

My Mom's Alzheimer's Inspired Me to Make a Difference: Here's How



Alice's Embrace has brought comfort and joy to many. It all began in 2005, when, my mom, Alice Figueira, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Not long after the diagnosis, I knit her a soft green blanket that she could use in her assisted living apartment. Little did I know that that same blanket would provide countless hours of comfort to Mom. Sadly, it was only seven months before she had to move into the memory care side of the facility. I often found the blanket draped over her lap while she was relaxing in her rocking chair. Mom would intertwine her fingers through the stitches, and that's when I realized it had a soothing effect on her. In a way, it became her security blanket.

As Mom progressed further into the disease, I knew that there would come a time to thank all of her caregivers at The Meadows – the place she called home for the last five years of her life. In 2010, Vera Bradley came out with a handbag called "Alice." I knew that this would be the perfect gift for the caregivers when the time came. Sadly, on May 29, 2011 Mom left her earthly journey. Each of the caregivers meant so much to Mom, and they were honored to receive their special Alice purse as a remembrance.



In the spring of 2012, I attended a Vera Bradley event in Las Vegas called Colorful Day. The highlight of that day was meeting Barbara Bradley Baekgaard. Barbara is co-founder of Vera Bradley, named after her mother. I had the opportunity to tell this kind woman all about my mom Alice, and I told her about how her Alice handbag meant so much to me. She listened – her focus completely on our conversation. Barbara then shared with me that her dear husband, Peer, passed away from Alzheimer’s disease in 2007. After chatting with Barbara for a bit, I found out that she was helping open a day care center for people with Alzheimer’s disease.

When I got home after the Colorful Day event, I remember lying awake in bed thinking, “How can I help? I live in California... she lives in Indiana!” Then it hit me... that blanket that I made for Mom provided her with such comfort, I wanted to make items for Birchwood, the daycare facility in Indiana. I had to take action quickly if I was going to do what I had already set my mind to since I knew they were planning to open in February of 2013.

After some corresponding with Barbara, she was in agreement – the knitted items would be a wonderful idea for the day care participants. I knit every free moment I had.....A LOT of knitting!! I made three prayer shawls, three lap blankets, and two full-sized blankets in about a seven-month period. Once Birchwood was open, I sent the items. Along with a heartfelt “Thank You” from Barbara, I received a picture of one of their day care attendees enjoying the warmth of one of the lap blankets that I knit. I honestly believe seeing that sweet woman with one of the lap blankets draped over her made me realize that I didn’t want this to end. I felt a pull to comfort many more people going through the daily struggles of Alzheimer’s disease. I knew how much comfort Mom received from that green blanket I knit for her, so I thought why not try to seek out the help of others to make this happen for the many, many people who suffer with the disease. This began the whole process of creating a website, choosing stitch patterns that would become Alice’s Embrace patterns, and building everything up to what we have today. Each of our 29 patterns is named after a story about Mom. From *Birds on a Wire* or *Cashews* to *Faith* or *Wonderland* – all these and many more special Alice stories can be found on our website. The patterns are easy to follow and work up quickly, and their result is absolutely beautiful.

We have hundreds of people who are knitting and crocheting for us. These kind and giving people feel that they are able to help in an area where they may have previously felt helpless. The whole concept behind Alice’s Embrace is comforting the recipient, but the item’s creator also receives joy knowing that their handmade gift is going to someone so deserving.



The delivery of our items is something else! Our team (usually 3 of us) arranges to provide items for an entire memory care facility. If the facility has 20 residents, we bring 40 items. We really want each resident to be able to choose their very own special gift. Often when we arrive, the residents are quiet and a bit apprehensive about the strangers coming into their home. However, give it 20 minutes and the whole mood changes. We have so many colors – bright, warm and vibrant; the whole room lights up when we put all of the items on the table. Sometime the recipients come up to the table, and other times we go to them and find out their favorite color. Once they choose their gift, we write their name on the Alice’s Embrace label. This helps them to know it is theirs to keep. Prayer shawls draped over their shoulders or lap blankets warming their laps bring out the smiles in everyone involved. The comfort and calmness is almost instantaneous. It truly is magical.

We are always seeking individuals to create our lap blankets and prayer shawls. Please visit our Facebook page where you will see many happy recipients and plenty of stories about our deliveries. Our website covers all of the details of how to help, and you will find all of the free patterns along with their accompanying stories, as well. If you would like to provide comfort and warmth to someone suffering with Alzheimer’s disease, please consider becoming one of our many generous donors.

About the Author



Diane Lewis has long had an interest in handcrafting items – having learned to sew and knit as a child and eventually earning a Bachelor’s degree in Home Economics with a concentration on Clothing and Textiles at California State University, Sacramento. Diane has also always focused on the needs and happiness of others. Whether it was volunteering at her son Scott’s school when he was young or hosting a monthly family dinner night, often with dozens of friends and family in attendance, she has been concerned about the comfort of those around her. When her mom and best friend Alice Figueira was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, Diane’s main goal was to make sure that her mom felt loved and cared for. A few years after Alice passed away; Diane combined her two lifelong passions and founded Alice’s Embrace to help bring comfort to those going through the daily struggles of Alzheimer’s. With the help of volunteers from around the world, handmade knit and crocheted items are gifted to those struggling with the disease, to embrace them in warmth and well-being. To see some of these gifts, along with a few happy recipients, please take a look at one of the Alice’s Embrace newsletters or their Facebook page.