

## Through her Lens

With her book, "I Still Do: Loving and Living With Alzheimer's" recently released, photographer, Judith Fox, opens up about the two loves in her life: her husband and photography.

Judith, tell our A-LIST readers a bit about yourself. The artist, the wife, the entrepreneur.

I don't think I can separate the various aspects of myself, they all work together and they're all part of who I am. From childhood, I've always been an artist and an entrepreneur. I didn't become a wife, though, until I was 23—but that was 45 years ago, so that's also part of who I am.

Three years into your marriage with Dr. Edmund Ackell, he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. How has your life changed since then?

After leaving the world of denial, I entered the world of Alzheimer's—which is a world far too many of us will have to inhabit. There's nothing else that I know that's like this strange and challenging disease; it has put me in mind, so many times, of Alice's surreal and difficult Wonderland. As the science stands now, Alzheimer's is 100% progressive and terminal; it changes from second to second. We can't control it and we can't impose our logic upon it. It hurts everyone close to it. Having said that, Ed and I have continued loving and living. While Ed's world has grown narrower, mine has expanded. In our particular case, our partnership has continued—I wouldn't have created my book and my photography without Ed and I wouldn't have felt free to be candid and public about our experiences without Ed's "okay", when he was still able to give it. It has been a gift of love from him to me and me to him.

Did your camera become a port to release your emotions?

I've always seen more clearly and sharply through my camera lens. It brings me closer to my subject and helps me focus (forgive the pun). It's hard to explain to someone who hasn't experienced the feeling, but photographing someone or something is, for me, an act of love. In most cases, the connection lasts as long as the making of the photograph—although it can be relived when I view the image. In Ed's case, my photographing him has been an extension of my love for him and an exploration of the shared experience of Alzheimer's disease.

Your book, "I Still Do: Loving and Living With Alzheimer's" will be released on November 2nd. Guide us through its pages as to what we will find.

Actually, and surprisingly, the book is available a month before the scheduled release date. Amazon has been shipping it and booksellers are now carrying "I Still Do". I'll admit to finding this more thrilling than I thought it would be. My publisher, powerHouse Books, is known for producing beautifully made and designed photography and art books, and I'm happy to say that's what they've done with my book.

"I Still Do" is a book of my photographs and text that operate on multiple levels (Justice Sandra Day O'Connor graciously referred to my text as "poetry".) It is intended to be, on every page, a book of rich and powerful photography and writing. It's also a celebration of a gentle, smart and beautiful man as he tries to fight a monstrous disease with dignity, humor and grace, knowing the disease will win; it's a tribute to the women and men who care for family members with Alzheimer's— but speaks to anyone who cares for a loved one with a difficult and challenging disorder. It's meant to draw additional attention to, and increase the understanding of, an illness that will impact tens of millions of individuals, as well as reduce the stigma and shame that still surrounds A.D.; and it's an acknowledgment of the power of art to help us heal—to deepen the understanding of the artist and the viewer, and to further connect us as empathetic human beings.

My photographing of Ed, my writing of the text, my expansion of this project have all stemmed from my love for Ed—and

from my private and public expression of that love in the way I know best. So, at its core, "I Still Do" is a love story.

What about the main protagonist of your book. Tell us about your husband.

My husband is an amazing and special human being; he and I were married 14 years ago when I was widowed and he was divorced.

Ed is very bright and has always used both sides of his brain to great success. He's been a scholar, athlete and artist; but, most important to me, he's a deeply kind, caring, generous and modest person with no pretenses.

Edmund was a pilot (he flew a single-seat carrier-based fighter, the Corsair, in World War II. He was the youngest kid in his squadron, and he loved flying but hates war.) He turned down an art scholarship to Yale because he needed the additional money he received from an athletic and academic scholarship to Holy Cross (while there he ended up playing baseball on the Yankee's farm team and played basketball with the legendary Bob Cousy). Ed was a scratch golfer and he had 4 holes-in-one (and won two cars playing tournament golf.) His career was in medicine and University administration. He was a surgeon who was drawn early and serendipitously in his career into administration, where he became the VP for Health Affairs at the University of Florida and then USC. From there, he became President of Virginia Commonwealth University and the Medical College of Virginia (VCU). He chaired committees for the NIH and also consulted on health care with governments around the world. When Ed retired, he was named President Emeritus of VCU and a building on campus has since been named in his honor.

What inspired you to capture these intimate moments and publish them for the world to cherish?

The simple story is that I photographed Ed as a way of celebrating him and keeping him close as he was leaving me. And that's true, and it's at the core of the book. The entire story is longer and more complex and includes my interest, as a photographer, in showing that desire and physical beauty don't end at 40, and that men are also worthy artistic muses. As the project evolved, I also realized the importance of exploring issues of loving, partnership, commitment, aging, mortality, humor, and hope.

Did the artist and the wife merge as one when creating this book? Perhaps it's the combination of both which makes this book so captivating?

I think I'd say that the lover and artist and writer merged as one; "wife" is a title that I'm happy with, but it's situational and legal.

The first part of the book's title drew me in, "I Still Do..." Dealing with your husband's illness, how do you cope with it on a daily basis?

My photography and my writing are of enormous help to me, as is being actively involved in Ed's care. The fact that Ed and I have a deep love also helps. I know, and greatly admire, people who are wonderful and committed caregivers who have more complicated feelings and a more difficult history with their spouse, but that's not our situation. Those of my friends who are also caregivers offer a unique support and understanding that I value highly. And I have options. So, all and all, I'm extremely fortunate.

Alzheimer's affects more than 5 million Americans and there currently isn't a cure. What is being done to increase awareness?

Awareness is just starting to be raised about this disease; until very recently, it was in the closet. But the conversation is just beginning. It's been helped by the media—the HBO/Alzheimer's Association's project on Alzheimer's was very good. Three-dimensional characters with Alzheimer's are starting to show up in film, on television and in books, and that's very important. Families are starting to talk about the disease and individuals are starting to admit to it. I hope *I Still Do* will contribute to the discussion and help increase understanding—the combination of a personal, but universal, story told with photographs and text is having a powerful impact.

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Judith Fox has always had two careers: one as an artist and one as an entrepreneur. After working as a photographer, writer, and business executive in New York, Fox started a service company in Virginia that expanded in size and reputation and was eventually purchased by a New York Stock Exchange firm. After selling her company, she devoted herself full-time to photography. Widely exhibited on both coasts of the United States, Fox's photography is also in many private and public collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego, and the Harry Ransom Center in Austin. Fox has been featured in dozens of newspaper and magazine articles and interviewed on numerous television and radio shows. Her NPR program, *On the Job*, ran in Virginia and Washington, D.C. She lives and works in California.