

Published May 8th, 2013

Moraga Man Promotes Alzheimer's Awareness

By Cathy Dausman



From left, Zack Smith and musician Glen Campbell at the Alzheimer's Association Advocacy Forum in Washington, D.C. last month. Photo provided

Zachary Smith of Moraga wasn't yet born when the first Alzheimer's advocacy forum was held, but he knows the intense toll this disease can take. Five years ago Smith's own grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's; she is now in the late stages of this disease.

"We discovered she was incorrectly writing checks and [neglecting] basic personal hygiene," Smith said.

He watched as she forgot her family's names and spoke with imaginary "friends" in her bedroom mirrors. "My grandfather was in such denial and knew nothing about the disease," he said.

Smith, now a government and public policy student at University of Redlands, is educating himself about the disease. "Alzheimer's disease is the very reason I chose to study [government and public policy]," he said. "I do my best to promote awareness of the Alzheimer's crisis both at home and in college." In April Smith was one of 40 young advocates meeting in Washington, D.C. as part of the Alzheimer's Association Advocacy Forum.

Special guests included musician Glen Campbell, who announced he had Alzheimer's in 2011. Smith's group met with staff from the offices of Congress members George Miller, Jerry McNerney, and Ami Bera. Smith plans to help

the Alzheimer's Association develop a youth advocacy group for local chapters this summer. He also plans to attend future forums "every year I am able."

"If there is one good thing that comes from my journey with Alzheimer's disease it would be that it caused me to realize what my passion was and what I wanted to do with my life," he said.

Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's:

1. Memory loss disruptive to daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems.
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with time or place
5. Trouble understanding visual/spatial images
6. New problems with words
7. Misplacing items and an inability to retrace
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work and social activities
10. Changes in mood or personality

Source: Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org)

Reach the reporter at: cathy.d@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA