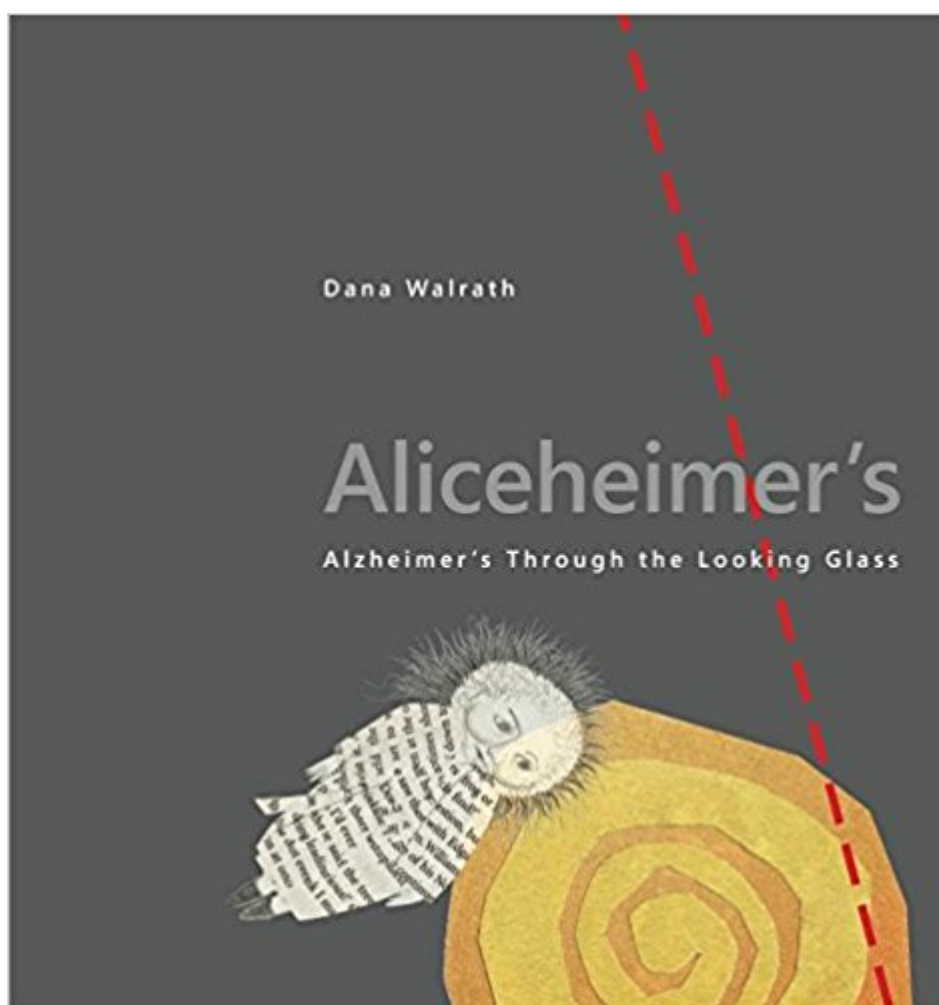


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# Aliceheimer's Alzheimer's Through The Looking Glass (Graphic Medicine)



## Synopsis

“Alice was always beautiful” Armenian immigrant beautiful, with thick, curly black hair, olive skin, and big dark eyes, writes Dana Walrath. Alice also has Alzheimer’s, and while she can remember all the songs from *The Music Man*, she can no longer attend to the basics of caring for herself. Alice moves to live with her daughter, Dana, in Vermont, and the story begins. *Aliceheimer* is a series of illustrated vignettes, daily glimpses into their world with Alzheimer’s. Walrath’s time with her mother was marked by humor and clarity: “With a community of help that included pirates, good neighbors, a cast of characters from space-time travel, and my dead father hovering in the branches of the maple trees that surround our Vermont farmhouse, *Aliceheimer* let us write our own story daily—a story that, in turn, helps rewrite the dominant medical narrative of aging.” In drawing Alice, Walrath literally enrobes her with cut-up pages from Alice’s *Adventures in Wonderland*. She weaves elements from Lewis Carroll’s classic throughout her text, using evocative phrases from the novel to introduce the vignettes, such as “Disappearing Alice,” “Missing Pieces,” “Falling Slowly,” “Curiouser and Curiouser,” and “A Mad Tea Party.” Walrath writes that creating this book allowed her not only to process her grief over her mother’s dementia, but also “to remember the magic laughter of that time.”

