Meet Tim. He’s 52 years old and until last year was an active, happy and healthy guy with so much going for him. Tim worked for ABC, and then ABC Disney, for 28 years. He played tennis, was active in track and field and bowling and attended Weight Watchers every week. All that changed when Tim was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease with additional symptoms of Parkinson’s last year. The disease has progressed extremely fast. Today, in hospice, Tim is bed bound and doesn’t speak. He has difficulty swallowing and, at times, doesn’t recognize his mother or sister.

Tim’s story is different from the ones we usually hear about adults with early onset Alzheimer’s because Tim has Down Syndrome.

Adults with Down Syndrome are susceptible to the same conditions and diseases that any non-intellectually disabled aging adult would experience, but because this genetic disorder is characterized by an extra copy of chromosome 21, the chromosome that carries the amyloid precursor protein (APP) gene, too much of which causes problems with how brain cells function, the risk of developing Alzheimer’s is increased.

People with Down Syndrome are living longer than ever before due, in part, to improved health care, and estimates suggest that 50 percent or more of people with Down Syndrome will develop dementia due to Alzheimer’s disease as they age.

Tim’s mother, Mary, had no idea of Tim’s risk to develop Alzheimer’s as an adult. The correlation between Down Syndrome and Alzheimer’s wasn’t well documented 50 years ago.

Tim’s symptoms began with showing lack of balance and increased confusion like getting on the wrong bus to go to work. A visit to a neurologist confirmed Tim had Alzheimer’s in 2016.

Tim was a member of OPICA for eight months and loved it. He must have known his condition was deteriorating because one day he woke up and said he didn’t want to come any more. Tim passed away on January 24th, after this article was written, at the age of 52. The picture on the cover was taken on his birthday...his favorite day of the year! We'll never forget his smile and loving nature, and that he played a mean harmonica.
Dear Friends of OPICA:

We are proud to be celebrating our 40th anniversary this year. The OPICA story is one of hard work for a good cause. Essential to the story are the dedicated, committed and skilled volunteers. Since its inception a rich bank of licensed professionals were willing to give of their expertise and time.

A question often asked, “What does OPICA stand for,” presents its challenges. We’d prefer to focus on what OPICA does but sometimes the answer, “OPICA supports adults with memory loss and their families,” is simply not enough. Beginning in 1974, the Older Persons Information and Counseling Associates was formed. OPICA became incorporated in 1979 and later changed its acronym (for obvious reasons) to Optimistic People in a Caring Atmosphere.

Thanks to the visionary leadership of Professor Yung-huo Liu of UCLA, the concept of setting up a service program specifically for older adults emerged gradually from her travels in other countries and observing how the needs of older adults were being met.

OPICA might have been, at the beginning, the commitment of a few people, but for the past 40 years it is a collective venture shared by all of those involved. Today, OPICA provides comprehensive programming specifically focused on all stages of memory loss in a nurturing environment. OPICA fills a critical need as one of the leading not-for-profit community-based organizations focused solely on memory loss.

Celebrating 40 years serving the Alzheimer’s community, OPICA looks to the future with great optimism and excitement. We are in an era where we have more access to age-related information than ever before. We better understand the progression of memory loss, preventative measures and how best to guide our families through the journey of dementia.

Members of OPICA have lived rich and full lives with amazing stories to tell and we have the privilege to add to their stories. The looks of joy, wonder, learning and creativity on members’ faces remind us every day that we have so much to offer and learn from one another.

“Your kindness and compassion made such a difference for my father. He looked forward to attending OPICA and participating in all of the activities. His last months and days were spent in the finest atmosphere where he felt safe, cared for and loved.”  

