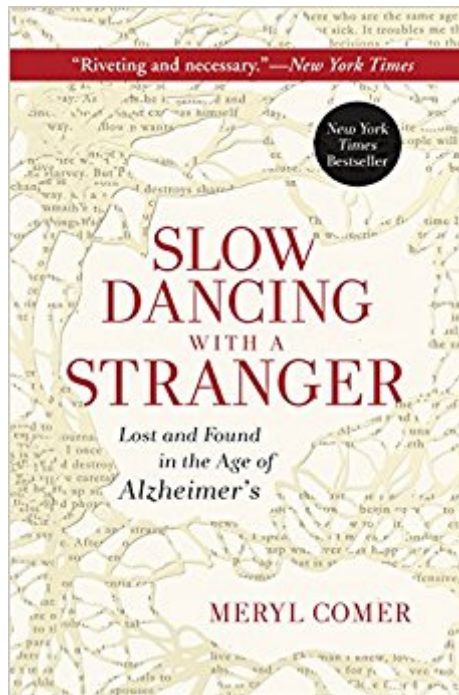


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# Slow Dancing With A Stranger: Lost And Found In The Age Of Alzheimer's



## Synopsis

Emmy-award winning broadcast journalist and leading Alzheimer's advocate Meryl Comer's *Slow Dancing With a Stranger* is a profoundly personal, unflinching account of her husband's battle with Alzheimer's disease that serves as a much-needed wake-up call to better understand and address a progressive and deadly affliction. When Meryl Comer's husband Harvey Gralnick was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease in 1996, she watched as the man who headed hematology and oncology research at the National Institutes of Health started to misplace important documents and forget clinical details that had once been cataloged encyclopedically in his mind. With harrowing honesty, she brings readers face to face with this devastating condition and its effects on its victims and those who care for them. Detailing the daily realities and overwhelming responsibilities of caregiving, Comer sheds intensive light on this national health crisis, using her personal experiences—the mistakes and the breakthroughs—to put a face to a misunderstood disease, while revealing the facts everyone needs to know. Pragmatic and relentless, Meryl has dedicated herself to fighting Alzheimer's and raising public awareness. "Nothing I do is really about me; it's all about making sure no one ends up like me," she writes. Deeply personal and illuminating, *Slow Dancing With a Stranger* offers insight and guidance for navigating Alzheimer's challenges. It is also an urgent call to action for intensive research and a warning that we must prepare for the future, instead of being controlled by a disease and a healthcare system unable to fight it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Riveting and necessary.” (New York Times) “An unflinching and intimate account...conveys a sense of passion and even frustration with a society that [Comer] believes has been slow to acknowledge the spread of Alzheimer’s disease or make adequate provisions to tend to its caregivers.” (Washington Post) Alzheimer’s disease is a slow killer of the health and spirit of the caregiver- the secondary victim. Comer’s pain is contained in elegant writing and channeled into a worthy purpose. This book is a call to action as haunting and urgent as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. (Gail Sheehy, author of *Passages in Caregiving* and *DARING: My Passages*) “In an unvarnished account of caring for a husband with dementia, Meryl Comer lays out the struggles and gallantry of a devoted and remarkable caregiver.” (Peter V. Rabins, M.D., MPH, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, author of *The 36-Hour Day*) “No silver linings, no phony homages to spiritual growth.” Meryl Comer writes the unvarnished reality of being exposed as a wife, daughter, caregiver, and potential Alzheimer’s victim herself. Admire her bravery and honesty and applaud her for taking away some of the loneliness of the long distance caregiver.” (Ellen Goodman, Pulitzer Prize winning, nationally syndicated columnist and author of *Turning Points to Value Judgments* and *Paper Trail: Common Sense in Uncommon Times*) “*Slow Dancing With a Stranger* is a remarkable and moving story that will change the way our generation thinks about how we deal with aging and caring for those we love. An amazing journey of caring, love, and resilience.” (Tom Rath, bestselling author of *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, *How Full Is Your Bucket?*, *Strengths Based Leadership*, and *Eat Move Sleep*) This story is real. Meryl and Harvey are real. I don’t know what it’s going to take to wake the public up to this emerging catastrophe, but I suspect that emotional honesty is a key ingredient. Thank you, Meryl Comer, for telling it exactly like it is. (David Shenk, author of *The Forgetting* and creator of the *Living with Alzheimer’s Film Project*) “Meryl Comer in *Slow Dancing with a Stranger* unveils Alzheimer’s Disease in a remarkable and vulnerable way. Her personal story provides knowledge, inspiration and hope to us all. Her heroism jumps out from the pages and hopefully will motivate generations to make a difference against this horrible disease.” (David B. Agus, M.D., Professor of Medicine and Engineering, University of Southern California and author of *The End of Illness* and *A Short Guide to a Long Life*.) “Comer received the Sargent and Eunice Shriver Profiles in Dignity Award in 2004, for her work as a dedicated advocate and

