

Letting Go

By Amy Ditchburn

Frontotemporal dementia (FTD); I hate those words. Frontotemporal dementia is when the frontal lobe of one's brain starts to die. To me Frontotemporal dementia means losing my pop, Bob Eames. I know most people think "he is still with you, your life is fine" but the truth is this is harder than ever losing someone you love in flesh and blood. My pop had officially 'lost his mind' as his frontal lobe started to die in 2005. When Pop behaviour changed he got depression which took a lot out of him.

We first noticed something was wrong when Pop started to forget things, our first hint was when he couldn't put the caravan on the car after many years of camping and caravanning in Australia and continuous trips down from Cobram to Geelong to see my family. Pop never use to say dirty things and it started slowly and has only gotten dirtier since. He had to check the doors not once but three times before going to bed and he would wake at strange hours in the night and walk around making noise or watching the television, eventually falling asleep in 'his' chair. Pop started driving erratically and he would go around the roundabout the wrong way and was putting people's lives at risk besides his own. Pop lost his license in 2007 which was for the better but then he kept trying to drive and it was in everyone's best interests to be put into respite care in 2008. Respite care is short-term or temporary care of a few hours or weeks of the sick or disabled to provide relief, or respite, to the regular caregiver who is usually a family member. This was hard for my Nan, Alida who is my Pop's second wife because she thought she could manage him but he was taking over her life, she couldn't go out with friends without worrying about him or walking around the block without him getting himself into mischief.

My mum, step dad, brother and myself went up and met Nan and Pop at Shepparton for a catch up, some shopping and lunch and one of us would always have to be with Poppy. My brother was a little scared of Poppy back then because he didn't understand what was wrong with him but I was well aware and when mum and Nan needed a break I was left to look after him as we lagged behind my brother and step dad. I was never scared of him, I think it was just embarrassing when he wanted to pick up someone else's baby or talk baby talk to them. My Pop use to be a butcher so we would always look at the butchers and Pop would say that's pricey and everyone would look at us and all I could do was move him on and apologise. I think that was the time that I had apologised to the most number of strangers on one day cause of Pop.

In September 2011 we put him in a nursing home with his new and improved attitude of 'I can do what I like'. This was such a "fun" time for our family. With Nan constantly visiting Pop who barely remembers her but can remember the door code to get out of the nursing home. There is this lady in the nursing home with Poppy who we call his 'girlfriend' and they had made a plan to leave the nursing home together so on one of the annual bus trips Pop went to buy them both two plane tickets to Fraser Island. Thankfully the bus driver stopped Pop and had to report it to the nursing home. The bus driver then had to give up his time to 'babysit' my Pop so he wouldn't do anything dangerous, stupid or both.

Now Pop is like a 10 year old kid stilling trying to escape the place he hates the most and he believes it's all nanny's fault but it's no one's fault. Pop doesn't understand this is for the best. He may still be breathing but he's mind is gone. He has even forgotten my name. To him my brother and I are just 'two cheeky monkeys,' even though I am 15 years old. Letting go is hard and it's not possible to let anyone go that is loved by oneself. I love my Pop. I will never let him go.