-Sandy

Mary Michlovich
Executive Director
Dear Friends of OPICA:

Recently, there have been many newspaper and magazine articles and television segments about the challenges of being a caregiver. It is a very stressful job and there are many suggestions about what caregivers can do to reduce their stress and ensure that they are taking care of themselves. Recently, on the Today Show, Maria Shriver, a leader in the Alzheimer’s movement, spoke about what she and her four siblings did to support their mother when she was the primary caregiver for their father, Sargent Shriver. She shared that once a week all five siblings, none of whom lived close by to their parents, had a conference call with their mother, Eunice. Each sibling was responsible for a separate area of need for their father, such as ordering medication, having supplies delivered and making medical appointments. Each one checked in to see what was needed for the upcoming week. I think this is a brilliant way to support a caregiver from afar. Certainly, a primary caregiver's load is lightened if family members share responsibilities. I think many families could adopt this model and adjust it for their particular circumstances.

This year our annual luncheon will be celebrating forty years of OPICA services by honoring caregivers. We are continually moved by the love and devotion OPICA families show to their loved one’s needs. I was inspired when I attended OPICA’s Family Day last month to see our members and their families engaged in activities that we do at OPICA on a daily basis. It was evident that everyone enjoyed themselves. The fact that we can provide stimulating activities to our members is a great comfort to their caregivers.

I hope you will join us at our annual luncheon on the 14th of June to celebrate the wonderful caregivers we have known in OPICA’s forty years of providing support to adults with dementia and their families.

Teresa Riddle
Board Chair
Where did the original funds for OPICA come from? When Dr. Yung-huo Liu presented her dream for a Day Care Center for older adults to Rita and Ted Williams, it struck a chord. Rita knew first-hand what a center like OPICA would have meant for her parents and convinced her husband, Ted, to supply the seed money for the first year. A Lutheran Church in West Los Angeles agreed to rent three rooms to OPICA and Rita formed the OPICA Associates, a group of dedicated individuals who devoted their time and energy to fundraise for OPICA. Shirley Kleiman, one of the original associates, is still involved with OPICA and only just this year retiring from the board directors at the age of 97. The Associates held raffles, garage sales and theater parties. Inviting family, friends, and friends of friends to these events, the Associates not only raised money, they spread the word about OPICA’s groundbreaking work. The OPICA Associates formally came to an end in 2010 but by that time, they had amassed a substantial fund that continues to sustain OPICA in the form of emergency reserves.

Today, in addition to OPICA’s emergency reserves, 44% of our operating budget is generous donations from individuals and foundations. It’s because of support from friends of OPICA that we have not raised our subsidized daily rate fee in over five years and provide approximately $150,000 for additional financial assistance each year.

OPICA’s enhanced programs are designed to meet the needs of adults at every stage on the journey through dementia. Our unique services and commitment to be each family’s partner in caregiving can make a difficult journey a little easier. And your support makes this possible.

There are many different ways to support OPICA, but a legacy gift will allow future generations to receive the same exceptional care provided to our members today. When you designate OPICA as a beneficiary of your estate, your enduring legacy honors yourself and your family. Your single action has the power to change lives.

To RSVP or to get more information about creating a legacy gift, please contact Stacey Barrett at 310-478-0226, or email her at stacey@opica.org.
OPICA PREPARES FUTURE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

From its inception 40 years ago, OPICA has been preparing future health professionals, recruiting Marriage and Family Therapy students before and after graduation, providing opportunities to fulfill their required hours toward licensure and offering training and supervision. In OPICA’s early days, a group of licensed professionals volunteered their time to provide supervision for up to ten students at a time. Today, the Counseling Center has a dedicated professional staff to oversee a program that has grown to 25-30 students who bring a breadth of creative talent that perpetually enhances and enriches OPICA’s programs. Over the years, many trainees and associates (previously referred to as interns) have stayed on at OPICA after graduation, including our own Anne Galbraith, Arline Agay, Elizabeth Lira, Gillian Scott and Meredith Rossi.

Trainees and associates enhance all of OPICA’s programs. Involved with the adult day program and counseling center, they assist in activities, co-lead support groups, and provide individualized attention to members who are experiencing anxiety, depression and/or transitioning into a new activity. All trainees and associates are assigned an adult day program member and serve as the point person for the member’s family to ensure that each are getting the support they need.

OPICA is proud to provide training for future health care professionals so they have the opportunity to learn the need of supportive programs for older adults with dementia and to experience first-hand, the rewards of providing service to others.