Graphic medicine, she writes, “lets us better understand those who are hurting, feel their stories, and redraw and renegotiate those social boundaries. Most of all, it gives us a way to heal and to fly over the world as Alice does.” In the end, *Aliceheimer* is indeed strangely and utterly uplifting.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A deeply moving, informative, and funny memoir by a woman watching her mother’s descent into Alzheimer’s disease. The collaged drawings are a perfect counterpoint to the writing.” —Roz Chast, author of *Can We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*

“Dana Walrath’s images evoke Alice in a way that text alone cannot, creating a symbiotic relationship between text and image in this work. Walrath’s style is gentle and specific, naive and yet quite sophisticated about the past and the present.” —MK Czerwiec, coauthor of *Graphic Medicine Manifesto*

“Dana Walrath’s approach to memoir is unique in that she twists together multiple forms—the personal essay, drawings, collage. This approach, which offers the equivalent of memory snapshots presented from different angles, suggests value in appreciating the moment over the supposed stability of the traditional narrative trajectory of beginning, middle, end. *Aliceheimer* echoes the spots of memory that are part of the Alzheimer’s experience and presents end-of-life care in an original and ultimately comforting way.” —Mita Mahato, University of Puget Sound

“Walrath offers an anthropological method for dealing with the disease. Observing Alice as if she belongs to an unfamiliar culture, Walrath relates to her in ways that respect her alternate reality. Her stories are mostly lighthearted; her drawings are whimsical, magical, surreal.” —LaVonne Neff, *The Christian Century*

“[*Aliceheimer*] offers a brand-new looking glass into Alzheimer’s—one that, like Carroll’s mirror, displays a parallel world rather than our own. Walrath dared to follow Alice down the rabbit hole of the disease and emerged with a courageous depiction of a fascinating world below.” —Nancy Stearns Bercaw, *Seven Days*

“I am grateful for creators like Walrath . . . who make art from experiences like those my patients face. Their works remind us that, even during the throes of illness or grief, when the air is filled with questions, fear, and sadness, there are slivers of time and space where room can be made for wonder.” —Lynda Montgomery, *Los Angeles Review of Books*

“Thoughtful, exploratory, and deeply loving. . . . A book about living with Alzheimer’s that gives voice to both caretaker and, insofar as is possible, patient. In this

dialogue, illustration helps Alice's actual words subvert empathic inaccuracy, and challenge our fears. •Emily Wojcik, Massachusetts Review "Sometimes funny, sometimes heart-breaking, each comic weaves in a different facet of [Dana and Alice] shared experience: hallucinations, repetition, memory, loss, magic, and sometimes even time travel. •Meredith Rizzo, NPR Shots "Original in its collage approach, and buoyant in its message of how to bring back the humanity of a person with dementia. . . . Aliceheimer is a story about the possibility to find quality of life in dementia caregiving; the possibility to see Alzheimer's disease as creating a new self, a self that can be lived with and written about up to the moment when we feel threatened in our own self. •Martina Zimmermann, Medical Humanities

Dana Walrath •an anthropologist, artist, and writer •is on the faculty of the University of Vermont College of Medicine and the author of Like Water on Stone. Learn more about her work at [danawalrath.com](http://danawalrath.com).

As an artist, art therapist, and daughter of a mother with Alzheimers, I was thrilled, encouraged and comforted by this book. Walrath's format and excerpts of caring for her mother are creative and sensitively wrought. The illustrations are lively, humorous and provocative. The total work is framed as a journey of moments shared and transformed - both past and present. Her comments and direct responses are heartfelt and helpful. She has mastered the art of replies as caregiver that are direct, brief, honest - yet therapeutic. Not once did I have the sense that she was unaware of the person beneath the layers of the disease. The journey is difficult, yet brought back repeatedly as moments in time possible to simplify and reassure based on sensitivity, respect. Like the illustrations, these moments are open ended yet grounded. While informative, Aliceheimer's does not read like an instruction manual. It reads more like a love story, and a second chance at making a stronger connection. It reminds me that authenticity of the moment can be possible in this challenging journey. Many times I was surprised how Walrath could hit on the core of an incident, based on shared memories of her mother as well as present situation.

Aliceheimer's is Dana Walrath's loving gift to her mother who, having Alzheimers disease, could "read" the pictures but not words. The book offered me a new view of Alzheimer's--that it can be seen as another way of being, similar to belonging to another culture. Dana Walrath is both a clear writer and accomplished artist, and both inform the book. Dana's portrait of her mother is

sympathetic without being maudlin, and it offers important insights. For example, that most Alzheimers sufferers have their social faculties intact. If you become tense around them, they will become tense too. Although the book is not a "how to" work at all, as a former caregiver, I wish this book had been available years ago when I cared for my grandmother. Given these insights, I would have done it better.

Just finished this book today. A stunningly beautiful read in both word and image. Everyone caring for someone with Alzheimer's will find wisdom and comfort in these pages. So glad my husband her Dana Walrath on VPR and told me about this.

this is a lovely book to help contemplate living in partnership with someone with dementia. It is very positive in offering a paradigm for living with dementia and understanding how to be truly "with" the loved one who has dementia. I feel this book will be very helpful in educating and changing attitudes about dementia. I have several loved ones with dementia and have worked as volunteer with dementia patients.

Happy

A fascinating way to look at Alzheimer's disease. Artistic, insightful, poignant!

RE FRAMING DEMENTIA Medical anthropologist Positive approach to care giving is visually portrayed in an excellent manner and the idea differs from many other illness narratives where care giving is associated with burden .Dana Walrath has defined a new concept of re framing Dementia,she calls it is as opportunity to reciprocate love and affection.I recommend the book for all elders and family members to understand the 'unfinished business'

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