

ALZHEIMER'S STORIES

Music: Robert S. Cohen

Libretto: Herschel Garfein

Part I: The Numbers

Chorus: Here are the numbers.
1901. 1906. 1911.

Here are the numbers.
1901: patient diagnosed, age 51.
1906: patient died, age 55.
1911: condition named.

Here are the numbers.
1901, 2009.
1901: one patient diagnosed.
2009: five million two hundred thousand. Twenty six million worldwide.

1901: Mrs. Auguste Deter, age 51, enters the Mental Asylum of Frankfurt am Main.
Her symptoms are unusual. 1902: loss of memory; 1903: delusions, anger;
1904: paranoia.
1906: She dies, age 55.
Her doctor is Alois Alzheimer.

Here are the numbers.
1901, 2009.
Here are the numbers. From one to twenty six million worldwide.
Here are the numbers. 2050: one hundred six million people worldwide;
one in eighty five people worldwide.

1901. Dr. Alzheimer's question:

Baritone: What is your name?

Mezzo: Auguste.

Chorus: Question:

Baritone: What is your husband's name?

Mezzo: Auguste, I think. Auguste.

Baritone: How long have you been here? How long have you been here?

Mezzo: I have lost myself. Ich hab mich verloren.

Chorus: Ich hab mich verloren. *[Repeat]*

Chorus: Question:
Baritone: What is your name?
Mezzo: Auguste.
Chorus: Question:
Baritone: What is your husband's name?
Mezzo: Auguste, I think. Auguste.
Chorus: Question:
Baritone: How long have you been here? How long have you been here?
Mezzo: I have lost myself. Ich hab mich verloren.

Chorus: Ich hab mich verloren. *[Repeat]* Question:
Baritone: What are your children's names?
Mezzo: My children?
Baritone: Their names.
Mezzo: My children? Auguste, I think.
Baritone: Your children.
Mezzo: My children?
Chorus: Ich hab mich verloren. *[Repeat]*

At first, a memory lapse.
Jumbling words or names;
A moderate cognitive decline.
You're not sure where you are,
The day, the week, the year;
Forgetting simple things
Like keys or coats or everyday objects,
And then the street you live on... and soon, those you live with.

Chorus: Here are the numbers. 1901. 1906. 2009. The numbers. *[Repeat]*
Baritone: Question: What is your name? *[Repeat]*
Mezzo: Auguste. *[Etc.]*
Baritone: Question.
Mezzo: Question.
Baritone: What is your name?
Mezzo and Chorus: Ich hab mich verloren.

Baritone: How long have you been here? *[Repeat]*
Mezzo: Auguste, I think. *[Repeat]*
Chorus: Ich hab mich verloren. *[Repeat]*

Part II: The Stories

Chorus: I am seeing my dad on an overturned milk crate staring at nuts and bolts from an RV wheel. He has taken it apart, the kind of thing he could do in his sleep, but now he sits staring, like he's never seen it before. But now he sits staring.
This is my story.

I am riding with my mom back home from the A & P. We're chatting away, enjoying the day, and then we sail through a stop sign, we're up on the sidewalk, flying past our neighbor's house... She had blacked out; I thought we would die.

I say, "Mom, you can't drive now." "I drive as well as ever."

"Pop, you can't live alone." "You're not putting me in one of those homes."

This is my story.

Time forgotten, time remembered; images lost and names return.
Place forgotten, place remembered; names have vanished, images held.

I run to my grandparents, right at the door, and I hug my grampa first. And he turns to my grandma and says, "Who on earth is this?" "Who on earth is this?"

Time forgotten, time remembered; images lost and names return.
Place forgotten, place remembered; names have vanished, images held.

* * *

Mezzo: Are we on the boat to Panama? Are we on the boat to Panama? Are we on the boat, are we on the boat to Panama?

Chorus: Mom, you're in a nursing home.

Mezzo: Daddy's taking us to Panama. Daddy's taking us to Panama. Daddy's taking us, Daddy's taking us to Panama. We run down the boat's long hallways, Mary chasing after me. We pull on every doorknob, and swing off all the handrails.

Chorus: The handrails help you walk. The handrails help the patients walk.

Baritone: *[Interrupting:]* Speaking of boats...!
When I was in the Navy oh! we raised some hell!

Chorus: Yes, Dad. Yes, Dad.

Baritone: In any port, the order was: be back on board at midnight, standing on your feet.

Chorus: Uh huh.

Baritone: If you were late or showed up drunk, or had “I ’n I”^{*} ‘til you smelled like a skunk, then KP, swab the deck, hit the rack, you’ll never go back on shore again – oh! We raised some hell.”
Speaking of boats...!

Chorus: Here we go.

Baritone: Have I told you about the Navy oh! we raised some hell!

Chorus: Yes, you raised some hell! Yes, you raised some hell!

Baritone: In any port, the order was: be back on board at midnight...

Chorus: *[Muttering quietly, having heard this story many times:]* Back on board.

Baritone: ...standing on your feet.

Chorus: That’s right!

Baritone: If you were late...

Chorus: If you were late, or showed up drunk...

Baritone: Or showed up drunk,

Chorus: Or had “I ’n I”

Baritone: “I ’n I”

Chorus: ‘Til you smelled like a skunk,

Baritone: Smelled like a skunk then

Baritone and Chorus: KP, swab the deck, hit the rack you’ll never go back on shore again– oh! We raised some...

Baritone: *[a memory:]* ...raised some hell.

* * *

Chorus: My Dad said, please sing. Sing anything.
He talks to the pictures on his desk.

* *I’n I*: “Intercourse and Intoxication” (naval slang).

She dresses for church four days early
Sing anything: *It's Only Make-Believe; April Showers.*

Mezzo: Are we on the boat to Panama?

Baritone: I can't remember the names of my shipmates.

Chorus: My Dad said, please sing. Sing anything.
A tiny woman tied into a wheelchair.
Pink makeup, rosy lipstick.
Next thing you know, she's up and cha-cha-cha-ing.
Panama...Sing anything.

This is my story. This is how pieces of a life were lost. These are the pieces of a life recalled. This is my story. Love and compassion repair every loss, one by one, time and again.

* * *

Mezzo: Look at this photograph! Oh, I remember this! I'm in an evening gown,
descending a gleaming circular stair. Circular stair...

Part III: For the Caregivers

Chorus and Soloists:

Find those you love in the dark and light.
(It was brief, but she knew me; she looked at me and knew me.)
Help them through the days and nights.
(As he died, his arm lifted and his fingers looked like dancing)

Keep faith. They sense what they cannot show.
Love and music are the last things to go. Sing anything.

Find those you love in the dark and light.
(At the end she still remembered the pearls my father gave her.)
Help them through the days and nights.
(As she lay unconscious I would whisper that I loved her.)

Keep faith. They sense what they cannot show.
Love and music are the last things to go. *[Repeat]*

Love and compassion repair every loss, one by one, time and again.
Keep faith. Sing anything. Keep faith. Sing anything.
Love and music are the last things to go. Sing.

Find those you love in the dark and light.
Help them through the days and nights.
Keep faith. They sense what they cannot show.
Love and music are the last things to go. Sing anything.
Sing.