

A shared, spiritual journey

Jade Angelica and her mother Jeanne Heinzelman visit at a Dubuque care center. The elder woman was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2001. Angelica wrote a book, "Where Two Worlds Touch," about the experience.

Thonline: Angelica discusses her book.



Contributed

New book closely examines Alzheimer's

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The numbers are daunting — more than 5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease, with that number projected to rise to 13.8-16 million (Americans older than 65) by 2050.



Jade Angelica

The dreaded incurable disease progresses relentlessly, robbing its patients of memory and other cognitive and physical functions until they die from its complications.

Jade Angelica knew little about Alzheimer's when her mother, Jeanne Heinzelman, of Dubuque, was diagnosed with it in 2001. Thirteen years later, Angelica's book, "Where Two Worlds Touch," about her "spiritual journey through Alzheimer's disease," is being hailed as a definitive resource for caregivers, families, physicians,

Signing: Jade Angelica will sign copies and read from her book, "Where Two Worlds Touch," from 1 to 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 26, at River Lights Bookstore.

pastoral workers and anyone who seeks a deeper understanding and connection with someone with Alzheimer's.

Angelica threw herself into research about the illness that "frightened" her. She read dozens of books and attended just as many workshops and conferences. The knowledge she gleaned from those, as well as what she learned, often by instinct and by trial and error, from years of helping to care for her mother are beautifully interlaced in her book.

By her description, the book is, "like a tapestry, woven together by poetry and stories drawn from my own experiences and those

of other Alzheimer's caregivers, informed by literature in the Alzheimer's field of research, and grounded by spiritual and theological resources."

It's the book she wishes she had had.

"I feel like an explorer (into the mysterious world of Alzheimer's), sending back my notes," Angelica said. She has lived 32 of her 61 years on the East Coast, but again lives in Dubuque after returning to care for her mother, who died in 2011.

Through personal reflection, recounting of her troubled past and observations of other caregivers and patients, the author covers a wide range of subjects in chapters like, "The Value and Beauty of Every Person," "The Present Moment," "The Most Important Memories," "Nourishing Compassion" and "Companionship on the Journey." Although she includes much scholarly ma-

See **SPIRITUAL JOURNEY, PAGE 4D**

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY: Book offers many tips

Continued from Page 1D

terial, her writing is entertaining and intentionally accessible to all readers.

Most importantly, Angelica offers salient ideas for caregivers and family members of Alzheimer's patients. Scattered throughout the book and well-explained are tips such as:

- Establish a regular pattern of visits that the patient can count on,
- Engage in activities, whether it is bingo, tossing a beach ball, listening to a concert or even watching TV together,
- Use touch and massage to communicate,
- Understand that anger is a good sign that the patient is standing up for himself or herself,
- Remember that even if patients can-

not initiate communication, it doesn't mean they aren't receptive — they can understand although they cannot speak.

Angelica hopes that if readers can get beyond their fears and misunderstandings about Alzheimer's, they will, "Open their hearts and minds to this population and understand they have value. It will teach them about life and letting go."

The book was published by Skinner House Books in Boston, the publishing arm of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. Angelica is an ordained Unitarian "community minister."

"This book is a reflection of Unitarian theology, grounded in Christianity, but borrows from other faith traditions," she said.

"Jade Angelica is a sojourner from the land of Alzheimer's bearing witness that all there is not lost. Her testimony is even more outrageous: We can experience in that far country depths of being alive, and in love, that the worlds of perfect health may never understand.

"Where Two Worlds Touch" is a treasure chest of spiritual gems, the boon of an adventure into and out of the valley of the shadow of death. If you or someone you love are in the land of Alzheimer's, read this spirit-ed-inspired travel log and find your way home." — **Michael Verde, founder and director, Memory Bridge**