

# SUPPORT GROUP

S. Parker Program Coordinator

February 2024

## Alzheimer's: A Real Love Story...


TRUTH: Alzheimer's is more than memory loss.

*It is common knowledge that Alzheimer's robs people of their ability to remember, but other truths about the disease remain unknown. This June, we are debunking harmful misconceptions that keep people from seeking a diagnosis and that reduce access to needed resources and support services. Uncover the truths and take action to help end this disease.*


Julia Balson, a slight, red-haired woman with a big smile, English accent and twinkling eyes, now knows that Alzheimer's disease affects 47 million people worldwide, a growing percentage of which are younger than the age of 65. She knows this ugly statistic because her beloved husband, Mike was diagnosed at age 58. "But isn't Alzheimer's an "older person's" disease," I ask her? I know this is what a lot of people think, so I put the question out there. She sighs heavily and tries to steady her vital, yet sad voice, "Unfortunately not," she finally says.



Mike and Julia Balson, along with thousands of others living with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease need the world to know that while theirs is a true and lasting love story, the reality of Alzheimer's isn't what's depicted in *The Notebook*. This disease doesn't just affect "old people" or the ability to remember at the end of one's life.



Married for more than 47 years, the Balsons are world travelers who have adapted to many global cultures during their life together. Like many couples, they've had children, challenges, joys and regrets. But one thing they never planned for, or ever thought about, was the possibility of Alzheimer's wreaking havoc on their family.



Mike was a strong, elite athlete who played professional soccer on the international circuit for more than a decade. He played on big teams in the U.K. and, at one point in his playing career, moved his family to South Africa to join a professional team there. The family had to eventually leave due to the overwhelming violence from the Apartheid riots in the area. So, Mike and Julia, no strangers to adversity, felt they could take on any problem that came their way. When Mike started showing signs of mental "fogginess," they both dismissed it (or denied it, as Julia tells me later) until the symptoms became so apparent one day when Mike filed his paycheck in one of Julia's cookbooks.

Despite such a difficult diagnosis, they both


maintain sunny dispositions and a strong desire to help others in similar situations. I recently had the privilege of speaking with Julia and Mike about their journey with Mike's diagnosis. Both of them were quick to offer advice about love, acceptance and living with Alzheimer's disease.

**Tell me a little bit about being married for 47 years. How has your partnership helped you face such a devastating disease?** **Julia:** Big factors for us are hard work, accepting the ups and downs, our faith in God, and our hope for advances in research. I think it's also important to love and respect each other and try to ignore each other's faults. No one is perfect! We look for ways to serve each other, and put each other's needs above our own. We definitely try to encourage each other; and we make it a point to laugh a lot. Now we hold the motto that unless a situation is life and death at the moment, we don't worry about it. **Mike:** Never give up; it's so easy to give up when you're faced with this kind of situation but you just can't.

**Julia, when did you first realize there was something "off" with Mike? How did you respond to this?**

**Julia:** Two things stand out. I found a paycheck in a cookbook. This was odd because Mike had always been so on-top of everything. Also, his driving abilities seemed to be declining. Honestly, I panicked at first and then I was definitely in denial. We ended up getting help through the Alzheimer's Association much later on; looking back, we should've reached out earlier, but I was scared and felt helpless and isolated.

**Mike, what about you? When did you first start noticing things? What did you notice?**



**Mike:** Things just weren't right, but I couldn't figure out exactly what wasn't right. And, I don't think I could accept it. I kept asking for directions to go to work), and it once took 20 minutes to do a bank deposit which was unusual because I always had a keen mind.

