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## In Sickness And In Health-Terry And Chandra Golder

Terry Golder of Hooper, NE is a second generation racer with “motor oil running through his veins.” Over the past 20 years Terry has face the toughest competition Midwest racing has to offer-the Kosiski brothers, the Zeitners, and Kyle Berck are only a few top drivers that Golder’s 41T has chased. However, since December, 2000, Terry has battled his toughest foe, the devastating disease ALS, a disease that could strike ANY of us at anytime. Although Terry and wife Chandra do not consider themselves heroes, they are indeed just that, traveling an almost indescribable journey together.

To help us learn more of ALS, Terry and Chandra are allowing us an in depth look at their family, their hopes and struggles, losses, and successes.

### ALS-Anyone, Anytime

All information on ALS is courtesy of the ALS MDA website, [www.alsmdausa.org](http://www.alsmdausa.org).

ALS is a disease of parts of the nervous system that control voluntary muscle movement. The cause is unknown, and there is no cure. ALS can affect anyone, anytime, arising spontaneously and mysteriously, making seemingly random attacks on previously healthy adults. Nerve cells that control muscle cells are gradually lost, weakening the muscles. The muscles in the arms, legs, chest, and throat eventually cease to function. However, involuntary muscles, such as those that control the heart beat are not directly affected by ALS. Pain is not a major component of the disease, although moderate pain can certainly occur as a result of immobility and its complications. Hearing, vision, touch, and intellectual ability generally remain quite normal. And so do emotions. Writer Jerry Gladman of the Toronto Sun has likened the disease to “being buried alive.”

Death, usually from respiratory complications, typically comes between three and five years of diagnosis. About 10% of those with the disease live more than ten years, some survive for decades. In a small number of patients, ALS is known to remit or halt progress.

While Lou Gehrig is most often associated with the disease, other notable victims include former Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung, actor David Niven, and former Oakland A’s pitcher Jim “Catfish” Hunter. Writer Mitch Albom’s best seller “Tuesdays With Morrie,” is a story of his time spent with a favorite professor in the professor’s final months of battling the disease.

### Slurred Speech

With the majority of ALS sufferers, the disease first appears in the arms or legs. For Terry Golder it started in his throat. A little over a year before he was

diagnosed, Terry was talking with driver Mark Wyman at a race, and his jaw locked up. He later confided to a crew member he thought he might have suffered a stroke because of his slurred speech.

Lincoln neurologist Dr. Gary Pattee felt Golder did indeed have ALS. A series of tests during a two week stay at the Mayo Clinic confirmed the diagnosis.

“Our first reaction,” posed Chandra. “Well, we were quite ignorant, and felt we could beat the disease.”

Now end tables are covered with books on the disease, and while race fans might spend computer time on a variety of race forums, the Golders spend such time on web sites dealing with the disease.

Terry is afflicted with what is known as Sporadic ALS, as are 90-95% of all ALS sufferers in the United States. There is no why, it just is.

Since the disease first started in Terry’s throat, the most noticeable symptom was his speech. Someone talking with him might feel he had suffered a stroke at some time as his speech was slow and somewhat slurred. Until 2003, the Golders did not see much change in their life. The disease progressed quite slowly. There were still two nights a week of racing, and late nights in the shop preparing to race.

“We honestly thought Terry might be one of the lucky ones,” said sister Carol Scrimsher, comparing Terry with the small number of patients in which ALS is known to halt its progression. “The ALS was confirmed in late 2000, and until this year he was pretty much able to do everything, work, drive the race car. This year the disease moved down.”

“It was mainly the extra things that changed,” stated wife Chandra. “Terry quit working on other cars, stopped clearing neighbors drives in the winter. Just things like that.” And there was also trouble with eating. Chandra changed their diet to foods easier to swallow. Finally this was not enough, and in June, 2003, Terry had surgery to implant a feeding tube.

“Terry got out of the hospital on June 28<sup>th</sup>, and Terry being Terry, raced on June 30<sup>th</sup>,” laughed Chandra.

The loss of arm and hand strength became more noticeable late in the summer of 2003. For someone who takes such pleasure in making things work, not being able to use his hands to fix or create is terribly frustrating.

