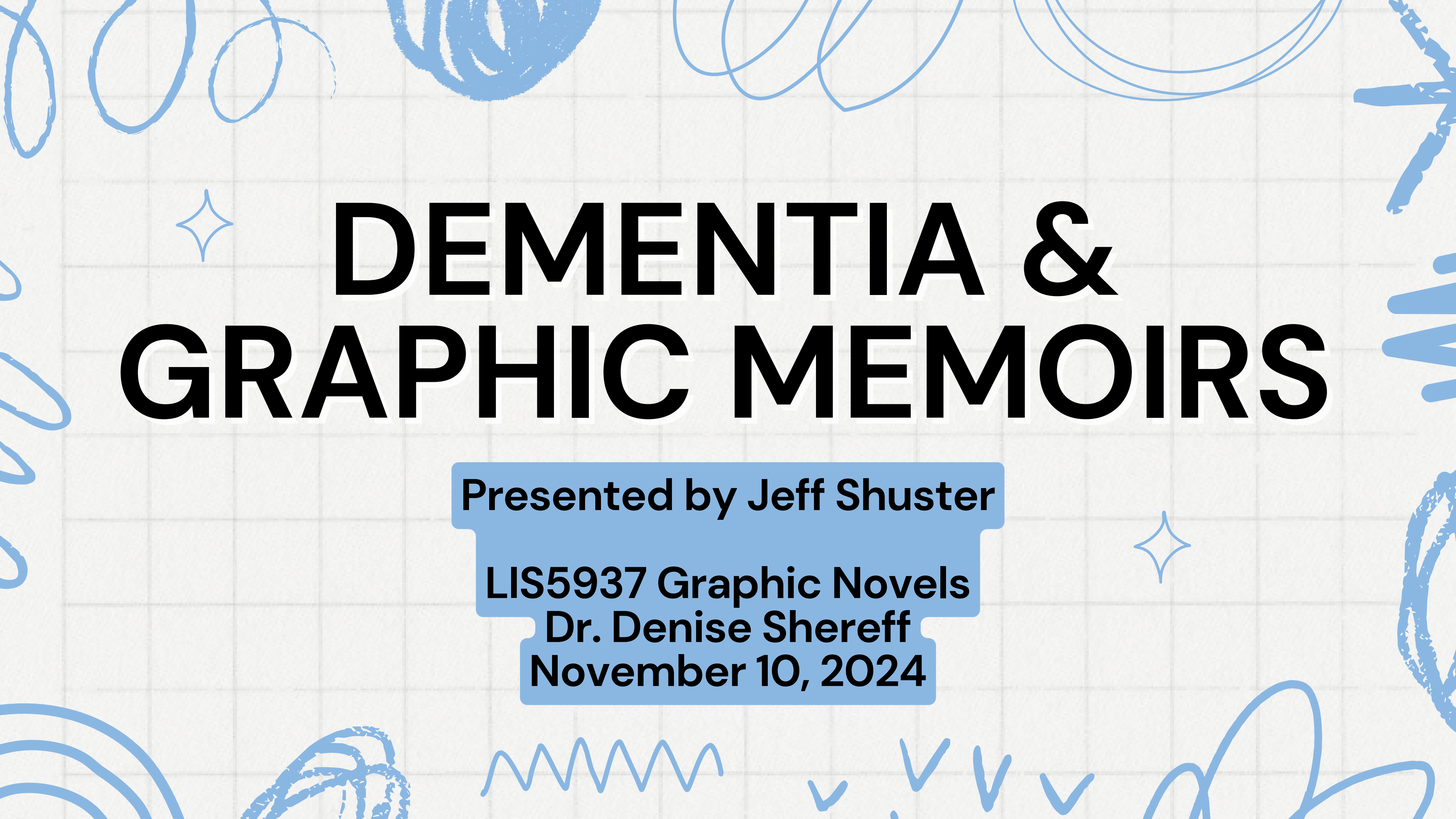




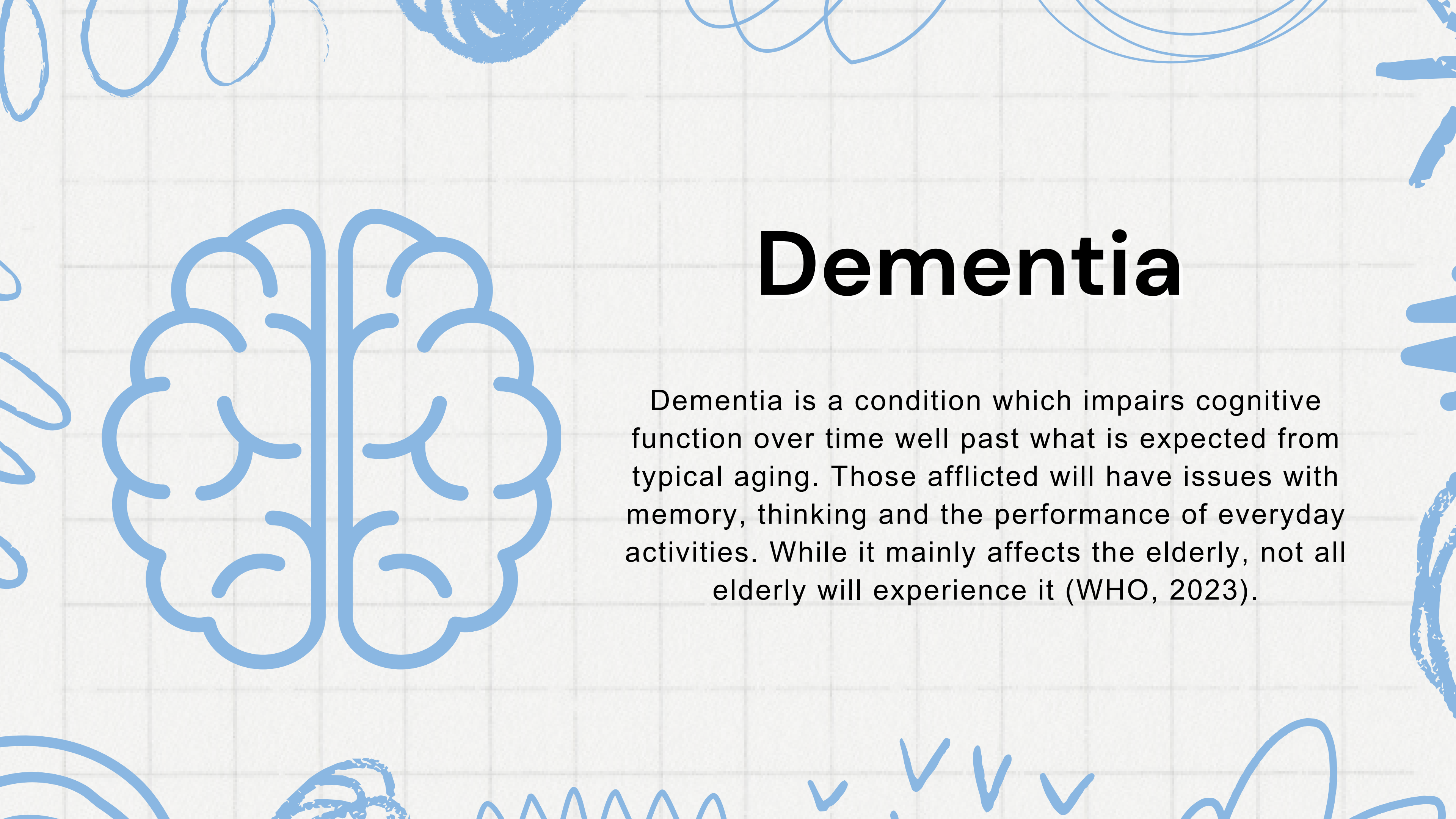
✧ DEMENTIA & GRAPHIC MEMOIRS

Presented by Jeff Shuster

LIS5937 Graphic Novels

Dr. Denise Shereff