remarkable, decade-long caregiver. Fast forward a decade later. In *Slow Dancing With A Stranger*, Meryl shows what it truly means to stay the course. • (Mark K. Shriver, Senior Vice President, Save the Children and author of *A Good Man: Rediscovering My Father*, Sargent Shriver) • “Meryl is a trailblazer in every aspect of Alzheimer’s and it shines through in this wonderful new book chronicling her long and winding journey with this devastating disease. • (Dr. Rudy Tanzi, New York Times Bestselling author of *Super Brain* and Joseph P. and Rose F. Kennedy Professor of Neurology, Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School) • “With her trademark honesty and class, Meryl Comer shares her struggles and triumphs in dealing with Alzheimer’s, one of life’s most devastating diseases. In *Slow Dancing With A Stranger*, she charts paths that others can follow and recharges the public conversation about a pending global epidemic. • (Maria Freire, Ph.D., President and Executive Director, Foundation for the National Institutes of Health) • “Meryl Comer’s heart wrenching story will resonate with the millions of families who know the devastation of Alzheimer’s disease first hand. Her journey makes a powerful and compelling case for the urgent need to support Alzheimer’s prevention trials. • (Reisa Sperling, M.D., Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School and director of the A4 Study) • “Written with great insight and tenderness, *Slow Dancing With a Stranger* is both a cautionary tale and a call to arms as Meryl Comer helps lead the charge to beat this horrific disease before it beats us. • (Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D., CEO of Age Wave, author of *Bodymind*, *Age Wave*, *Age Power: How the 21st Century Will be Ruled by the New Old and A New Purpose*) • “Meryl Comer is one of my heroes. With unflinching courage, candor, and determination, she eloquently underscores the terrible toll that Alzheimer’s takes on patients and families and the urgent need for us to address this unacceptable problem once and for all. • (Eric M. Reiman, MD, Executive Director, Banner Alzheimer’s Institute and Professor of Psychiatry, University of Arizona) • “*Slow Dancing with a Stranger* is a poignant story of Alzheimer’s disease robbing memory, personality, life and dignity... Meryl’s book is a daily motivation for me personally to find a medicine against this terrible disease which is impacting so many lives. • (Professor Dr. Andrea Pfeifer, CEO of AC Immune) • “As a physician-scientist who has studied Alzheimer’s disease for more than 25 years, and a son with a 99-year-old mom with Alzheimer’s dementia, I recommend this book to anyone who is struggling with the tormenting issues of Alzheimer’s care. • (Michael W. Wiener, MD, Professor of Radiology, University of California, San Francisco) • “Meryl Comer’s account is a page-turner; it is wrenching, soul-baring and beautifully written. It should shock the nation into

providing more support—both for Alzheimer’s research and treatments, and for the legions of family caregivers who will bear ever-growing burdens in the future.” (Susan Dentzer, Senior Policy Adviser to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation)

“Meryl Comer’s *Slow Dancing with a Stranger* takes us into the tragedy that is Alzheimer’s disease and shows what is ahead for nearly half of us who live to age 85. We must respond to this emergency and Meryl courageously shows us why.” (Jeffrey Cummings, MD, SCD, Director and Kate Zhong, MD, Senior Director for Research, Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health)

“Although [Meryl Comer] would say she doesn’t deserve the recognition, she definitely deserves the ‘Rock Star of Humanity’ award for her caregiving and her humanitarian work.” (Florence Haseltine, Emerita Scientist NIH and Founder of the Society for Women’s Health Research)

“Turning tragedy into art and productive work is a hallmark of the great human spirit. Meryl has done this in a very emotional, engaging and thoughtful manner. The book should be read by all, but especially those with Alzheimer’s disease in their lives.” (Howard Fillit, M.D., Executive Director and Chief Science Officer, The Alzheimer’s Drug Discovery Foundation)

“An unsparing and moving account of the symptoms of early Alzheimer’s disease and at the same time a call to arms, a memoir and an accurate clinical description....The author’s account will help open readers’ minds to the need for early diagnosis of this devastating global illness.” (Maria Isaac, M.D., Ph.D., Psychiatrist, Senior Scientific Officer, European Medicines Agency)

“This is a great love story in an era when love has become an all too shallow emotional commodity. For better, for worse, in sickness and in health has never been made more powerful in its deepest sense.” (Larry Minnix, President and CEO of LeadingAge)

“Relates in very human terms the essence of palliative care. Not only did the author care for her husband with unconditional love, but optimized whatever physical and mental capacities were left to preserve his dignity. Readers will be inspired to want to help both victims and caregivers.” (Elizabeth J. McCormack, Chairman, Partnership for Palliative Care)

Meryl Comer offers an unvarnished account of her experience as her husband’s caretaker after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. Comer has become an advocate for the need for early diagnosis and treatment for Alzheimer’s. A poignant love story with a powerful message. (Kirkus Reviews)

“Poignant, unflinching.” [Comer’s] memoir is deeply personal and all the more powerful for it. (Miami Herald)

“I think there’s a mythology that Alzheimer’s is a passive fading away of an individual. Meryl’s book highlights in a personal way the real story, the impact of the disease not just

on the victim but on the entire family. (George Vradenburg, chairman and founding board member of UsAgainstAlzheimer's)

From New York Times bestselling author, Emmy award-winning broadcast journalist, and leading Alzheimer's advocate Meryl Comer comes a profoundly intimate account of her husband's battle with Alzheimer's disease, one of today's most pressing and least understood health epidemics. One hundred percent of the proceeds from *Slow Dancing with a Stranger* will support Alzheimer's research.

