

Wife of Alzheimer's patient: My husband no longer recognises me

By YVONNE BAROOLAL

MARTIN, once a hardworking, active plumber and church member, no longer recognises his wife, Esther, with whom he has six children, and sometimes calls her "Mummy".

"For the most part he doesn't recognise or remember anyone now."

"There's no conversation. Sometimes he smiles."

"Sometimes when I say, 'you know I love you' he responds with a smile or says it back."

Esther shared her touching story with *Basins Master of People of Trinidad & Tobago* which is published by the Alzheimer's Association of T&T's (ASTT) website.

She said the changes in her husband began when he was 61.

"He was a plumber, a hard-working and orderly man."

Esther said Martin started forgetting and began accusing people of stealing his things, making harsh and unjust accusations.

"He became aggressive. It was so unlike him."

"We have six children ranging in ages from 22 to 45 and 13 grandchildren."

"We didn't understand what was happening."

Esther found out only later that her beloved husband was suffering from Alzheimer's, a disease of the brain manifested in a form of dementia.

She said she never gave up on Martin, remains totally dedicated to him and asks God for strength when she feels she cannot carry on.

A member of the ASTT, she said, "You can't give up on the person. You just have to adjust."

"It took a lot of adjusting, patience and strength to get to where we are now."

Esther said all the mirrors in the house are covered because Martin gets agitated when he sees his reflection.

"Sometimes when I am tired, I ask God for strength to carry on. I can't leave him alone or take my eyes off him for long."

"It's almost like having a baby again. I do everything for him now, bathe him, feed him, cut his hair, shave him."

She recalled "terrifying" moments when Martin walked away from her.

"He walked away twice, once out of the house towards the bus route and the second time when he went to Port of Spain."

"These moments were terrifying. I worry about



ESTHER and her husband, MARTIN. Photo courtesy People of Trinidad & Tobago.

dying before him."

There are no statistics on the number of people with Alzheimer's in T&T, but Sarwan Jack, ASTT administrative officer, said the disease is quite "prevalent" in this country.

"The Health Ministry is now trying to do surveys to see how many citizens are affected."

Not even the ASTT could provide a figure since members include supporters and people whose relatives have passed on, Jack said.

But she added, "Alzheimer's is becoming more prevalent in T&T."

"I get a lot of calls from people who say their relatives are forgetting things."

Jack said Alzheimer's still remains largely a mystery to scientists who are yet to determine its specific causes.

"It's a physiological thing that happens in a part of the brain related to memory when plaques and tangles are formed around cells."

September is World Alzheimer's Month and the ASTT joins an international campaign to raise awareness and challenge domestic stigma.

The theme this year is, "Remember Me".