**What did you do when you noticed these behaviors? Can you take us through the time you began to notice problems, through getting the**

**diagnosis? Julia:** We didn't do anything at first. Eventually, we realized we needed to get help because Mike was struggling with day-to-day tasks. Initially, Mike was diagnosed with [Mild Cognitive Impairment](#) (MCI). We later got the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

**What has been the biggest change to your relationship since the diagnosis? What do you find to be the biggest issues you have to tackle on a daily basis? Julia:** I'd say our biggest change has been the role reversal, because I now have to take care of everything that Mike used to do, like all the driving, the financing and household stuff. I also have to help Mike choose clothes (he would sometimes dress awkwardly with clothes in the wrong order, or not seasonally appropriate), make sure he takes his medications properly and make sure he is bathing correctly. I know it upsets Mike that he isn't able to take care of me like he used to, but I am a pretty strong person and can take care of myself, so I don't mind that as much. **Mike:** The lack of driving ability is upsetting and it's a struggle to remember day-to-day

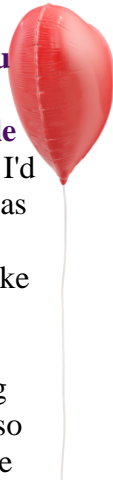
details. It is also upsetting that I can't take care of Julia like I used to. I have a problem remembering to eat – Julia will leave food prepared for me and I'll forget about it completely. Also, I'm trying to work on interacting with others.

**What helpful adjustments have you made that you can share with other couples living with**

**Alzheimer's? Julia:** A key thing for us is to write everything down – appointments, instructions, reminders, etc. Writing everything down really helps Mike remember to do things. When I was in denial, I didn't write everything down and that would get frustrating for both of us. Now we keep a calendar on hand with everything written down. I also joined an Alzheimer's Association support group; I've found that spending time with others on the same journey is a great comfort. I take Mike to the Memories in the Making art classes; it's something he'd never done before but really now enjoys. Another big thing was to accept the changes, to recognize that there is life after the diagnosis even though it's never going to be the same as it was.

**Working with the Alzheimer's Association, what do you regard to be the most beneficial support services they provide? What would you suggest to a couple who is just receiving a diagnosis? Mike:** Their monthly couples support group has been our biggest lifeline. When all this started, Julia was constantly stressed and ill from trying to handle everything on her own. **Julia:** There is a church service the first Wednesday of every month that has been very important and beneficial for us. To anyone who is just receiving a diagnosis – don't panic. There are so many resources offered by the Alzheimer's Association. They can get help by joining a support group; the staff are kind and wonderful, and no one should go through it alone. Also, remember that there is life after an Alzheimer's diagnosis – it's different, but there is life.

**If you could tell people one thing about life after diagnosis, what would it be? Julia:** You should appreciate every day that you have together as a blessing from God and take life one day at a time. No matter how much you love each other – or the



person you are caring for – you still get frustrated sometimes. Take time to sit and say "let's regroup" when you are frustrated or upset with each other. **Mike:** I would say to remember that caregivers must take time for themselves because life as a caregiver can get

challenging and overwhelming.

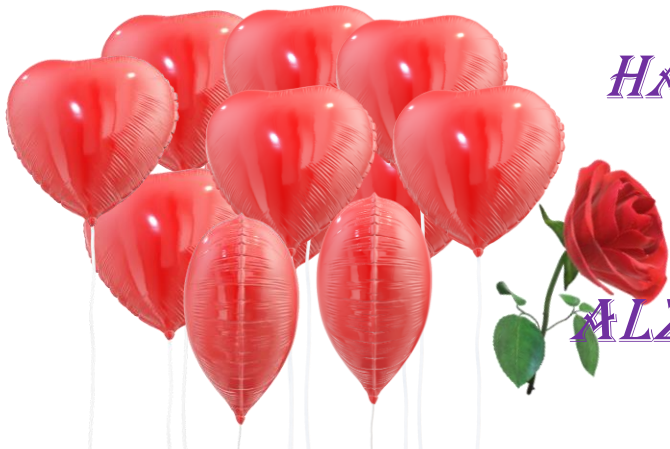
The Balsons hope that sharing their story will encourage others who may be dealing with similar struggles and fears. Though Alzheimer's is more than just losing memories, Mike and Julia

will be the first to remind you that it doesn't have to mean losing love.