November 10, 2024

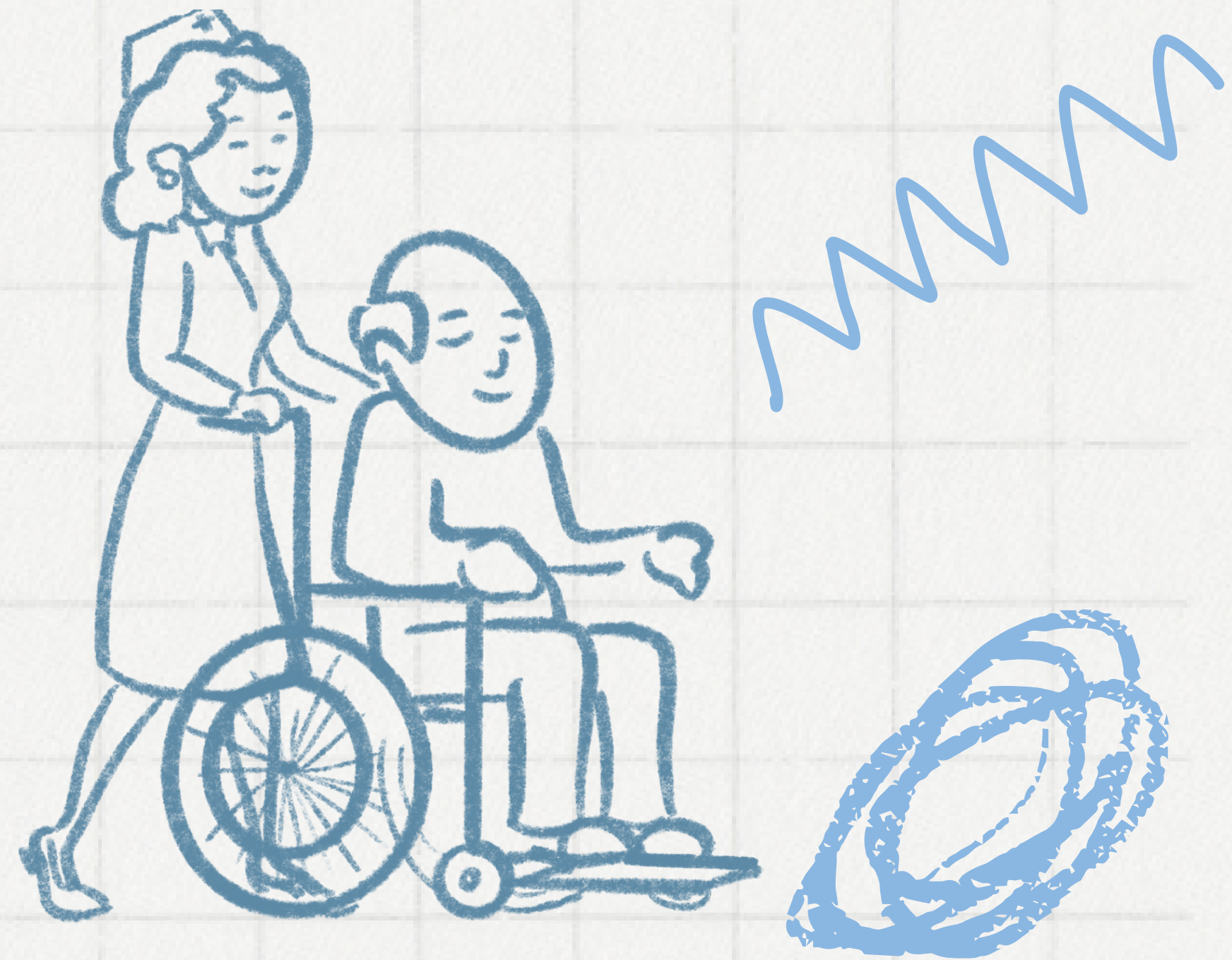


Dementia

Dementia is a condition which impairs cognitive function over time well past what is expected from typical aging. Those afflicted will have issues with memory, thinking and the performance of everyday activities. While it mainly affects the elderly, not all elderly will experience it (WHO, 2023).

