching an introductory course in statistics. She held a Ph.D. in statistics from an elite Ivy League school. I had completed one graduate course in statistics. She was not a very good teacher, and we both realized it.

Early in the course, she informed me she was giving the class over to me to teach. This declaration was met with astonishment. Me? I didn't know very much about teaching, or statistics either, for that matter. I was very nervous about this assignment, as I was at a very early stage of learning the topic myself.

I showed up for my first class and informed the students that I was now their instructor. They looked at me somewhat skeptically, as well they should have. I relayed the occurrence to Betty Ann that evening at dinner, and she laughed at the predicament I found myself in. Hey, how about a little empathy here, I implored of her. She gave me assurances I would do fine, assurances that did not fully assuage my concerns.

The year was 1967 and smoking cigarettes was a more common habit than it is today. I smoked, and my wife smoked Marlboro's. Many of the students also smoked. Unlike today, there were no restrictions about smoking during class. The habit was so prevalent that the university placed small metal ashtrays on each student's classroom desk.

I showed up for my first lecture. I was so nervous that I felt like my knees were shaking. My anxiety was apparent to the students. I lit up a cigarette, and many of the students did likewise. I had a piece of chalk in one hand and a cigarette in the other. I thought that it would probably be a matter of time before I stuck the chalk in my mouth and tried to write on

the blackboard with the cigarette. The students probably imagined it, as well.

A student from the back of the class asked me a question. I gazed out through a blue haze in the classroom to see him. Betty Ann and I had a good laugh that evening when I related this experience to her.

I would relate this story to my own students many years later when I became a full-fledged professor and was teaching statistics. The students were astonished that such a thing could have ever taken place. Smoking was forbidden in all university classrooms and buildings by that time. You could not even smoke near the entrance to a building.

As the completion of my graduate studies approached, my goal continued toward becoming a college professor. All the graduate students greatly admired and respected their professors. To us, in this era of the 1960s, they were all-knowing beings who I half-suspected may have descended from the heavens to share their knowledge with us like some great prophet. We addressed them as Dr. so and so and never by their first name. We treated them with the greatest reverence and were always a little nervous in their presence. I was always a bit surprised when I saw them using the restroom. Gee, I thought, they have the same biological functions that we do. One day I saw a woman who was a distinguished psychology faculty member in the grocery store. I had a hard time conceiving that such a prominent person would have to spend her time doing such a mundane task.

I usually wore a long-sleeved white shirt and tie during graduate school, and most of my male classmates did as well. The female graduate students all wore long dresses, with stockings. Such attire was not a formal rule, but one that most of us adhered to just the same.

Included below is a picture of four of us who worked as research assistants in the rat lab. The fellow in the middle with the pipe is Stan and standing to my left was Evans, the best man at my wedding.