Mike and Julia will be going purple this month in honor of [Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month](#). You can join them and learn more by visiting [alz.org/June](http://alz.org/June).

**Author: Abby Nehring**

*This post originally appeared on <https://alzcnfl.wordpress.com/>.*



*HAPPY VALINTINE DAY*

*FROM*

*ALZHEIMER'S SERVICES*



*WE*



*LOVE*

*YOU*



**Alzheimer's**  
SERVICES  
of the Capital Area

3772 North Blvd  
Baton Rouge, LA 70806  
Office: 225-334-7494  
Fax: 225-387-3664

[alzheimer's love languages - Search \(bing.com\)](#)  
[Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade: The...book by Gary Chapman \(thriftbooks.com\)](#)  
[alz.org/June](http://alz.org/June)  
*This article originally appeared on Oklahoman: Black History Month 2024: What we know about its origins.*

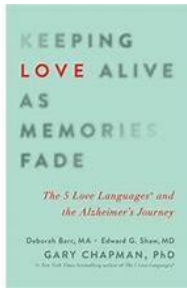




## *5 Love Languages for Those with Dementia*

- **Physical touch** such as holding hands and stroking hair.
- **Quality moments** This is so important and includes giving your loved one moment of “laughter, pleasure or your undivided attention.” ...
- **Gifts** I can’t say enough how important this is. ...
- **Words of affirmation** This is so important also. ...
- **Acts of kindness** ...

# Must Read...



[Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade: The... book by Gary Chapman](#)

[thriftbooks.com](http://thriftbooks.com)



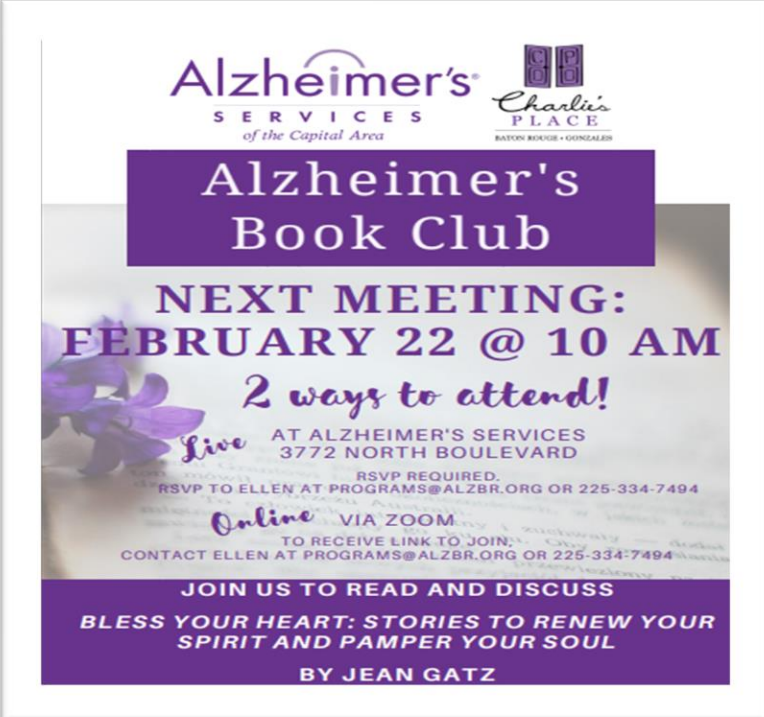
This article was adapted from  
*AFA's Alzheimer's TODAY*

[Read the full issue here »](#)

