

**Theme:** Communication Hampered by Alzheimer's

**Text:** Non-Fictional – Charlton Heston's Alzheimer's Disease Statement (August 9, 2002)

My Dear Friends, Colleagues and Fans:

My physicians have recently told me I may have a neurological disorder whose symptoms are consistent with Alzheimer's disease. So... I wanted to prepare a few words for you now, because when the time comes, I may not be able to.

I've lived my whole life on the stage and screen before you. I've found purpose and meaning in your response. For an actor there's no greater loss than the loss of his audience. I can part the Red Sea, but I can't part with you, which is why I won't exclude you from this stage in my life.

For now, I'm not changing anything. I'll insist on work when I can; the doctors will insist on rest when I must. If you see a little less spring in my step, if your name fails to leap to my lips, you'll know why. And if I tell you a funny story for the second time, please laugh anyway.

I'm neither giving up nor giving in. I believe I'm still the fighter that Dr. King and JFK and Ronald Reagan knew, but it's a fight I must someday call a draw. I must reconcile courage and surrender in equal measure. Please feel no sympathy for me. I don't. I just may be a little less accessible to you, despite my wishes.

I also want you to know that I'm grateful beyond measure. My life has been blessed with good fortune. I'm grateful that I was born in America, that cradle of freedom and opportunity, where a kid from the Michigan Northwoods can work hard and make something of his life. I'm grateful for the gift of the greatest words ever written, that let me share with you the infinite scope of the human experience. As an actor, I'm thankful that I've lived not one life, but many.

Above all, I'm proud of my family ... my wife Lydia, the queen of my heart, my children, Fraser and Holly, and my beloved grandchildren, Jack, Ridley and Charlie. They're my biggest fans, my toughest critics and my proudest achievement. Through them, I can touch immortality.

Finally, I'm confident about the future of America. I believe in you. I know that the future of our country, our culture and our children is in good hands. I know you will continue to meet adversity with strength and resilience, as our ancestors did, and come through with flying colors -- the ones on Old Glory.

William Shakespeare, at the end of his career, wrote his farewell through the words of Prospero, in "The Tempest." It ends like this:

"Be cheerful, sir. Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits and are melted into air, into thin air: And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, yea all which it inherit, shall dissolve and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep."

Thank you, and God bless you, everyone.

### Annotations:

7 Red Sea – reference to the movie *Ten Commandments*, in which Heston was Moses 13 draw – contest without either side winning 26 flying colors – triumph; Old Glory – nickname for the US flag 29 revels – festivities 31 yea – yes; indeed / all which it inherit – everything on earth 32 insubstantial pageant – Prospero stages a spectacle (pageant) in which illusions are created by spirits / rack – trace 33 rounded – [cognate: abrunden]

### Assignments:

1) Render Heston's rather literary hints to Alzheimer's in a more matter-of-fact way. [Contents] (Do not forget the introductory statement.)

2) What is the message of the various references to the arts in the context of Heston's statement? In your interpretation the Shakespeare quotation from *The Tempest* is expected to play a major role. [Interpretation]

3) Talking about the former US president in July 2000, Mauren Reagan said "she was proud of her father for going public with his battle [with Alzheimer's] because it helped people everywhere acknowledge what otherwise had been a whispered disease." Take Heston's statement as a starting point to discuss the pros and cons of "going public" with such news. [Evaluation]