

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

HoustonChronicle.com and chron.com | VOL. 113, No. 42 | WE RECYCLE | \$2.50 (\$3 IN SELECTED AREAS) ***  Houston Chronicle  @HoustonChron

HEALTH

Dementia patients find Amazing Place to pass the day

By Claudia Feldman

Margaret and Larry Kelminson tell different versions of their shared story.

There's Larry's version—he is the one with progressive dementia, a type similar to Alzheimer's.

And there's Margaret's version. She is Larry's wife and, now, his caretaker. The change in her life has been enormous, too.

She goes first, out of Larry's hearing range.

It's the little things that hurt, she says. They don't go out to dinner much anymore because it's hard to have a prolonged conversation. They used to love Texas A&M football, but now Larry has trouble focusing on the game. For most of their married life, they shared a passion for antiques and the antique business, but Larry has forgotten much of what he knew.

"It's hard to accept. I keep thinking tomorrow he's going to be OK, but he's not."

Margaret Kelminson

mind in anyway that I wanted to use it, and all of a sudden, it just wasn't there to depend on."

Both Larry and Margaret embody the struggles facing millions of couples in their supposed golden years.

About 5 million Americans live with Alzheimer's. Roughly 1.3 million Americans struggle with Lewy body. Those numbers are expected to multiply as baby boomers, as many as 79 million, enter their 50s, 60s and 70s.

Larry is 76. Margaret is 77.

"I was born in Brooklyn, N.Y.," he says, settling in next to his wife on the couch, "but we left when I was 8. I guess I've spent 68 years here in Houston."

Couple says center gives him a reason to get going

Margaret, a businesswoman who owns LK Fine Antiques, had a health scare a few weeks ago. It turned out to be nothing, but she couldn't share the worry with her husband or the relief.

"This is lonely," says Margaret. "My 24-hour confidant and partner is gone."

She is sitting on a sofa at Amazing Place, a day center for adults, including Larry, with mild to moderate dementia.

"It's hard to accept," Margaret says. "I keep thinking tomorrow he's going to be OK, but he's not."

When Larry pulls himself away from his favorite activity at Amazing Place, Bible study, Margaret greets him with a kiss. She also re-buttons his blue-and-white-checked shirt and straightens his suspenders.

He's had Lewy body dementia for about 10 years now, and from the tone of his voice, he's found it bewildering.

He was an accountant, a quick study, thoughtful and analytical. Then there was a bungled assignment, followed by doctors visits, medical tests and the terrible diagnosis—dementia.

"My first reaction was, 'Why me?'" Larry says. "I was used to using my

He attended A&M, graduated with a degree in finance, married and divorced. And then, while working as an accountant, he met Margaret.

He makes an oft-repeated joke.

"I think she'd do anything not to pay an accounting fee." More seriously he says, "I liked the fact that she was a good Christian. And I liked the way she looked. I liked the way she made announcements and did all sorts of things."

When they married 25 years ago, Margaret had three adult children.

"I was close to Margaret's son, John," Larry says. "That was a close relationship. When I found out that John had a brain tumor, I decided I was going to take care of him, no matter what. Which I did until the time of his death. He lived for 12 years with the brain tumor. When he died, he was only 42."

"John did love Larry," Margaret says softly. "They loved each other."

Larry has been coming to the Amazing Place for the past six months. He started with two days a week, then three days and now four. Margaret



Karen Warren / Houston Chronicle

Margaret Kelminson drives her husband, Larry, 62 miles round trip, four days a week to the Amazing Place, a day center for adults.

drives 62 miles a day, round-trip, to make that happen.

"I really like it here," Larry says. "It's a matter of being around people that I can help as well as they help me."

He has met people with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and other problems.

"Sometimes we share our frustrations," Larry says. "And we'll play bridge or dominoes or do jigsaw puzzles. It seems like a second childhood."

"We also play all sorts of word games, which I wish I was better at," Larry says. "But I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't come here."

Margaret nods. When Larry had gobs of unscheduled time, he was bored and depressed. Since finding Amazing Place, he has a reason to get up, get dressed and get going. He's the best he can be.

Tracey Brown, executive director of Amazing Place, has heard versions of the Kelminsons' story many times.

"Our participants deserve to have wonderful, meaningful days," Brown says. "If they weren't here, they'd be in front of the TV, shutting down. People come back to life here."

The program, a rarity in Houston, got its start in 1996 at St. Luke's Methodist Church. Today, 14 churches help sponsor the nonprofit, which

Amazing Place

Amazing Place is a day center for adults with mild to moderate dementia.

Where: 3735 Drexel

Hours: 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Mondays-Fridays

Price: \$85 a day. Some scholarships are available.

For more information:

Call 713-552-0420 or visit amazingplacehouston.org.

serves about 80 participants ranging in age from 52 to 98.

The 25 staff members do their best to adjust to the musical tastes, historical references and personal interests of participants. They also offer support, information and understanding to family members.

Margaret recently participated in a class for caregivers. After it was over, they decided to meet for lunch every Thursday, on their own. There are tears but lots of laughter, too.

Margaret knows she's lost the brilliant man she married. But she's learned to love the sweetheart who is left.

claudia.feldman@chron.com
[@claudia_feldman](https://twitter.com/claudia_feldman)