Jay Ingram sends along a photograph of his mother, Doris, circa 1960. The photographic setting is eloquent and appropriate, for there Doris sits, contemplative and alone, on a summer’s day. She’s not truly alone, of course, for someone takes the photo, perhaps Ralph, her husband, who decades later would pass a love letter to her wife after she had begun her creeping descent into dementia. So the photograph uncannily suggests distance as well as introspection.

Ralph Ingram was 90 when he wrote his billet-doux to his wife. Doris was 88. “It was actually pretty intimate,” Jay Ingram says of the letter, discovered after his father died. “More intimate at the age of 90 than I thought they ever were. So that was a revelation to me, because I started thinking, you know, I’ve carried as image of what they were like. Well, maybe it’s completely off.”

Doris Ingram no longer knew Ralph Ingram when she passed away in 2006. Did she die of Alzheimer’s, by far the most common form of dementia? It’s likely, posits Jay Ingram, a science writer and broadcaster who explores what he calls the anatomy of the disease in *The End of Memory: A Natural History of Aging and Alzheimer’s*. By the time of Doris’s death, he writes, she was “bedridden and unaware.”

Despite his family’s experience, Ingram’s journey is not a personal one. “As a science person I really didn’t know much about the science of Alzheimer’s. Where did it come from? What’s really going on the brain? How well do we understand that?”

The statistics provide an obvious and dramatic spur to investigation. There’s lots to choose from. A study funded by the Alzheimer’s Association and published in 2013 crunched data from the Chicago Health and Aging Project. Looking out to 2050, researchers predicted that a new case of Alzheimer’s disease will emerge in the United States every 33 seconds. That would mean close to one million cases per year.

Science writer and broadcaster Jay Ingram strives to understand the disease that likely afflicted his mother.

> HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

### Into the darkness

Jay Ingram's mother, Doris, no longer knew her husband of 70 years, Ralph, when he wrote her a love letter when he was 90 and she was 88.

> LITERARY AFFAIRS

Michel Houellebecq’s uncanny timing

His novel about a near-future Islamic France hit bookstores the day of the Charlie Hebdo attack
There are no limits on freedom of expression