For the 1 1/2 years he was the full-time caregiver for his wife, Rita, through all the havoc and heartbreak caused by her early-onset Alzheimer’s disease, Alford Claiborne, 71, needed patience, fortitude and a really good calendar.

As his wife’s nurse, cook, bath, bill payer, meds dis- penser, physical therapist, driver, doctor’s appoint- ment-keeper and medical bureaucracy naviga- tor, Claiborne over the years developed the organiza- tional skills of an air traffic controller.

He created a meticulous system with laminated pages, spiral notebooks, pocket folders and daily planners so he could track the snowballing number of caregiving responsibilities and record every cheer- less milestone of her slow disintegration.

Rita died at the couple’s Encanto home on March 13, and in the months since, Claiborne has been trying to reclaim the second life lost to the disease — his. A lifelong marathoner, he ran his first race in years last month in Dallas. He’s taking care of his own long-neglected and newly diagnosed health is- sues. He’s lost nine of the 24 pounds he put on, is leading a men’s su- pport group at Alzheimer’s San Diego and is spending leisure time with his adult children.

Sitting for an interview on his living room couch recently, Claiborne strained to remember the name of a free Shakespeare production he went to a few months back that was put on by the Old Globe at a local community center.

Frustrated by his clouded memory, he reached for what has become a trusted tether to reality: a paper organizer.

“The calendar,” he said, with a sigh, “looks a little different now.”

For Claiborne, and the estimated 650,000 unpaid family caregivers in San Diego, finding a new life after a loved one’s death can be a challenging task for a family member who provided full-time care.

BY MICHELE PARENTE

Rebuilding after a loved one’s death can be a challenging task for a family member who provided full-time care.

GOOD WEEK

College hoops: New state laws will help lower textbook costs, give home- less students and foster youth break- ing during breaks and make it easier for high schoolers to earn college credit. Happiness (SL)

Adams: The NCAA clears its name against SDSU after finding no rules violations in the men’s basketball program. Play- on, gentlemen.

Andrew Vitale: The Qualifiers will receive a $50,000 prize for creating the algorithm that helped make digital communi- cations possible. A thumbs-up to you, sir.

SoutHWOrLD: The running back suffers terrible citizen’s shopping if he is to be partly foods involved with killer whales. Humans and orcas, what could possibly go wrong?

BAD WEEK

Weather forcing: The first El Niño storms of the season bring flooded streets, waterlogged homes and a deluge of drought irony. And yet, we’re not laughing.

Wall Street: Worries about China make the first trading day of the year the Mother of all Mondays. Where did Santa leave the aspirin?

Winston Shepard: The SDSU bas- ketball player returns from a road trip to find that his apartment was burglarized. But they can’t take the Utah State victory away from him.

Gun math: As President Barack Obama announces modest gun restrictions, new federal data show that 2015 appears to be a record-breaking year for gun sales.

Music history: Groundbreaking French composer and conductor Pierre Boulez dies at the age of 90. A moment of silence? Non!
I've been saying ‘I'm so stunned,’ he said at the meeting, he was met by a show of support for the Alzheimer's organizations. Just four days after Rita's death, he sat in the front row at the board of supervisors meeting as a caregiver and Alzheimer's advocate. From left: Alford Claiborne says it makes him happy to look back at his role as Rita's caregiver. Photo by Michael Casper.

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