Coming from someone that works in the healthcare industry, particularly with older adults with Alzheimer's/dementia, this book was very eye-opening for me. I work in a community that offers memory care and having this insider look into what it's like to live with an Alzheimer's patient was insightful. Having to take care of an Alzheimer's patient 8 hours a day is different than living with one 24/7 and having that strong emotional connection of having that patient be your husband. I would be interested to read something similar from the perspective of someone that didn't have quite as many resources as this author did. Many people in similar situations are not as financially well-off and it would be interesting to see what people have to do when their finances are limited.

I can't say it enough...Meryl is amazing. It is my hope that this book gets on the best seller list so many people will be educated to the effects of Alzheimer's. There is an urgency to get this knowledge out as 1 in 7 of us will be inflicted with this horrible disease by 2050. A disease with no cure! Once you have it you are stuck with it. To watch someone you love slowly die, no words could explain. Wake up Washington! You have a chance to make a worldwide difference. It takes money for the research, please see this as important as cancer and HIV/AIDS. Meryl has unselfishly showed us her life, this book is recommended for everyone, as some time in life everyone will see the destruction of this disease.

Alzheimer's is almost always portrayed in books, on TV and in movies as a benign disease causing what might be called "extended senior moments". After she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's (at the age of 54), my wife and I did our best to inform the public that Alzheimer's is certainly not normal aging (and it isn't) but it can also strike much earlier in life than almost anyone would expect. Younger Onset Alzheimer's is cruel and a big thief. It steals not only the precious

memories of its victims but the hopes and dreams of both victim and caregiver. In her book, Comer not only describes the early stages but, unlike any book I've seen to date, pulls back the curtain that hides the horror of Alzheimer's late stages. This is the book I would have written if only I could write really, REALLY well. It is NOT "Hilarity for Charity" but a nuts and bolts look at a disease and its profound effect on the lives of its victims.... and those who love and care for them. The Introduction alone is well worth the price of the book! I find myself constantly nodding in agreement as Comer puts into words what to me is unexplainable. "Caregivers are not unlike victims who survive a hurricane and find ourselves sifting through the rubble to rescue faded, storm-drenched photos or sentimental objects. We piece together what's left of our past and struggle to put down building blocks for the future. I need to make some sense of my journey through this storm" And so it is.

I am amazed that a person in the very battle with her husband's and then her mother's diagnosis of Alzheimer's is able to write such an unblemished account of her years in the trenches with them as their caregiver. For it to cover such an extended period of time, touches deep within my soul. I have seen both friends and acquaintances live this life and have been so touched by their devotion to their spouse or parent. At the same time, I have had deep concerns for them personally as the caregivers. Right now, I would recommend this to others, like me, who are not in this battle in order to get a better perspective of what it really is like. To me one would have to be physically and emotionally strong to read this during their own chaos as a caregiver until more research is accomplished and headway is made in the treatment of Alzheimer's. How can a loved one read about this dismal journey that at present doesn't have a happy ending? God bless the countless individuals who are walking down this weary road with their loved ones.

Very difficult read - not because it's not well-written, because it is. Not because the information and story are not compelling, because they are, but because of what this woman went through to provide what she believed was the best care for her Alzheimers-ridden husband. My wife and I are in the midst of our own challenges, with her 83-yr-old mother living with us, about 5 years into her Alzheimers diagnosis. It's incredibly hard, but our experience makes us look like pikers compared to this author. Sad story, but ultimately inspiring to see the selfless giving to make her husbands last years safe and as comfortable as possible.

While I was not dealing with Alzheimers, I was the principal caregiver for my wife as she became

more and more restricted by the multiple surgeries and disease processes that you plagued her during the last 25 years of her life. While alert until the last four days of her life, she suffered greatly with depression related to her increasing inability to live a normal active life. I eventually retired from my medical practice to be able to spend more time with her as she was living on borrowed time that our greacious God granted her and me as her husband. It was only in the last 8 months that I gave her 24/7 care with the help of three ladies who spared me from time to time to unwind. Ms Comer presents a very transparent account of caring for a loved one with a debilitating illness. This book is a must read for those who are about to (or who are) walking this lonely road of longterm care for a loved one. This book is not meant to scare off a family member of a loved one who needs 24/7 care but to let them know that they are not alone. Others have traveled this road before them. I highly recommend this book. While Ms Comer's story may be different than yours, the elements are similar or may be the same.

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30 Day Whole Food Slow Cooker Challenge: Whole Food Recipes For Your Slow Cooker – Quick And Easy Chef Approved Whole Food Recipes For Weight Loss (Slow Cooker Cookbook)  
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