

# ALS Is An Awful Disease

Well, ok, what disease is NOT awful? But ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) robs a person of his or her motor skills and leaves their mind intact. So essentially, ALS victims are imprisoned in their own body. And ALS often strikes at a young age, and most people struggle with it for less than 3 years before it takes their life. We watched my husband's father struggle with it for over 2 years. We watched as it robbed him of his ability to walk, talk, eat and pretty much everything else. He passed away very peacefully, a week before Christmas. We were all in the room with him, and a hospital volunteer was playing Silent Night on the harp as he passed. It was beautiful, but it's still hard for me to hear that song. The reason I'm bringing this up is because the most famous victim of ALS, besides Lou Gehrig himself, is Stephen Hawking, and I was sorry to read in the news today that he is very ill.

Stephen Hawking is a brilliant scientist and an inspirational man – he has lived with ALS for over 40 years. Lou Gehrig had it for nearly two years before he died at the age of 37. Gehrig's was a New York Yankees player, and he was forced to retire when he was diagnosed with ALS. His record of most career grand slams still holds at 23 today! We watched *The Pride of the Yankees* (which tells the story of Lou Gehrig) with my father-in-law after his diagnosis, and that was tough. Same thing with *Tuesdays With Morrie*... why did my father-in-law want to do that to himself? To get a better grip on what was happening to him, maybe? I don't know.

My father-in-law was a remarkable man. He had the biggest heart of anyone I've ever known, second only to my husband. He was kind, generous, smart, and funny. He knew a lot about everything; especially movies and religion – he had the Bible practically memorized. One of my favorite memories of him was when we took him to the zoo. It was after the ALS had already

taken hold of his body, but his humor was still intact. As we were wheeling his wheelchair over a bumpy bridge at the zoo, he said, "Ahhhh" – not because the ALS had taken away his speech (it hadn't yet) but because it was a bumpy ride and he was jokingly letting the bumps affect his voice. He was taken from us too soon; I wonder what he would have thought of having 7 grandchildren? He's been gone longer than I knew him now – over 8 years. His funeral was on our oldest daughter's first birthday. But anyway... I don't know why I'm going into all of this now. Let's pray for Stephen Hawking. ALS is a terrible disease.