



What Ed wants most is friends, buddies, the kind of men who used to gather around him when he was president of a university and a hero on the golf course. What he wants is to sit over a beer with these men after a game of golf and talk about politics, business, and sports.

He wants his old life back.

Focusing on Love

Book Marries Pictures with Words
in Honor of a Spouse's Battle with AD

By Mary Adam Thomas
Photos and captions by Judith Fox

In the photograph, a silver-haired man sits alone at a small outdoor table, surrounded by oversized concrete tiles whose boxy right angles stand in sharp contrast to the table's circular fluidity. He wears stylish sportswear, his hair is neatly combed and his leather shoes shine in the sun. We see him from above, not to look down on him but simply to observe his moment of solitude from a respectful distance. The image conveys loneliness and elegance at the same time.

The photo's subject is Dr. Edmund Ackell, an Alzheimer's sufferer, and its photographer is his wife and caregiver, Judith Fox. It appears on the cover of Ms. Fox's new book, *I Still Do: Loving and Living with Alzheimer's*, which pairs the author's spectacular images of Dr. Ackell with her poignant words about their dual descent into the disease.



For several years, Ed didn't want people to know he had Alzheimer's. He wanted to be treated with respect and he didn't want people to think he was "crazy." There are many incorrect assumptions about the disease—some held by the people who have it.

The Hard Path

"The cover photograph represents the heartbreaking isolation of Alzheimer's," says Ms. Fox. "Alzheimer's keeps fencing in those who suffer from it. The disease distances and cuts them off from the world, from friends, from family and ultimately from themselves."

Dr. Ackell was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (AD) in 1998, just three years into his marriage to Ms. Fox. Both had been married once before (she was widowed, he was divorced) and both had enjoyed successful careers. A former Navy pilot, Dr. Ackell was a prominent surgeon, academic and university president, as well as an accomplished athlete. Ms. Fox worked as a writer and professional photographer prior to building a business that eventually expanded to multiple locations from its base in Richmond, Va. When she sold her company, she focused on her work as a fine art photographer, often training her lens on her spouse.

Ms. Fox recalls subtle signs of Dr. Ackell's memory loss that surfaced before their wedding, but she decided that she loved him enough to marry him and care for him, even if he might eventually develop AD.

"The first signs of Alzheimer's were slight and slippery," she recalls. "The strongest and most concerning may have been that he had trouble tracking conversations when we were with friends." Eventually, Ms. Fox and Dr. Ackell decided to have him tested for the genetic markers that indicate a predisposition to the disease. The results came back positive, although that didn't necessarily mean Alzheimer's. To follow up, they consulted a neurologist, who looked at a variety of different test results and then confirmed the diagnosis of probable Alzheimer's.



From *I Still Do*, published by Powerhouse Books

“Ed is a natural athlete. He went to Holy Cross on a baseball scholarship and played on a Yankees’ farm team for a summer. His real love, though, is golf and, despite his extreme visual-spatial difficulties, he won’t abandon it. When he’s concentrating on golf, he’s not thinking about Alzheimer’s.”

A Visual Love Letter

That was 11 years ago. Dr. Ackell recently moved from the home he shared with Ms. Fox to a nearby residential facility for persons with AD.

I Still Do is an expression of love from wife to husband, as told through photographs and poetic tributes. Its pages—much like the lives of people living with and near to Alzheimer’s—are filled with images and words, as well as large amounts of empty space.

“One of the wonderful things about being a photographer and photographing Ed is that it’s another way of loving him; of touching him through the camera lens,” Ms. Fox says. “I see him more clearly. I see him closer. It extends our relationship.”

Dr. Ackell, his wife reports, is a very modest man and never thought of himself as someone who would be a likely model or muse. “But the entire time I was photographing Ed, he was a supportive and enthusiastic partner,” she says. “He was always there, proud and engaged and my most insightful editor. He had less interest in himself as subject than he had for my other work, but he was agreeable to my desire to photograph him because he loved my passion for photography and because he believed in me.”

Up Close

While each of the book’s pictures is hauntingly moving, Ms. Fox has some favorites. “I love all of the images in the book because they all reflect Ed in different moods and moments,” she says. “But as the woman who loves Ed, I would say one of my favorites is the close-up of him as he’s focusing

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Why do family caregivers do what we do? Is it an instinct to protect? A willingness to sacrifice for someone we love? Is it responsibility? Guilt? Lack of options? Or is it, perhaps, an understanding that we can do no less and the hope that someone else would do no less for us?

on a friend who was sitting next to him. The unseen friend is talking and even though Ed is in the advanced stage of the disease, he is happy and lucid and smiling. The photograph captures Ed's sparkle and his gentle, intelligent and sweet nature."

In addition, Ms. Fox says she is always deeply affected when she looks at one image (not shown) that shows her husband in an extreme close-up. "As both wife and photographer, I can see that his disease is advanced and the photograph shows the magnitude of his pain," she says.

When Ms. Fox talks with her husband about her book now, she reports that he's happy for her, even if he doesn't always remember what the book is about. "It pains me that I can't fully share with him the joy of this part of our partnership, and that he doesn't grasp how deeply his story touches and helps so many people," she says.

"My photography, in addition to the work I do for *I Still Do*, keeps me excited, challenged and moving forward," Ms. Fox says. "Yet I also deal daily with my loss, my deep pain for Ed's suffering, my gratitude that he is still in my life and my fear of what is still ahead." ■

*Read more about the book and its author by visiting www.powerhousebooks.com or www.judithfox.com. *I Still Do* can be found at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, or at your local bookseller.*