Terry has been unable to work since May. Wife Chandra is the primary care giver. And ALS has taken a toll on her as well. Chandra is very protective

of the man she loves, yet cannot protect Terry from the biological microbes that are relentlessly attacking him. "In sickness and in health, yeah right," she smiled.

"Denial is a good place to be. It is the silly things that make me most angry. Terry would never let me drive, now I do the driving. Carrying in the groceries, taking food to the deep freeze in the basement." Simple things, yet things that say normal more than any others.

Still the Golders try to live their lives as normally as possible. "Sure, I have my pity parties," confided Chandra. "Usually Terry will say I've had my 20 minutes and it is time to rewind and restart."

And occasionally Terry needs to rewind too. Someone who was very independent now must "rely on everyone. I can't go to the shop to work," Golder added. "And not being able to race is like having someone hold a bowl of ice cream in front of you, but tell you that you can't eat any."

A special family and a wonderful group of friends also help Terry and Chandra remain focused on the positives. And so does son Trevor.

"Trevor makes even our worst days happy," said Chandra. Trevor was born in February of 2001, several months after Terry's ALS was diagnosed. He is a bright 3 ½ year old who loves hockey as much as racing. Before the disease progressed to its current state, Terry was working on a mini-zamboni for Trevor, to go along with the mini late model he has.

"Trevor is like Terry," laughed Chandra. "He just has to figure out how everything works." For Trevor, Terry is just dad, and the ALS is just something that is a part of dad. Still, he displays an amazing sense of compassion for one so young. On a particularly bad day, Terry fell several times, and his spirits were a little low. Trevor crawled beside Terry sitting in his easy chair and said, "it's OK dad, I'll help you."

There is no cure for ALS. Still, the most significant research advances into ALS have occurred in the last decade, and stem cell and gene therapy are promising areas of research. Like Nancy Reagan, "I do support stem cell research," Chandra emphatically stated.

Both the MDA and ALSA websites give more detailed information on the disease and its treatment. It is not easy reading, it is not fun reading. ALS is not an easy disease to have. To even dream of a cure we need to be more aware of the disease, and contribute to those organizations funding research.

Chandra and Terry DO dream of that break through day. For now though, their reality is relatively few medicinal treatments available, and those only promise to extend life for some months. There is physical therapy, speech

therapy, and even assistive devices. Still perhaps the best treatment of all came in the sage advice of the Golder's neurologist, Dr. Pattee. Pattee told them "do what you can do to make YOU happy. Don't give in. Live your life. Lead a life that will make it without regret."

As crewman Dusty Reynolds said about the racer Terry, "Terry does not have the word can't in his vocabulary." Nor does Chandra. For us, "live everyday as if it were your last" may be a cliché. Terry and Chandra Golder do live everyday to its fullest, and it is no cliché for them. ALS is the toughest competitor Terry and Chandra have faced. However, the attitude that served well in racing a late model stock car is serving well in this battle with the disease. The Golders are not letting it beat them. They are not letting it stop them. They are taking control of the disease, and they too are fierce competitors.

#### Sidebar-My Most Memorable Win Was At Sunset

Golder is a second generation driver. Father Jack was a long time visitor to Midwest tracks, driving the 41 car and later the 41J. Terry began his racing career in 1980, running in the Sportsman division at Shelby County Speedway in Harlan, Iowa and also at Sunset Speedway in Omaha. He moved to late models in 1982. Terry never had the most expensive equipment at the track. In fact, his latest car was previously owned by Jim Wyman, and demolished in a series of barrel rolls at Denison, Iowa. Terry believed the car could be fixed, bought it, repaired it, and raced it with some success. "Terry has always been one who needs to know why something works," stated wife Chandra. "He gets a great deal of pleasure in seeing equipment he built run good."

Adds crewman Dusty Reynolds, "if Terry had the chance to make or fabricate a part that could save him money he was going to do it. Not just because it would save him money, but because he enjoyed making the part as well. It was an inside joke that if a new piece of suspension was coming out someone on the crew would say to him, I bet you couldn't make one of those. Even though we knew he could and would if necessary."

And Terry made all the decisions regarding the car. "That way, anything that went wrong was my fault," stated Golder.

Always driving the 41T, Golder averaged about one feature win a year in the late models. He tied Joe Kosiski for the points championship at Park Jefferson, South Dakota in 1992.

