

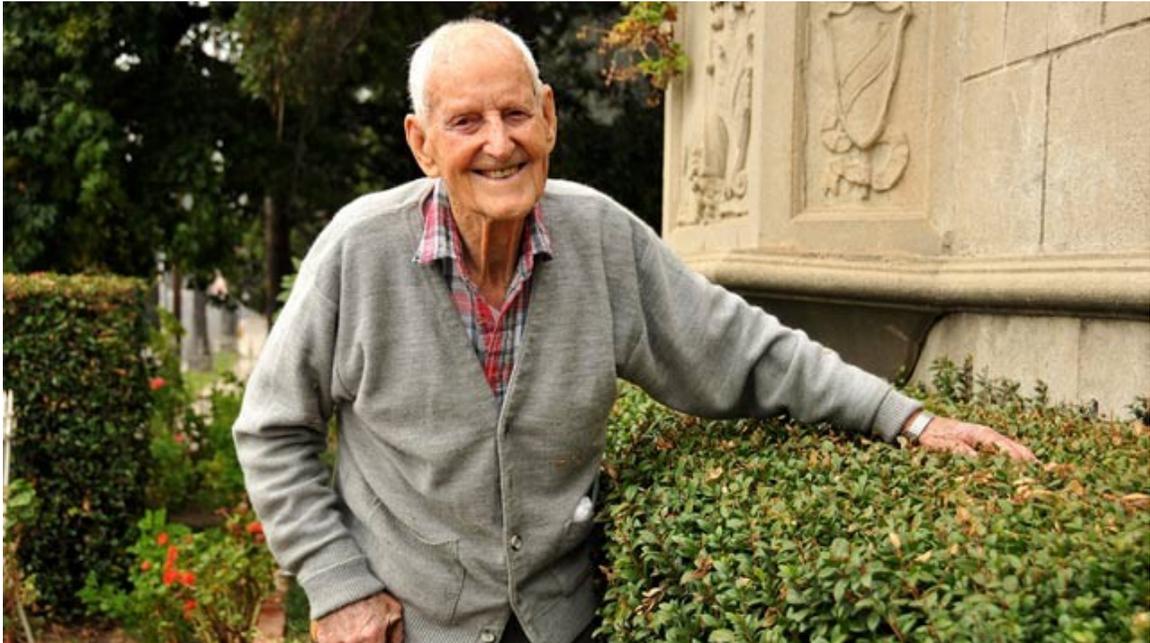
MailOnline

**‘We Were Always Lovebirds’: Husband, 98,
nursed wife with Alzheimer’s for 18 hours a day
for two years up until the moment she died**

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At 98, Reggie Gooch has overcome the compassion fatigue that plagued him when he cared for his dying wife and is now back to enjoying his Hollywood garden. (Courtesy David A. Lee)

A husband has revealed how caring for his wife of 76 years through a long battle with Alzheimer's disease took a severe toll on his physical and emotional well-being.

Reggie Gooch, 98, got up at 4am every morning for two years to make his beloved wife Millie breakfast - then stayed by her side until 10pm each night.

Mrs Gooch died at the couple's home in Hollywood, California last month, leaving her husband suffering from compassion fatigue - a condition with a variety of symptoms of secondary post-traumatic stress caused by caregiving.



All-time love: Millie and Reggie Gooch were married for 76 years and he cared for his wife up until her death from Alzheimer's in Hollywood, California last month

Mr Gooch, who worked as a carpenter while his wife worked in real estate, told Good Morning America: 'The furthest I could get away would be the entrance hall to pick up the mail. I don't think I could have gone on much longer.'

Although he had help from a part-time caregiver, Mr Gooch admitted that the strain of watching over his wife had a severe effect on his health.

Before his wife fell ill, Mr and Mrs Gooch loved to garden and spend time with friends. In their younger years, they had traveled the world together.



© ABC
Always by my side: Mr Gooch gave up all his pastimes to be available around the clock for his wife during her illness

The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project has been established to help caregivers who find themselves in position where they have to provide intense support for loved ones without any previous training.

According to the organisation, when an individual focuses so intensely on another's needs to the detriment of their own it can result in apathy, isolation, bottled up emotions and substance abuse, along with many other symptoms associated with a secondary traumatic stress disorder.

Around 65 million Americans care for someone who is chronically ill or disabled for around 20 hours a week, according to the National Alliance for Caregiving.

More than 15 million Americans provide unpaid care - valued at \$210 billion - for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias.

The aim of the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project is to support and educate caregivers, helping them find out where they can get help - and how to ask for it.



Natural beauty: Reggie Gooch had been married to Millie for 76 years and said they were always 'lovebirds'

Mr Gooch, who is about to turn 99, has managed to regain small pleasures in life following his wife's death - essential for those who suffer from compassion fatigue. However he said that he misses Millie every day.

He told ABC: 'We were always love birds... We always took care of one another.'

*Patricia Smith is a certified Compassion Fatigue Specialist with 20 years of training experience. As founder of the Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project© (www.compassionfatigue.org), the outreach division of Healthy Caregiving, LLC, she speaks and facilitates workshops nationwide in service of those who care for others. She has authored several books including *To Weep for a Stranger: Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving*, which is available at www.healthycaregiving.com or Amazon.com.*