Living with Dementia

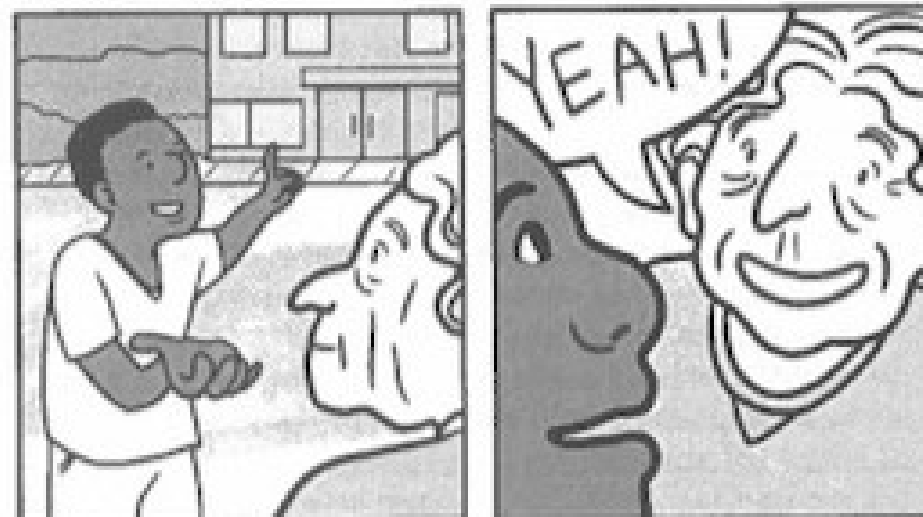
For one of my spring courses, I created a LibGuide focused on Dementia Friendly Libraries. I created the guide in an effort to inform myself and library professionals about this disease which affects more than 55 million people worldwide (WHO, 2023). For this medical module, I decided to revisit this subject and see how it has been portrayed in graphic narrative form



**Dementia Friendly Libraries
LibGuide**

<https://usflis.libguides.com/MemoryCollection>

Dementia in Comics



When volunteering at the nursing home, Ramie would converse with one of the dementia patients by repeating the sounds she made. Illustration by Kate Haberer

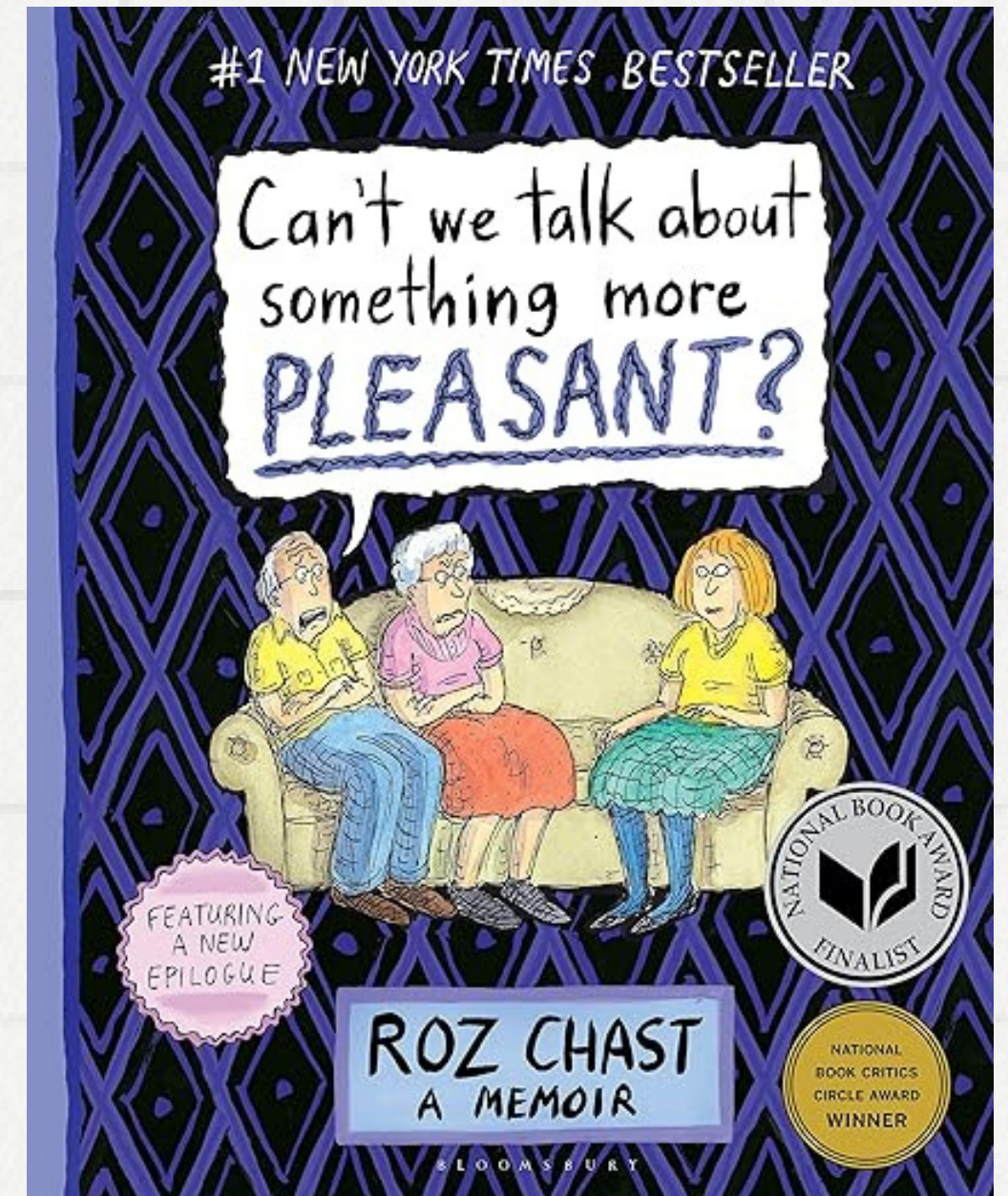
Comics can be used to help patients and caregivers with medical instruction. Here is a guide created to help teenagers deal with a loved one who's been diagnosed with dementia. Comic panels are combined with prose to help inform the reader on what to expect from a loved one with dementia (Rawitt, 2021, p. 40).

