



Written by: Theodora Lafkas

Throughout my journey with her I have found statistics an advocacy. They reaffirmed that I was not alone and these numbers soften the blows. There are over 100 types of dementia. One in four people get it over the age over 85 and one in two over the age of 90. It is the second highest cause of death in Australia and the highest among women. In Britain, it has recently become the highest killer. The other advocacy was talking to people who had gone through a similar journey or were going through it simultaneously. I write hoping that our journey helps to soften some of yours.

Signs of the onset of my mother's dementia began roughly eight years ago. She had started to clutch on to her bag, agonise over the whereabouts of her keys and then our presence. At the end of May in 2010 when I had returned from a trip to South America she had stopped going to church. Georgia was a devout churchgoer. She rarely missed a Sunday service and would be attending another service a week: be it in honour of a saint or a funeral. For her to have declared she was no longer going to attend a Sunday service meant that she had begun to become disoriented. I suspect she would have missed a bus stop or two and get distressed finding her way home. During this year I would often get calls of distress. She complained that people were trying to break into her home at night and would plead I move back in with her. Getting the house painted that year- a much-needed job- was a nightmare. By the end of the year, she no longer did her own banking or go to the local shops on her own. We were fortunate in that she was aware

'Still alive' living with dementia

*Να' ταν τα νιάτα δυο φορές
Τα γερατιά καμία
Να ξαναδροσερεύαν τα μαραμένα χόρτα
Και να ξαναγυρίζαν τα νιάτα μου τα πρώτα*

*It would not have been fitting if I had started
a story of my mother's journey with dementia
without her daily mantra.*

that it was dementia and this made the more severe years to come easier.

In June, 2011 I returned from a trip to Europe to find that a younger sister, with her own disabilities, had moved in and thus for two years two negatives allowed for a positive- I did not need to move in. During these two years, however, we did observe what we later discovered were typical symptoms of the condition. She would undertake toilet needs in corners of the garden; hide items of need like undergarments; forget food I would cook for her and eat whatever was at hand's reach. From early spring in 2013 she had started to pull out the lawn believing it was a field in need of clearing for crops, despite the existing garden of seasonal crops that I had

maintained for her. At the end of that year in an attempt to move the 'very full' green bin from an escarpment, she went rolling with it and fractured her left wrist. Unable to rationalise her injury she managed to pull off and cut away five casts. It was time to come back home. A couple of months later another fall resulted in severe surgery of the right arm. With the left wrist not quite healed and the right out of action 2014 was not the best year in our lives compounded by the arduous process of establishing care.

Our mother was first assessed by ACAT (Aged Care Assessment Team) at a Level 2 in 2012. Following the removal of one cast using a knife and another with the assistance of a pair of scissors, she was reassessed as