All trainees and associates are assigned an adult day program member and serve as the point person for the member’s family to ensure that each are getting the support they need.
WHY CHOOSE US

Customized for an individual’s emotional, cognitive and physical needs

1:5 ratio of staff to attendees

Expertise critical for memory loss care

Provides valuable respite for family caregivers
TrIBUTES AND MEMORIALS

OPICA tribute cards honor, celebrate and commemorate life’s most important events with a unique message of care and compassion. We express appreciation to the individuals listed below who contributed to OPICA in the form of a tribute between July 1 – December 31, 2018.

In Loving Memory of

Hanni Berg
   Esther Woo-Benjamin
Eva Chorub
   Gail Holtzman
Dad
   Jeffrey and Joyce Gampel
Ellen Grim
   Alan and Barbara Levy
Michael Krane
   Carol Vernon and Robert Turbin
David and Jay Leanse
   Thomas and Jessica Sipkins
Neil Levinson
   Sheri Samotin
Esperanza Manlapid
   Iris Rodgers
Leslie Martinson
   Reiko Pultz
Lee Miller
   Sue Miller
Alice Parrish
   Ron and Teresa Riddle
Lawrence Powell
   Rita Loew
Bill Ross
   Chris and Nancy Cooper
Mike Rothberg
   Sheila Goldman
Alan and Helen Rowe
   Ruth and Robert Yoshiwara
   Al Sentchuk
   Phyllis Bellano
   Nancy Shaffron
   Heidi Magner
   Connie Singer
   Gail Holtzman
   Craig Trager
   Phyllis Bellano

In Celebration of

Wesley Bilson’s Birthday
   Bert Woodruff and Barbara Bilson
JoAnna Jarvis’s Birthday
   Pete England
Shirley Kleiman’s Birthday
   Richard Kleiman
   Nili Kosmal
Barbara and Alan Levy’s Anniversary
   Alan Levy
Jane Morgen’s Birthday
   Rita Loew
Sherry Newman’s Birthday
   Rita Loew
Lori Harrison’s Birthday
   Sharlene Wolf Basch
Margie Rand’s Birthday
   Pete England

In Honor of

Mary Baker
   Mary Ruth Brown
   Mel and Stephanie Kay
   Dan and Teresa Murphy
   Judi Lippe
   The Honorable Michael Berg
   Christina Davidson
   Mary Bomba
   Cookie Galanti
   Esther Cidis
   Vicky Foxworth
   Tom Dunsmuir
   Bodhi and Telulah Younger
   Frannie and Jordan Hudson
   Rita Loew
   Tom Keyser
   Ron and Teresa Riddle
   Shirley Kleiman
   Milt and Susie Gross
   Joyce Leanse
   Thomas and Jessica Sipkins
   Ernestine Elster
   Eleanor Leanse
   Alvin and Gloria Lanfeld
   Tom and Barbara Leanse
   Kim Allen-Niesen
   Marilyn Levin
   Ralph and Shirley Shapiro
   Annie Lampl
   Barbara Levy
   Martha Felton
   Rita Loew
   Barbara and Ron Gordon
   Teresa Riddle
   Lana Brody
   Sheri Samotin
   Nella Webster
   Dr. Kevin Scher
   Sheila Goldman

“To our surprise, OPICA was able to bring out the hidden artist and dancer that we didn’t know existed. We will forever be grateful for all that was done to make our dad’s time at OPICA a place where he could express himself and be happy.” -Debi and Danielle
You don’t have to do it alone...

OPICA support groups offer comfort on a very personal level. Limited to eight people each, individuals feel secure knowing the members of their group remain consistent week to week. Groups are segmented to meet the specific needs of adult children and/or spouses and are facilitated by licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and supervised associates.

For more information and/or to join an OPICA support group, contact Anne Galbraith, Director of Programs, anne@opica.org.

"My weekly support group had huge positive impact on me. I still attend the meetings. My group has become so close and we all support each other deeply on an emotional level." -Vicky