

IN VICTORIA

Launching a Book

about a Journey with Alzheimer's

by Sue Orsen
The Victoria Gazette

I hadn't personally met Monica Hall and her husband Jerry, but for some time (years!) Allan and I sat four or five pews behind them on Sundays at St. Victoria, where Monica is often a reader at Mass. I felt I knew her.

When I heard that Monica had written a book entitled *Pouf*, I went online to see what it was all about. The dandelion on the book cover is fitting for the topic at hand, especially if you've watched someone, a loved one, step from coherence into a stage of life which is not coherent. It's like, pouf, where did they go?

Monica's book is about her beloved father, Jerome Vierling, who died of Alzheimer's in 2017. She writes, "It has been a magical and life-changing journey. *Pouf* captures the time I spent with my dad while he was in the memory care unit."

To acquire my own personal sense of Monica Hall's journey with her dad, I listened to a YouTube video on which she was being interviewed by Lori LaBey. I found Monica's story of her dad and how their life changed, to be compelling.

As I listened to the video and watched Monica relive those days, I took notes, of course. It's what I do. Since I had traveled a similar journey with my mother a couple years ago -- along with my dad, my brothers, sisters, the whole family -- I hung onto Monica's every word and found much truth and wisdom in all that she said. I had never before heard it put so well, so lovingly, thoughtfully, perfectly.



Residents at the book launching August 26th at Winchester & Rye in Victoria. Front (l-r): Jim and Nan Emmer, Fr. Bob White, Ryan and Jane Wenning. Back: Monica and Jerry Hall, Louise Lehner.

Monica puts into words what I came to know, intuitively, but had not heard it expressed this way. I believe that every memory care facility would do well to make *Pouf* available to all visiting families.

Here are a few remarkable insights Monica gleaned upon visiting her father and the memory care unit:

"I learned to focus on the moment, not on the memories. They know how you're making them feel. They might not remember, but they feel. I learned this by being there.

"It was a different world inside my dad's unit, a simple pure world. We've had so many good laughs. It was almost harder to transition back into the real world than transition to his world.

"In the beginning, I was stuck in my own pain. But if they don't feel a sense of

peace inside of you, they don't feel a peace.

"It turned out to be a beautiful time, a bittersweet time. It's a world of magic in a memory care unit if you allow it to be. I believe people in care units feel isolated and alone. It's important to visit them.

"If you're stuck in your own pain, you can't deal with the loss. With my dad, I had to pretend like I didn't know my dad before. How can I talk to this man *now*? If you can give them a spark, they can light on it.

"I believe the people with Alzheimer's know that they don't know. I would say that was the most heart wrenching thing, to know that he knew. I wanted my dad to know that I understood and to reassure him that I understood.

"Towards the end, it didn't matter if he understood or not. It mattered that he was happy. It's a love communication. It was

hard to visit him at first, but it became beautiful. You have to step outside of yourself and be there with them.

"At first I felt like I was coming for him, and then I felt like I was coming for me. I received so much from those visits. When he passed, I was no longer able to see him. There was an empty hole, and not just the hole of being gone, but was a loss of the whole experience.

"It takes practice to get to that point. It's a nurturing of your loved one. It's a nurturing of the other residents in that community, and letting go of yourself. It's a letting of everything, to just be.

"My dad was a blue collar worker with those nuts and bolts about him. I started to take down notes of the different things he said, like, 'This salad doesn't have any freedom.'

"I've got three journals of notes, and that's what I used to take us into the world of a memory care unit. It was my day brightener. My purpose was to spend time with him. It was important for him and important for me. I saw a whole different side of humanity."

Monica Vierling Hall was born in Shakopee, where she still lives. She has raised two faith-filled and well accomplished sons who passed their faith on to their own families. Her book and story are featured on her website at www.monicavierlinghall.com. Thank you, Monica, for your amazing perception.

IN VICTORIA

The Only Customer Appreciation Days in Victoria



by Sue Orsen
The Victoria Gazette

The week of August 29th through September 6th marked Customer Appreciation days at the Hartman Garden Center on Bavaria Road. It was a delightful week weatherwise. Most intriguing to this editor is the greenhouse where dozens of tomato plants climb on vines that stretch upward to the ceiling of sunlight.



The farm setting, replete with historic barn, cupola, water tank, and windmill, is enhanced by a gardener's eyes and hands. It's a place to visit in any season, an attraction for young and old alike, a gift to the community unlike anything you find elsewhere. Thank you, Jeff, Leslie, and Garden Center family.