

Dr. Alice Howland: Good morning. It's an honor to be here. The poet Elizabeth Bishop once wrote: 'the Art of Losing isn't hard to master: so many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster.' I'm not a poet, I am a person living with Early Onset Alzheimer's, and as that person I find myself learning the art of losing every day. Losing my bearings, losing objects, losing sleep, but mostly losing memories...

[she knocks the pages from the podium]

Dr. Alice Howland: I think I'll try to forget that just happened.

[crowd laughs]

Dr. Alice Howland: All my life I've accumulated memories - they've become, in a way, my most precious possessions. The night I met my husband, the first time I held my textbook in my hands. Having children, making friends, traveling the world. Everything I accumulated in life, everything I've worked so hard for - now all that is being ripped away. As you can imagine, or as you know, this is hell. But it gets worse. Who can take us seriously when we are so far from who we once were? Our strange behavior and fumbled sentences change other's perception of us and our perception of ourselves. We become ridiculous, incapable, comic. But this is not who we are, this is our disease. And like any disease it has a cause, it has a progression, and it could have a cure. My greatest wish is that my children, our children - the next generation - do not have to face what I am facing. But for the time being, I'm still alive. I know I'm alive. I have people I love dearly. I have things I want to do with my life. I rail against myself for not being able to remember things - but I still have moments in the day of pure happiness and joy. And please do not think that I am suffering. I am not suffering. I am struggling. Struggling to be part of things, to stay connected to whom I was once. So, 'live in the moment' I tell myself. It's really all I can do, live in the moment. And not beat myself up too much... and not beat myself up too much for mastering the art of losing. One thing I will try to hold onto though is the memory of speaking here today. It will go, I know it will. It may be gone by tomorrow. But it means so much to be talking here, today, like my old ambitious self who was so fascinated by communication. Thank you for this opportunity. It means the world to me. Thank you.