

Fading in the Distance

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By Sue Miller
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Buena Vista Home Video (2002)

Fading, faster and faster, into an unknown universe of confusion, denial, and turmoil, Alzheimer's patients face great devastation when dealing with their disease. They have to go through many tough and challenging phases that test their mental and physical capabilities. The Story of My Father, written by Sue Miller, follows the life and death of her father, church historian James Nichols, as he struggled with Alzheimer's disease. James Nichols was a very vibrant and scholarly man. He taught at many universities throughout his career and was a prominent member of society. In much the same way, Iris Murdoch was an acclaimed 20th century novelist. She was a bright and lively woman until she was struck with the same deadly disease, Alzheimer's. Iris, starring Judy Dench and Kate Winslet, chronicles the life of this amazing writer. In both cases, the affected persons were not only smart but also articulate and well educated. It is very ironic that both of these brilliant individuals were struck with diseases of the mind. It is very devastating to read and watch these stories knowing the inevitable fate of the characters. Sue Miller and the creators of the movie Iris did an excellent job portraying the lives and unfortunately the deaths of these fine individuals.

He became violent. He had hallucinations. He wasn't interested in activities that he used to love. He became preoccupied and left things undone. These are

only some of the effects Alzheimer's had on James Nichols in The Story of My Father. Throughout the novel, Miller examines her experiences with her father over the years. They enjoyed doing many activities together and spent much time talking about each other's lives. After the death of Miller's mother, she and her father became even closer. They even renovated a very disastrous house together. As Alzheimer's set in, Miller was the primary care giver for her father, letting him live with her and her family and eventually institutionalizing him towards the end of his life. The Story of My Father tells the tale of a woman and her family trying to cope with the sudden changes in life and trying to make the best of every situation. Miller, through recounting the story of her father and his illness, examines her life and how these events affected it.

The Story of My Father was well written and interesting to read. Although it was nonfiction, the novel read like it was a fictional story with made up characters. It allowed the readers to understand Alzheimer's disease on a personal level, introducing them to a real life situation. Sue Miller developed a character out of her father that all readers could relate to, as if it were their own. He was loving and kind. He was smart and funny. He was everything a father should be. Miller did an excellent job at presenting and following the stages of her father's disease, but she only did an adequate job at developing the story as a whole. The novel did not flow in a way that made sense to the reader. She jumped around chronologically and focus, from flashbacks to stories of other people in the family. It was difficult to follow the book at times because she was focusing on too many people—first it was the relationship between her father and mother, and then the relationship between her and her mother, and then the relationship between her and her father. There were too many side stories overtaking the main story of her father and his illness.

Iris Murdoch was a famous 20th century British author. She was a wonderfully gifted writer that allowed the world to see into her heart through her words. Iris is a film about her tumultuous life as told by her soul mate John Bayley, played by . The story goes back and forth between the older Iris, played by Judy Dench, and a younger, livelier Iris, played by Kate Winslet. The film follows Iris as she progressively deteriorates and eventually dies from Alzheimer's disease. Iris was a woman above her time, very strong willed and even stubborn at times. It is the story of a woman trying to break out into society. It is a story of a woman finding the man she loves with all her heart. And it is a story about a woman trying to desperately grasp the last few pieces of her once bright mind.

Iris was a very depressing, yet a very interesting and captivating film. It made the viewer think about and understand the effects of Alzheimer's disease on a patient. Throughout the movie, it was very easy to see the indications of the disease in Iris's everyday life. The movie was very well directed and the acting was superb. Technically the film was great. The color scheme, dark and monotone, was a perfect touch to give off the overall sad and gloomy mood of the film, which portrayed the emotions of the disease itself. Alzheimer's is sad and gloomy. The script was well written, easy to follow, and successfully portrayed the downfall of Iris Murdoch. As depressing as the

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ending was, it gave an amazing picture of Iris: how she was and how she will forever live to be; dancing in the sunlight, happy and full of life.

The Story of My Father and Iris were two wonderful representations of minds affected by Alzheimer's disease. James Nichols and Iris Murdoch were both people that had beautiful and well educated minds that ironically were taken away from them as they progressed into the depths of the disease. These two stories followed the lives of their families as well, recounting the turmoil that one goes through when taking care of someone with Alzheimer's disease. Iris captivated its viewers with the real life portrayal of the downfall of a great mind while still developing a wonderful story line that educated the viewers. Although The Story of My Father was a wonderful representation of a person affected by Alzheimer's, it didn't do a very good job at portraying the actual disease. Iris, however, was able to develop a wonderful story line as well as allow the viewers to really see and understand the devastating effects of Alzheimer's on an actual person. Both accounts were very enlightening and informative, but at the same time disheartening and depressing. Although these pieces of work are not joyful, they present issues that are facing people everyday.

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