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Meet Gincy Heins | caregiver, volunteer, Alzheimer's advocate, wife, mom, gardener, book lover and baker

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We had the good fortune of connecting with Gincy Heins and we've shared our conversation below.

Hi Gincy, as a parent, what have you done for your children that you feel has had the most significant impact?

My husband and I have one child. He is 25 years old and in 2021 graduated from law school and passed the Bar Exam! Yes, we are very proud of him.

I think the most important thing I did was become a stay-at-home mom. I know this isn't an option for every family and isn't something many people would choose, but it worked for us.

My husband and I celebrated our 32nd anniversary at the end of March and before we ever talked about marriage, I let him know that if I became a mom, I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom for at least the first five years. I wasn't sure how he would take this as I had an MBA and a good career, so I wanted to let him know early. Fortunately, he was in support of that decision.

I loved my time with our son! As he grew up I became involved in PTA and often served as room parent and was his Den Leader in Cub scouts. Honestly, I'm sure I was a helicopter parent!

About the time I started to think about going back to work, my mother passed away and my dad came and lived with us. Even when he moved into a senior apartment a few months later I knew working wasn't in the cards. My dad had several health problems and I knew I'd be taking him to doctor appointments and dealing with whatever came up for him.

A month after my dad passed away, my husband got lost driving in the local area and a few months later was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment, which we were told could lead to Alzheimer's. He had to stop working and was put on disability. Once again, working was not an option as there was no way I could take off work to take him to his numerous appointments, at times as many as seven in a week.

Looking back, would I have continued working if I'd know I'd become a caregiver not once but twice? Not a chance! You cannot get back the years with your children, and they go by so fast! I'm glad the decision I made was the right one for our family.



Alright, so let's move onto what keeps you busy professionally?

I have a Bachelor's degree in Finance, Investments and an MBA. My husband and our son discuss investments and don't even involve me in the discussion because despite my degree, it just isn't my thing. I worked in the business world for 15 years until I changed my title to stay-at-home mom.

I could definitely add “volunteer” to my list of jobs! I volunteered in my son’s schools from the time he was in preschool. I took on roles like room mom and PTA treasurer, and willingly jumped in to do any job that needed to be done. I am actually a life-long volunteer, giving my time to numerous organizations over my life.

“Family caregiver” was added to my resume when our son was 10 and my mom passed away. When my dad died 25 months later, I thought my caregiving days were over until I was at least in my 80’s! Wrong! When I was 49, my husband was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment and I became his caregiver, it became apparent that going back to work full-time was impossible for me.

Using the information I learned about taking care of our brains from all the research I did trying to help my husband, I volunteered at the Cypress Senior Center and started teaching a class which I called Keep Your Brain Buff. While teaching the class, I got a part-time job with North Orange Continuing Education as an Adjunct Faculty member teaching Senior Topics. I was able to start teaching Keep Your Brain Buff, by then renamed Games for Brains, as one of their Senior Topics classes. I have been teaching the class continuously since 2010, just with different names. I finally went back to teaching the class in person this year.

In 2017, I applied for and became a Senior Citizens Commissioner for the City of Cypress. I am now in my second and final four year term as a Commissioner.

Along the way as my husband’s caregiver, I connected with many other caregivers. I formed a special bond with four of them, each caring for a spouse or loved one. Although the five of us have different caregiving experiences we share the common bond of a strong sense of advocacy and a desire to help others. Together we have written four books in the “365 Caregiving Tips” series. Our books of practical tips are perfect for caregivers who have limited time and resources.

I realized that people looked at my husband as a person with a cognitive impairment rather than the interesting person he has been and continues to be. In my caregiver support groups I heard about fascinating people who were the spouses or loved ones of other caregivers. I gathered those stories, and am proud to say I am the creator and editor of “Before the Diagnosis: Stories of Life and Love Before Dementia” and “Before the Diagnosis: More Stories of Life and Love Before Dementia” which was published in March 2022. These anthologies are full of stories about people and who they were before their diagnosis. No one involved with these books receives any money. Everything from “Before the Diagnosis: More Stories of Life and Love Before Dementia” goes directly to Alzheimer’s Orange County, the organization that has helped me so much in my caregiving journey.

