

**A circa 2014 interview with Eileen and Christine Lambie, Sanskrit scholar, teacher, editor of INSIGHT, the world wide newsletter of the Philosophy School, and wife of Donald Lambie, a barrister and leader of the world wide School.**

**- *When did you realize it that you were facing this disease?***

I was in denial; I did not realize it until after my husband Michael and our son Josh brought the subject up. At first I was surprised and didn't believe it to be true, and shortly after, horrified, deeply saddened, and frightened.

***Do you remember? What was it like after the diagnosis?***

My first reaction to the diagnosis was very painful – I cried a lot, and was in denial; I was angry at myself (as if I could do anything about it!), and angry at the world (again, as if....)

Of course I remember! I felt that I just wanted to close my eyes and disappear. I even felt sometimes that I just wanted to die. But whenever I spoke that, Michael very strongly reminded me that I don't believe I really wanted to die; it just felt that it was too hard to go on.

My father had Alzheimer's disease. He was a brilliant, published, Yiddish writer, with a wonderful, delightful sense of humor. I watched his mind deteriorate over a period of many years. His memory and to some extent, his ability to communicate, were severely compromised. It broke my heart to see him struggle with language – a man who spoke four languages fluently – English, Hebrew, Yiddish and Spanish . And of course, it also frightened

me that I would end up in the same way. My father was a very loving man. Towards the end he did not even remember my name – he would often call me by one of his three sisters’ names – Bluma, Clara, and Gita. But he always remembered that I was someone that he loved very much.

I think it is very important for people who have this disease to recognize that they still have much to say, much to contribute, and much love to give.

- ***What are you facing in yourself? What do you fear, how often are you sad?***

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My fear is that this disease might rob me of things that I love -- being able to interact intelligently and coherently with people , singing, memorizing Shakespeare’s sonnets (I know several of them by heart now), playing the piano and the recorder – (I play both instruments pretty well). But even with this disease, I cannot imagine that there will ever be a time when I can no longer sing and make music.

For the last several years Michael and I have attended a “sing-along” of Handel’s Messiah in Chicago, Illinois – the conductor is a very dear and old friend of ours and it is a very joyous event. I have memorized the entire Alto part by heart, so that I do not even need to open the score!. I do, however keep the score open, just in case!, and because the people who are singing around me sometimes need help finding their place and I am always happy to help.

### ***Any physical pain?***

None that is related to the disease.

***What is giving you strength in this situation?***

Family—especially Michael and Josh, music, and of course, the Teaching and support of School.

***What practical steps have you had to take?***

- Quite a bit of medication, visiting doctors regularly (though sometimes I get very frustrated with all the doctors I have to see) and a “medic alert bracelet” that allows anyone who sees me in trouble can call for help. (Happily, I have so far not needed to make use of the bracelet.)

Michael has encouraged me to exercise frequently – he purchased a stationary bike and a treadmill, so that I can exercise every day. Swimming with my “noodle” in the summer is wonderful! This is a foam “toy” that keeps you afloat if you are not a very good swimmer, which I am not, in the summer. I’ve become quite good at it! When Michael turned seventy years old this past summer, I swam 71 noodle laps without a break, in honor of his birthday!

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- From Mrs. Lambie:

**What you said during the week made a big impression on me: you were cleverest at school, fluent in another language, gifted at singing and music. Alzheimers carries a stigma; when people talk to you they seem to be seeing the disease - this is very important to mention; people need to hear how to treat you (or any other sufferer) with respect and compassion. I'm still me - in spite of this disease. Meditation is best of all. People ask about this with either curiosity or compassion . . .**

What helped me through the deep emotional pain:

Michael reminded me that I am not this disease. He recently shared a quote from Tennyson – “Though much is taken, much abides.” We remind each other of this often. It is a powerful and moving statement for me to remember and take to heart.

Husband Michael’s and son Josh’s loving care and strength. On September 30<sup>th</sup> Joshua and his wife Blair are participating in a 3-mile walk to educate people about the disease. Both Michael and I are going to participate as well. Joshua’s note on the Internet, encouraging people to join the walk, is beautiful and moving. (If you would like to read it we will e-mail a copy of it to you.)

Meditation twice a day is an extraordinary gift. During the first few years of School I was happy to meditate, but I can’t say that it was paramount in my life or that I practiced twice a day every day. As I have gotten older and stayed with School and meditation twice a day, I recognize and appreciate that even (or perhaps, especially), in dark times it is crucial to maintain the discipline. And in particular, since receiving the frightening diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease, I find that meditation, and the depth of peace, knowledge and truth that it provides, offers a most powerful way of facing this devastating disease with courage and grace. After all the years in School, and all that has been given to me, I see that the Teaching provides a viewpoint and path that, with the help of my loved ones, keeps me steady and helps me to be free from the grief that still at times arises in my heart.

For many years music has played a strong role in my life. I find great joy singing, playing piano, and playing the recorder. I am now playing recorder sonatas by Handel, and am now considering looking for a keyboard player(ideally, harpsichord, but piano will

do) to play with. Since this illness began, I play music pretty much every day. I play the piano – Scarlatti sonatas and Bach Preludes. I also play the Handel sonatas on the recorder. I am very fortunate that many years ago, a dear friend who is a brilliant bassoonist, gave me a very fine recorder which I still play.

Support and love from my group at Philosophy, our tutors, and most recently and strongly, from Mrs. Lambie, goes very far to bring me back to the truth and strength that has so graciously been showered on me by my family and the School.