

Minnie's Story—Part I

Minnie is eighty-two years old. She is 5 feet 2 inches tall and obese and has mild hypertension (high blood pressure). She was born in Italy, but her parents moved to the United States when she was five years old.

Minnie has three children, two sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Eugene, has five children, two of whom are married, with children. The middle child, Bobbie, has four children, one of whom is married, with children. The youngest child, Brian, is recently divorced, with no children.

Minnie's husband passed away when she was fifty. He died of cancer. Currently, she lives alone in a four-bedroom house. Her children live in the same town, her youngest son living next door.

Minnie always enjoyed cooking for her family. She spent forty years cooking at a large rest home before she retired at sixty-five. Her family enjoyed the large dinners she prepared for just about every holiday and family get-togethers.

About three years ago, the entire family (all twenty-seven of them) had come over to celebrate Thanksgiving. Usually, Minnie's kitchen was her castle and she ruled with a stern hand or, in this case, a large spoon. Her famous dishes included homemade ravioli with her special marinara sauce. Bobbie and Brian always enjoyed assisting her in the kitchen; Brian even became a chef for a local restaurant.

This time, however, Bobbie and Brian noticed that something was a bit different about the kitchen and their mother. She was having some difficulty finding and using the right spices for the sauce. The ravioli, which she usually prepared days in advance and put in the freezer, was not done yet, and Brian had to run over to his house to get the flour for making the pasta dough.

Minnie seemed to get upset easily and at times reverted back to speaking only in Italian. More troubling was that Minnie seemed to forget the names of her children and grandchildren and at times called her eldest son "Chester," which was her husband's name.

The next day, Bobbie called Eugene regarding her concern over Minnie's behavior. She had done an Internet search on memory problems and behaviors and found the Web site of the Alzheimer's Association. There was a lot of information on Alzheimer's disease (AD) and the symptoms to look for. More importantly, the site mentioned the importance of seeing a physician to determine the cause of the change and the steps that can be taken.

A week later, Minnie was at her family physician's office with her children. They were awaiting the results of the extensive tests to determine the cause of Minnie's problems.