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ALZ

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MAKING THEM PROUD

STAMPING OUT ALZHEIMER'S

Advocate helps create USPS stamp for dementia research

Every letter and bill that Kathy Siggins, 74, drops in the mailbox is affixed with the Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamp — a stamp that she helped conceptualize and bring to the public. It's a testament to the 18 years Kathy worked to make the stamp available to help fight the disease that stole so much from her.



The Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamp has been a passion project of Kathy's since 1999, but its roots start years earlier. Kathy and her late second husband, Gene, met while working at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) headquarters in Washington, D.C., and married in March 1978. In 1985, Gene began experiencing memory issues that eventually caused him to retire early from USPS in 1988

at age 60. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 1990. Kathy, who was 37 when Gene's memory began to decline, served as his caregiver until he died in January 1999 at age 70.

"Being 20 years younger did help me take care of Gene, but Alzheimer's robbed us of our future and life savings, and we still had

a mortgage to pay," Kathy says. "I was also under a doctor's care for depression as my health began to decline. I was emotionally and financially devastated."

Kathy found that taking action gave her back some control over her life. In 1994, Kathy started a Walk to End Alzheimer's® team as a way to honor Gene and raise money to fight Alzheimer's, and in August 1999 began the campaign to create the first-class Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamp. Semipostal stamps raise money for specific causes — and for the Alzheimer's stamp, Kathy wanted the funds to go to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the government agency that assists in funding dementia research.

Kathy worked with NIH to get their formal approval and support of the stamp, then collected over 84,000 petition signatures to show USPS there was national public support



for its creation. With the help and persistence of stamp co-creator Lynda Everman — a Facebook friend who shared the same goal and joined the campaign in 2012 — congressional champions, and Kathy's third husband, JD Brooks, the Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamp was finally issued in November 2017.

"It was a bit overwhelming," says Kathy of the stamp dedication ceremony, "but it was one of the best days of my life. It was like a big weight had been lifted."

The Semipostal Authorization Act granted USPS the authority to offer one stamp for a two-year period, so the Alzheimer's stamp, with a print run of 500 million, was pulled off the market in 2019. This meant Kathy and stamp advocates had to mount another campaign to have it reinstated for sale, or else the remaining stock would be destroyed.

Bureaucratic red tape and legislative holdups were no match for Kathy's tenacity. The support of her elected officials and changes to the law cleared the way for the stamp's reinstatement, and it was offered for sale again in October 2020.

To date 10 million Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamps have been sold, raising more than \$1.3 million for



Stamp dedication ceremony



Alzheimer's and dementia research at the National Institutes of Health. That leaves 490 million stamps left to sell before it comes off the market in 2027 — a goal Kathy, Lynda and all stamp supporters continue to work toward so that even more money is raised for dementia research. "We can't stop fighting," Kathy says.

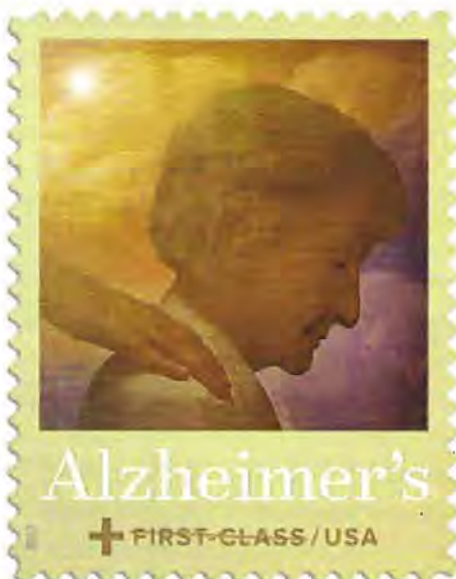
Kathy has now spent half of her life advocating on behalf of the Alzheimer's cause. Her home in Mount Airy, Maryland, is adorned with Walk to End Alzheimer's signs (she has participated annually for the last 27 years), photographs of Gene, and other mementos from her efforts — which include attending government hearings and visiting Capitol Hill to speak with federal lawmakers.

Kathy's desire for her large extended family — three children, five stepchildren and 25 grandchildren —

to avoid the disease drives her efforts, as does a remarkably positive attitude.

"Alzheimer's is both the worst and the best thing that has happened to me," Kathy says. "It was a terrible thing to go through, but I survived. I knew there was a reason why we were taken on this journey and that it wasn't supposed to die with Gene.

"Without Alzheimer's, I wouldn't have met all the wonderful people I've met. I wouldn't be doing the things that I've done." ♦



Purchase the Alzheimer's Semipostal Stamp at select local post offices or online at

STORE.USPS.COM



Kathy Siggins