According to Reynolds, "Terry is a quiet, yet aggressive racer. He isn't the flashy straight to the front type. He is consistent, and his persistence is what gained him the success he enjoyed."

Two wins remain quite vivid for the Hooper, NE. driver. "My most memorable win was at Sunset Speedway," stated Golder. The win came in 1998, NASCAR's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season. As all area drivers will attest, a win at the grand old dame of Midwest race tracks is a career highlight. Drivers had choices on where to run Friday and Saturday nights. On Sunday, there was only Sunset, and the best drivers were always there.

The other memorable win came at Park Jefferson in 2003. "Terry defeated Leon Zeitner that night," said wife Chandra. "Leon was running for the NASCAR regional championship, so wins at Park Jefferson were very important for him. Leon had already cleared tech and was outside his car waiting for the post race interviews. He was pacing back and forth and I was afraid he was angry, that maybe Terry had cut him off. Terry finally cleared tech and drove around to the front stretch. Before Terry could even get out of the car Leon reached in and gave him a big hug. In Daytona this winter, Leon's parents told Terry's parents that Leon was even happier for Terry winning the race, then he would have been if he won himself." Terry's family, including Chandra and their then 2 ½ year old son Trevor were on hand to enjoy the special victory.

Terry's sister Carol sums up his driving career in a fitting tribute. "Both Dad and Terry were true competitors. They realized that there is just as much glory in driving your best and having a good finish as there was in winning."

## Side bar-The Racing Family and the MDA Family

A benefit for the Golders was held at the Hooper, Nebraska auditorium last February. "We honestly thought maybe 100, 150 people would attend," stated Chandra. "We got there early to take in all of the decorations, and there were people already standing in line to get in. Over 1,000 people attended the benefit, at least half from the racing family. The event raised \$50,000.

Though physically weakened by ALS, Terry's passion for racing has not dimmed. He will take in a race occasionally, and was acknowledged during a visit to Nebraska Raceway Park on July 18<sup>th</sup>. Only a week later Terry was in the hospital suffering from pneumonia like symptoms that would lead to surgery on July 27<sup>th</sup>. Terry Golder did not race weekly at NRP. Still, many fans and drivers remember the fierce competitor, and at intermission of NRP's July 25<sup>th</sup> weekly show a collection was taken to assist the Golders. Led by Terry's driver pals Mark Wyman and Leon Zeitner, drivers went into the grandstands with helmets in hand, seeking donations. A total of \$1204 was raised that night.

Just a day after leaving the hospital recovered from the pneumonia like symptoms, Terry was on hand at Blackbird Bend Speedway in Onawa, Iowa, as friend Mark Wyman raced Terry's car. The plan was for Wyman to race the Golder 41T through August, but Blackbird Bend is planning a special Terry Golder Race on September 10<sup>th</sup>, so the car will be seeing a little more action this year.

While the Golder's appreciate all of the racing family, a new family has become just as important in their lives. "I do not know where we would be without MDA-the Muscular Dystrophy Association," stated Chandra. "MDA is awesome. We have made many friends, and the emotional support is even more important than the financial support. I talk with Omaha MDA coordinator Jessi Thompsen almost everyday. She is a part of the family."

Responding, Thompson stated "Terry and Chandra are outspoken advocates. They seek to educate others of the disease, while maintaining a positive outlook. They are excellent role models, inspiring not only those just learning of the disease, but those already diagnosed as well."

During last year's Labor Day Jerry Lewis MDA telethon, Terry was presented an MDA Personal Achievement Award for continuing racing while battling ALS. "I can't say enough about MDA," exclaimed Chandra. "Please donate to MDA."

The racing family has a tradition of taking care of its own. Of digging deep and giving proudly when a family member is in need. Both Chandra and Terry were quite adamant that they do not want sympathy. They are dealing with what life has handed to them, and dealing with it positively. They agreed to this article

in the hope of raising awareness of the sinister villain ALS. And in turn that those who learned of the disease might contribute to its downfall by supporting the research efforts of the MDA.

Anyone wishing to make a donation can contact their local MDA Chapter, call the organization's toll free number 800-572-1717, or go to the ALS MDA website, [www.alsmdausa.org](http://www.alsmdausa.org).