**When Cognitive Loss Impacts a Marriage – Part 1**

During a wedding ceremony, many couples include a vow that references loving and caring for each other through all the ups and downs of life. Optimism and positivity are excited about the marriage and living a full life together. Few are thinking about what happens when major life changes such as chronic illness, mental health challenges, or the onset of cognitive decline and eventual dementia arise.

Even before an official diagnosis, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) can begin to affect the marriage. Symptoms such as short-term memory loss, occasional confusion about time and place, new difficulty in communicating, trouble finding the right words or finishing sentences, as well as irritability or frustration due to the changes, may arise. If the person is experiencing younger-onset MCI, late 40s to early 60s, it can be more confusing as some of these symptoms may mirror those of common relationship issues. This may lead to conflict due to misunderstanding what is occurring. Regardless of when symptoms start all cognitive decline will change a marriage in some way.

**Meet George & June**

When George and June were married, they were filled with joy and passion for living their lives together, entwined in love and commitment. They had the type of relationship that was based on a deep friendship and every day they were excited to reunite and share the events they had each experienced during their working time apart. It was not unusual for them to just sit and talk for hours about life, philosophy, and the world around them. When you saw them together you could clearly see that they had a special relationship, two of them against the world, always there for each other.

They raised their children with the same love and dedication that they had for each other. After the children were grown and creating their own families, they enjoyed time traveling and pursuing art and hobbies that fed their spirits. They loved each other deeply for over 40 years before things started to change. George would go out to run an errand and would be gone “too long.” He would stand up and walk away during a conversation. He would get frustrated while working on his model airplanes. June asked him questions about what was happening. She even went so far as to wonder and then ask if there was another woman. George became so angry with her because he did not think anything had changed and he did not understand her line of questioning.

This went on for a couple of months until the kids brought their families for a holiday visit and their daughter, Audrey, told her mom that she thought that dad was having memory issues. She shared that she was talking to him on the phone about her son’s birthday party and the model he had sent as a gift. He did not remember that he had sent the gift. Audrey was concerned and asked June if they should make an appointment for him to visit with the doctor to bring this up. They decided to talk with George about what they had been noticing hoping that he would cooperate. They talked to him about it in a non-accusatory, loving, and kind manner and he agreed that he would go to talk to the doctor. He mentioned that he had been feeling quite frustrated with June’s questions lately and he did not want her to be worrying about him or accusing him.

**Mild Cognitive Impairment**

At the appointment, his doctor asked questions and agreed that there were some concerns, so he made a referral for a geropsychiatric visit. A couple of visits, along with some tests, uncovered the beginning symptoms of MCI. The family was provided with information about MCI and what to expect. The physician set a follow-up plan with them. June was saddened because she knew others who had been down this road and she knew that the man that she had relied on and partnered with was going to need her in a different way. This was just the start of how their life would change as George’s cognitive loss continued.