

# The Women of Alzheimer's Series – Rita Hayworth



One of the most glamorous Hollywood actresses would unintentionally change the face of Alzheimer's disease. Even though the disease had been identified by the German physician, Alois Alzheimer in 1906, it was not well studied and had little public awareness until the 1970's.

During the 1960's the legendary actress Rita Hayworth, who was in her 40's, was known to have problems with her memory. By the 1970's there was progressive deterioration accompanied by agitated behavior. Friends and doctors long suspected it was due to a pattern of heavy drinking. By the late 70's there were problems in managing her financial affairs, and eventually her daughter gained legal control over her finances and her personal care.

It was not until 1979 that the **misdiagnosis of chronic alcoholism was correctly attributed to Alzheimer's**, but information was not released to the public until 1981. Rita Hayworth lapsed into a semi-coma for several months before dying in 1987 at the age of 68.

Rita Hayworth was the epitome of the glamorous Hollywood pin-up star of the 1940's and 50's. Coming from a dancing background she became a favorite partner of Fred Astaire, appeared in over 37 movies and magazines of-the-day crowned her **"The Great American Love Goddess"**

She was married five times and most notably to the famous actor Orson Wells and then leaving him to marry her third husband, Prince Aly Khan. Her daughter, Princess Yasmin Aga Khan, would later testify before a congressional committee on Alzheimer's funding of her mother's deteriorating "state of

utter helplessness.”

In 1985, Princess Yasmin paid tribute to her mother by organizing the first of yearly **Rita Hayworth Galas** to raise money for Alzheimer’s disease research. By 2010, donations had reached a total of \$55 million dollars.

*Sultry, glamorous, alluring and temptress* were movie star words that captivated Rita Hayworth’s fans. **If you wonder how one woman could be all these things, catch the video clip below from one of her provocative roles in the 1946 film “Gilda.”**