Digital and print subscriptions available

## ALZHEIMER'S SERVICES BOOK CLUB IS

## BACK



Alzheimer's SERVICES of the Capital Area

Charlie's PLACE  
BAYON ROUGE • GONZALES

**Alzheimer's Book Club**

**NEXT MEETING:  
FEBRUARY 22 @ 10 AM**

**2 ways to attend!**

*Live* AT ALZHEIMER'S SERVICES  
3772 NORTH BOULEVARD

RSVP REQUIRED.  
RSVP TO ELLEN AT PROGRAMS@ALZBR.ORG OR 225-334-7494

*Online* VIA ZOOM

TO RECEIVE LINK TO JOIN,  
CONTACT ELLEN AT PROGRAMS@ALZBR.ORG OR 225-334-7494

**JOIN US TO READ AND DISCUSS  
BLESS YOUR HEART: STORIES TO RENEW YOUR  
SPIRIT AND PAMPER YOUR SOUL  
BY JEAN GATZ**

[alzheimer's love languages - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

[Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade: The...book by Gary Chapman \(thriftbooks.com\)](#)

[alz.org/june](http://alz.org/june)

[This article originally appeared on Oklahoman: Black History Month 2024: What we know about its origins, celebrating](#)

# Upcoming Support Group Meetings



2.2.24

Denham Spring

12:00 pm  
Denham Spring / Walker Branch Library  
8101 US, HWY 190 Denham Springs, La. 70726.

2.6.24

Alzheimer's Services

via zoom 10am

2.9.24

In the Beginning

via zoom 2:30pm

2.8.24

Greenwell

11am

2.12.24

First Baptist

(Zachary) 12pm

2.12.24

Charlie's Place

(Gonzales) 1:30pm

2.13.24

Greenwell

6pm

2.19.24

Parkview Baptist

1pm

2.19.24

New Roads

4pm

2.20.24

Pm Support Group

7pm

## Facilitator Notes

Facilitator Barbara Zellmer & Jeanette Launey have agreed to Facilitate in absents of any Facilitator when needed (if available) Please give them enough notice.

Shyrell Parker, Program Coordinator  
Alzheimer's Services  
PH: (225)408-3101

## Facilitator Reminders:

2.7.24 Facilitator Training via zoom 12-1:30pm

2.8.24 Volunteers Luncheon 12 noon





Join Us for our Caregiver TLC

February 16<sup>th</sup> 2024

@ 11AM

To register online Contact Ellen at [programs@alzbr.org](mailto:programs@alzbr.org) or 225-334-7494 for further assistance.



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February 10th H.O.P.E.

March 13th A Man Best Friend

4/10

5/8

6/12

7/10

8/14

9/11

Save The Date  
April 17, 2024  
Education Conference





- February 2 is Groundhog Day—the day we find out whether winter will last six more weeks or call it quits early. How did this quirky tradition get started? Find out the meaning of Groundhog Day.
- February 10 is the Lunar New Year. Celebrated widely throughout East Asia, this holiday begins with the first new Moon after the Winter Solstice and is associated with the Chinese Zodiac.
- February 11 is the Super Bowl in 2024.
- February 12 is Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday. The 16th president of the United States was born in a one-room, 16x18-foot log cabin with a dirt floor.
- February 13 is Mardi Gras (aka “Fat Tuesday” or Shrove Tuesday), which is the final feasting day



before the Christian tradition of Lent begins on the following day, Ash Wednesday.

- February 14 is Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of Lent.
- February 14 is always Valentine’s Day. Heads up, lovebirds! Today, the holiday is celebrated with love, flowers, and chocolate, but how did this holiday get its start? Learn all about Valentine’s Day.
- February 15 is Susan B. Anthony’s Birthday. How much do you know about this women’s rights leader?
- February 15 is also National Flag of Canada Day!
- February 19 brings Presidents’ Day, a federal holiday also known as Washington’s Birthday that is celebrated on the third Monday in February. (George Washington’s actual birthday is February 22!)
- February 29 is Leap Day! Happening once every four years, we are given an extra day in February. Some think this day brings good luck. Learn more about leap years.

