

When my dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it felt very important to me that he be surrounded by images of his family. I wanted him to be able to see the faces of the people who love him, even though he would be forgetting them. I also knew that reading would become harder as his disease progresses, so I wanted to keep things simple. I organized "Grandpa Don's Memories" like this:

1. I gave each of my sisters (none of them scrapbook) some 9x9 cardstock, photo tape, and letter stickers.
2. I explained the concept: one 5x7 photo on each page, a title, and a little bit of journaling printed in a clean and simple font.
3. Each layout should include the names of all the people in the photos, a date, and the name of the place or the event the picture came from. The rest of the journaling was up to them.

Initially, we assembled about 20 layouts. The photos ranged from older ones (15-18 years old) to one taken a week before we started. I put the album together with all of the layouts and then added as many empty sheet protectors as I could. (I used a 9x9 album from Close to My Heart.)

Now, my sisters and I have an ongoing goal of adding layouts to the album. Since the design is so simple, it is really quick to throw together a layout or too. Sometimes Dad's granddaughters add layouts, too, so it really is a family affair.

My dad is now living in a nursing home. He doesn't talk much, and has lost the ability to read. But we keep his Memories album there, with him, so he can still look at it if he wants. When we go to visit, I make sure to look through the photos with him and read the journaling out loud. I think he enjoys it, even if he can't form the words to tell me so anymore. What I didn't expect is how the album comforts *me*. Helping a person with Alzheimer's is a certain brand of difficult; it is so hard to sit in his room having a one-way conversation. The album gives us something to "talk" about, something to do. But, even more important, it reminds me of the importance of taking pictures and writing things down. That I didn't ask my dad enough details about his life before he got sick is one of my life's biggest regrets. This disease has taught me that memories *are* lost unless you share them with someone else. I'm not sure, of course, that Dad understands what I'm saying when we flip through the album. But that's OK—I cannot *know* but I *believe* some part of him hears me. Every once in awhile he'll manage to lift his hand to mine, an awkward and fleeting gesture, but it is enough. —AMY SORENSEN

