

Personal Identity In Our Morals, Not Our Memory

September 14, 2015

The Wall Street Journal:

This summer my 93-year-old mother-in-law died, a few months after her 94-year-old husband. For the last five years, she had suffered from Alzheimer's disease. By the end, she had forgotten almost everything, even her children's names, and had lost much of what defined her—her lively intelligence, her passion for literature and history.

Still, what remained was her goodness, a characteristic warmth and sweetness that seemed to shine even more brightly as she grew older. Alzheimer's can make you feel that you've lost the person you loved, even though they're still alive. But for her children, that continued sweetness meant that, even though her memory and intellect had gone, she was still Edith.

A new paper in *Psychological Science* reports an interesting collaboration between the psychologist Nina Strohminger at Yale University and the philosopher Shaun Nichols at the University of Arizona. Their research suggests that Edith was an example of a more general and rather surprising principle: Our identity comes more from our moral character than from our memory or intellect.

Read the whole story: [The Wall Street Journal](#)