

# Congressional Hearing on Alzheimer's Disease - March 23, 2004

## Testimony of Sister Genevieve Kunkel, SSND

### 1) What has it meant to be a participant in The Nun Study?

I pray daily for wisdom and prudence, and today I prayed "extra hard" for these gifts!

It has been a privilege and a pleasure to be an active participant for fourteen years in Dr. Snowdon's research and there have been some "personal perks" such as an appearance with him and Katie Couric and a chapter in his book, *Aging with Grace*. Not displeasing at all, for one in her late 80's! It is rewarding to have frequent, friendly and informative reports from Dr. Snowdon and his dedicated staff assuring us that the donation of our brain is contributing significantly to this promising study of the dread disease of Alzheimer's. As a School Sister of Notre Dame for more than seventy-two years, it is good for mind and spirit and body to know that I can still, even as a fully retired sister, continue to be a vital part of this on-going project. My philosophy as a woman, a religious and a teacher has always been to be grateful for the past, enthusiastic about the present and confident about the future. Dr. Snowdon's cause is a good one. I am enthusiastic about it!

### 2) What has it been like to watch others afflicted with Alzheimer's disease?

To phrase it bluntly: It isn't easy! As a sister, my faith that this is part of the Paschal Mystery of Lent leading up to Easter - and eternal life - eases the pain somewhat. May 1<sup>st</sup> I will celebrate the seventieth anniversary of my profession of vows, a commitment I made in 1934 with fifty-five other young women. It is saddening to watch my friends, my sisters, stricken with the diminishments of ailing and failing. And when these are accompanied by Alzheimer's it seems and is so much more devastating. How painful to see sisters, much younger than I enter this darkened world. How often I ask: "Why them? Why not me?"

Living with this reality has made me more prayerful about finding a cure and more zealous to remain "actively involved" in the Nun Study of Dr. Snowdon.