

Lorraine Speech - RICA

I am Lorraine aged 63. In the summer of 2014 I was diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's disease by a neurologist at Medway Hospital. Tests took over 3 years to come to a conclusion.

I was then working in the Crisis Home Treatment acute mental health team at Medway Hospital. I worked at Medway Hospital for over 24 years.

I was devastated beyond belief being given the diagnosis of early onset Alzheimer's disease. I experienced a wide range of emotions and concerns. I am now retired due to ill Health. Not my decision but one made for me by my managers, occupational health and human resources at KMPT NHS.

I am fortunate to have support from my family and friends and former manager and colleagues. Without the Alzheimer's Society groups and Memorybilia I don't know how I would have coped with my life changes and circumstances that I am now faced with. But I decided 'I'm am going to do something about the situation that I now find myself in'. I got involved with Memorybilia and I began to get my voice heard.

It is through Memorybilias that I have found new work! The work of getting rid of the stigma faced by people with dementia, educating people about young onset dementia and helping make communities and services dementia friendly. I was also asked to become the Chair of Medway Dementia Action Alliance, something that I was very happy to do. I have spoken at conferences, been on interview panels, spoken on the radio and appeared in publications. In November 2015 I won Medway's most inspiring person with dementia award. An award that I am very proud of.

This is my mission, my life and conviction – to put the messages about dementia across to as many people as possible. This is why when I was asked to take part in the Huguenot mystery shop I was pleased to do so. Everywhere should be dementia friendly and accessible to all. To be honest I don't remember clearly the day that I took part in the Mystery shop but I have, with Katie's help, pieced a few things together.

I got the chance to explain to the researchers just how difficult it is to read a lot of text and said it had to be at least font size 14 and also how I would have liked to have found staff to help me during my visit in the exhibition space. I did however find the staff at the till to be very friendly and approachable.

Whilst I do not exactly remember what happened I do know this. People living with dementia should be able to go to museums, shops, restaurants to take part in the things that make life fun and enjoyable. Without asking people living with dementia to take part in mystery shops we will not be able to live life to the full.