

'Your heart breaks over and over'

Two women tell new about the pain of losing their loved ones after they were diagnosed with dementia

Solicitor Chelsea Shore, 28, is from Nuneaton near Coventry. Her great-grandmother, Violet, was diagnosed with dementia in 2018

'From the moment I was born, my great-grandmother Violet and I were close. She lived two streets away from us in Nuneaton and as a child I'd often cycle over to her house.

I loved our Friday night sleepovers, when she'd teach me how to bake butterfly cakes or arts and crafts. There might have been 65 years between us, but she was my best mate, and when I grew up I'd take her for fish and chips every Saturday. She always gave such great advice, whether it was about boyfriends or my career.

At first, we put Granny Vi's memory lapses down to old age, but in 2018 she was diagnosed with dementia, after suffering a seizure. When I heard the news, I was utterly

devastated. We were so close and I just couldn't bear the thought that one day she wouldn't know who I was.

Over the following months, she became more forgetful. "I'm all over the place," she'd say and her beloved books and puzzles became a source of frustration because she couldn't process the words. Then, one day I walked into her house and found it boiling hot because she'd forgotten to turn off the oven. She loved baking, but we had to disconnect the cooker. It just wasn't safe.

I tried desperately to help Granny Vi hold on to her memory. I visited four times a week, swapping her puzzles for brightly-coloured children's versions. We tackled dementia-friendly word searches and I bought her a kids' oven with an automatic timer. We'd bake jam tarts and it was such a joy to cook together again.

I also created an Instagram account, @chelsandvi, where I posted regularly about our experience. We built up a community and it was comforting to know that my updates were helping others.

But, despite everything, dementia took its toll and Granny Vi became a shell of herself. She lost the motivation to go out and she started

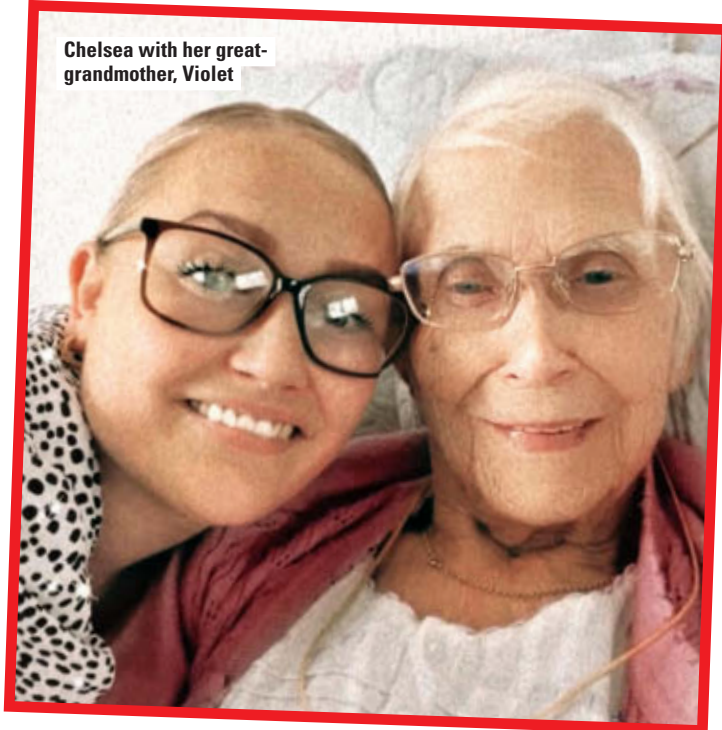
forgetting people too. To help, I made photo albums with labels next to each picture and we'd flick through them together.

"I'm ready to go," she'd tell me as she became sicker, but I wasn't ready to lose her.

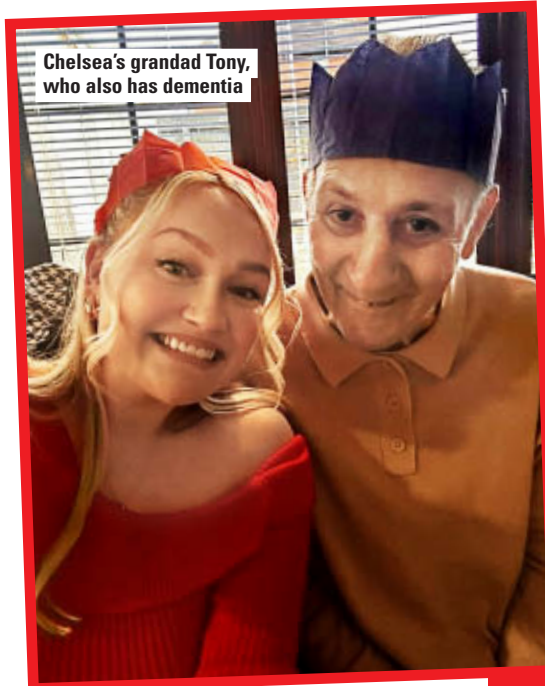
Then, in the summer of 2021, Granny Vi's condition plummeted, after she fell and fractured her hip. She was admitted to a nursing home and kept asking, "Where am I?" again and again. Then, one day, I was sitting by her bedside when she looked at me and asked, "Who is she? Why is she crying?" I was lucky she hadn't forgotten me sooner, but it didn't hurt any less.

That September, I got a call at 5am to say that Granny Vi had passed away. She was 91. Afterwards, I completely broke down and my head felt fuzzy, as though I'd been drinking. I wasn't expecting to be knocked for six because we'd known it was coming, but the

Chelsea with her great-grandmother, Violet



Chelsea's grandad Tony, who also has dementia



'Granny Vi became a shell of herself. She lost motivation'