Elizabeth Winkelmann

Testifying before the Appropriations Committee: Human Services Public Hearing

In Opposition to H.B. No. 6824

2-27-2015

My Name is Elizabeth Winkelmann, I live at 76 Mott Lane in Moods Ct. and I am 57 years old. On January 10, 2014 I lost my husband Thomas Winkelmann to Alzheimer's disease. Tom served Six years of active duty for the United States Air National Guard. He retired after 42 years as a union Ironworker Field Superintendent working on many projects throughout the Northeast. Tom was a dedicated husband, father and friend. He was a great provider and was always there to support any friend or family member in need. He was intelligent, quick witted and physically fit. On October 22, 2008 we received the devastating diagnoses of Alzheimer's disease. It was on that day that I made a promise to Tom and myself that he would be taken care of at home. You see I had worked in the Health Care field for the prior 20 years. I had sat with many families completing paperwork as those family members with extremely heavy hearts placed their loved ones into long term care. I also watched as those patients when placed in long term care lost all that was familiar to them and almost always took a rapid decline.

The first few years after the diagnosis with the help of our daughter Kassie we were able to adjust our lives to make sure that all of Tom's needs were met. Because he was able to be home with us he was able to be present for the births of our 2 youngest grandchildren. He attended the wedding of our son and he walked our daughter down the aisle for her wedding. It was in the last year of Tom's illness when he needed total 24 hour care and began having difficulty sleeping through the night that I began to question my ability to keep the promise that I made. In the last few months of Tom's illness he had to be hospitalized for dehydration. This disruption in his routine and change in his environment threw him into a tail spin. My biggest fear was that I was going to be unable to take him home. His stay in the hospital was extremely difficult for all of us and I knew that if I could just get him home he would be able to settle back in. We came up with a home care plan that included the resources from the respite program and we were able to take Tom home. Tom spent the last weeks of his life in the home that he so loved surrounded by his family and friends. We were able to have a caregiver come in for a few hours a couple of days a week. I was able to spend an afternoon with my children or grandchildren. Go out and do the household grocery shopping or just go and have a cup of coffee with a friend. I remember one day when I just took a book and drove down to the river and sat and read for a couple of hours. This provided the break I needed to just get through another day. The caregiver was experienced in working with Alzheimer's patients she fit right in to our routine and she made Tom feel comfortable and at ease.

I believe that we need to provide more support for the families dealing with this devastating diagnosis and when possible provide all the resources they need to care for their loved ones in the home environment.