[alzheimer's love languages - Search \(bing.com\)](#)  
[Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade: The...book by Gary Chapman \(thriftbooks.com\)](#)  
[alz.org/june](#)  
*This article originally appeared on Oklahoman: [Black History Month 2024: What we know about its origins, celebrating](#)*





# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

*It's the annual celebration of Black History Month in America.*

Whether you're in school, teaching students, or just hoping to learn more, here's what you need to know about Black History Month and how to celebrate.

## *When is Black History Month 2024?*

Black History Month is celebrated each year in the United States during the month of February. The annual observance is also recognized during February in Canada, and in October in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

## *What is the 2024 Black History Month theme?*

Since its origins in the 1920s, Black History Month has been assigned a theme. For 2024, the theme is "[African Americans and the Arts](#)," according to the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

## *What president made Black History Month?*

President Gerald R. Ford was the first president to issue a message urging Americans to recognize what was then Black History Week in 1975. The next year, it was expanded to a month-long observation. In 1986, [Congress passed a law](#) designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month."





## Why is Black History Month in February?

Woodson chose the month of February because many Black Americans were already celebrating the February birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, on Feb. 12 and 14, respectively. Woodson hoped this would help the week succeed, but he also hoped it would reform the tradition from studying the accomplishments of two men to studying the accomplishments of an entire race.

### Why is Black History Month important?

Woodson started the annual observance to [expose school children to black history](#), and in the hope that Black Americans and others would be able to see all of the contributions [Blacks had made "to the advance of human civilization,"](#) according to the association. Woodson also

hoped that by bringing to light heroic black figures, whether they were inventors, entertainers or soldiers, and their influence on the creation of America, equality would follow soon after, according to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. But some question [whether Black History Month is still relevant](#) for today's world. "The great diversity within the black community needs the glue of the African American past to remind us

of not just how far we have traveled but lo, how far there is to go," said Lonnie Bunch, founding director of the museum, in a plea to continue seeing Black history as something deserving of year-round and annual recognition.

### How to celebrate Black History Month

- **Week 1, Feb. 1-4: Literature and Poetry** [Cultural Expressions | National Museum of African American History and Culture](#)
- **Week 2, Feb. 5-11: Performing Arts** [Taking the Stage | National Museum of African American History and Culture \(si.edu\)](#)
- **Week 3, Feb. 12-18: Visual Arts** [Reckoning | National Museum of African American History and Culture \(si.edu\)](#)
- **Week 4, Feb. 19-25: Music** [Musical Crossroads | National Museum of African American History and Culture\](#)
- **Week 5, Feb. 26-29: Digital Arts** [Afrofuturism | National Museum of African American History and Culture \(si.edu\)](#)

Black History Month is all about keeping Black history alive through education and celebration.

In keeping with this year's artistic theme, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has a [digital toolkit](#) to learn about "Black people who have used art as their platform for social justice."

Here's a [reading list for kids](#) to learn more about Black history during February and year-round.

#### Helpful websites

include [blackpast.org](#) and [Black History 101 Mobile Museum](#), and you can attend the [2024 Black History Month Festival virtually here](#)

# CARE FOR THE CAREGIVER



## Risk factors for caregiver stress include:

- Being female
- Having fewer years of formal education
- Living with the person you are caring for
- Social isolation
- Having depression
- Financial difficulties
- Higher number of hours spent caregiving
- Lack of coping skills and difficulty solving problems
- Lack of choice in being a caregiver

## Watch for these signs of caregiver stress:

- Feeling overwhelmed or constantly worried
- Feeling tired often
- Getting too much sleep or not enough sleep
- Gaining or losing weight
- Becoming easily irritated or angry
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling sad
- Having frequent headaches, bodily pain or other physical problems
- Abusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medications



## Ways to relieve caregiver stress:

- Accept help
- Focus on what you are able to provide
- Set realistic goals
- Get connected
- Join a support group
- Seek social support
- Set personal health goals



Source: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/caregiver-stress/art-20044784>



Send a friend a card!