In anticipation of my latest book’s publication, I created my website, gincyheins.com. It was a lot harder to do than I expected, but I am very proud of it! I found out that a lot of people who have websites paid someone to create them and I created mine all myself!

Teacher, Commissioner, and author are my three current jobs. I am thrilled that I am an author, happy to be serving my city as a Commissioner, and glad that I can make a difference with my teaching. Obviously I never expected get here with a Bachelor’s in Finance and an MBA! I’m excited to see what I do next!



If you had a friend visiting you, what are some of the local spots you'd want to take them around to?

My city is Cypress, in Orange County, so our journey is going to start there. I'll try to think like Huell Howser and visit spots that might not be on everyone's list as I take you around.

Our visit is beginning on Thursday. After picking you up at the wonderfully convenient Long Beach Airport, we'll go for a walk through Oak Knoll Park in Cypress where we might be able to stop and watch a few baseball games. If the school year hasn't ended, we might be able to watch Cypress High School's baseball team in action! For dinner we'll head to Dominic's, a wonderful family-owned Italian restaurant in Cypress.

Friday we're going to lunch at Classics Flowers and Confections in Cypress. The food is delicious, the atmosphere is relaxing and lovely, and we might even pick up a few gifts plus some flowers to take back to the house. The Cypress Concerts on the Green are on Friday

nights, so we'll pick up some sandwiches for dinner and walk over to enjoy the music and lovely evening.

Saturday's first stop will be the Cypress Branch of the Orange County Public Library. I always have books and DVDs I've borrowed plus items I've put on hold. I volunteered here before the pandemic and my books are on their shelves! From here we're heading to the Cerritos Farmer's Market. It's one of my favorite farmer's markets and I'm sure we'll need some fresh berries! Late Saturday afternoon we're going to Downtown Disney. While there we'll grab dinner and walk through all the hotels, enjoying the excitement of the area. We might even see a wedding outside at one of the hotels!

Sunday we're heading back to Cerritos. They have a beautiful library and I love to visit libraries, so we'll spend some time there. After, we're going to the sculpture garden which is in the same area. It's a nice place that is frequently busy on Friday and Saturday nights with couples taking pictures on their way to school dances. We're going to Seal Beach for the afternoon and evening where we'll walk down Main Street, splash in the water, admire the beautiful houses, then pick from the many restaurants for dinner.

Monday we're taking the Amtrak from Fullerton to San Juan Capistrano. It's a fun trip and it's so nice avoiding the traffic by taking the train! While there we'll have some lunch, visit the Mission, shop in the stores, walk around the area, and grab some ice cream before taking the train back to Fullerton. As long as we're in Fullerton, we'll have something for dinner.

Tuesday we're off to Orange! We're starting with breakfast at Ruby's at the train station. From there we'll walk across the parking lot to the Hilbert Museum of California Art. I've made a reservation for us to visit the California's Gold Exhibit and Huell Howser Archives on the campus of Chapman University. Since I got my MBA here, I'll enjoy being back on the campus and seeing how much it has changed. After our visit we'll stop at one of the many coffee shops for a break and then do some shopping. Hmm, should we have lunch at Bruxie or The Filling Station? Such decisions! Maybe we'll have lunch at a one and dinner at the other!

Our visit is ending all too soon on Wednesday! There are so many more places I want to take you. I drop you off at the new terminal at Long Beach with a hug and a reminder to visit again soon!



The Shoutout series is all about recognizing that our success and where we are in life is at least somewhat thanks to the efforts, support, mentorship, love and encouragement of others. So is there someone that you want to dedicate your shoutout to?

When my husband was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) in December, 2009, he was only 55-years-old. I was 49 and our son was 13. I was so far in over my head! I knew absolutely nothing and didn't have a clue what to do or how to do it. I wasn't a very good caregiver for my dad and was so overwhelmed! I didn't know who to talk to about my situation.

I immediately found Alzheimer's Orange County when I was trying to even understand the meaning of MCI. They have been a lifesaver ever since. I've taken classes, spoke at conferences, helped other people, and regularly attend a support group. All of these things have helped me become a better caregiver for my husband and helped me maintain my sanity, which has helped me be a good mom.



Website: gincyheins.com (<http://gincyheins.com>) and 365caregivingtips.com (<http://365caregivingtips.com>)

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