The next few slides will showcase memoirs detailing personal experiences with dementia from a caregiver's perspective.

Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?

In *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant: A Memoir*, author Roz Cast details how she became a caregiver for her elderly parents in their final years up until their deaths including the pitfalls of finding them an assisted living facility and round the clock nurse for her mom.

At one point in the memoir, her mother has to stay in the hospital due to complications from a bad fall. When she has to look after her dad during her mother's hospital stay, she notices behaviors in her dad that are symptomatic of dementia.



But as the day went on, he became more and more frantic. Nursing homes call it "sundowning." He convinced himself that a certain neighbor—someone who had occasionally picked up groceries for them and who had shown nothing but concern—was going to break into their apartment and STEAL THEIR BANKBOOKS. He also decided that this person was a Nazi-in-hiding because of her slight German accent.

We visited my mother in the hospital every day, and every day, we stopped by the apartment to make sure the bankbooks were o.k.

By 5 o'clock, we'd be back at my house in Connecticut, and the sundowning would begin.



Sundowning

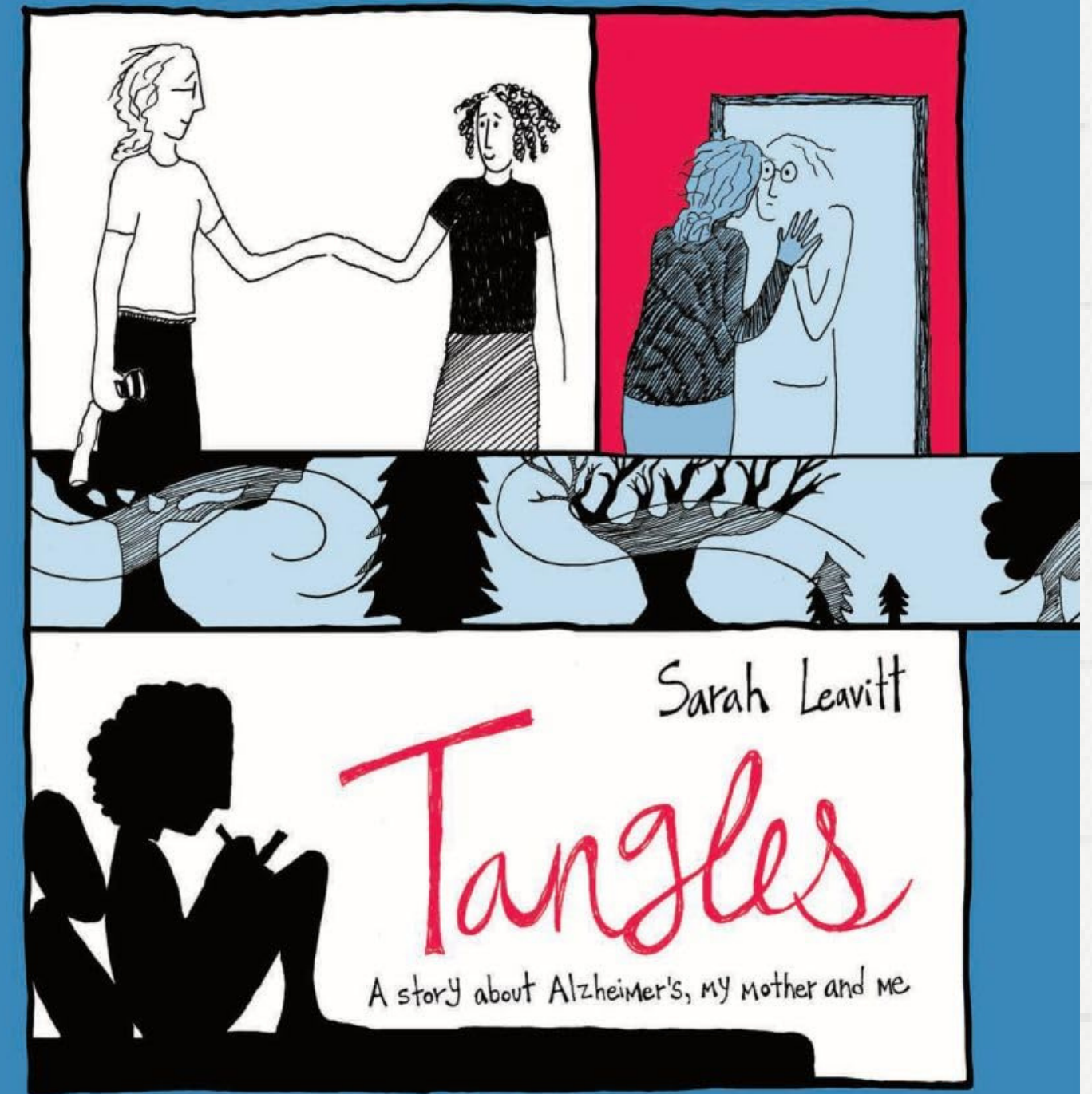
Our narrator reveals that her father would worry about the bankbooks tucked away in his apartment. Even after he and his daughter checked to make sure the bankbooks were safe in the apartment, her dad dad would worry about their safety, convinced a neighbor would break in and steal them (Chast, 2016, p. 72).

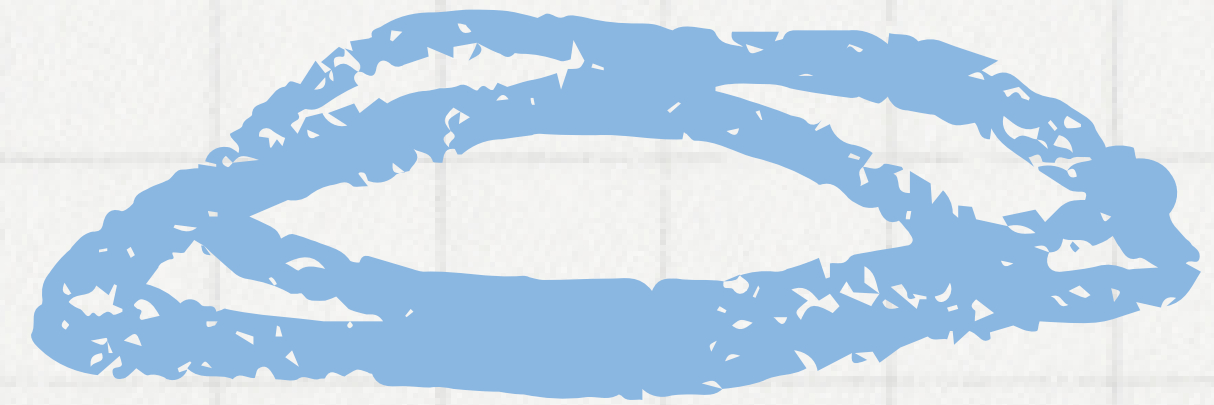
As Alzheimer's gets worse, people with the disease will become agitated. They worry and can't calm down. When this happens later in the day, it's known as sundowning. Roz Chast's father fretting over the bankbooks is an example of this (NIA, 2024, para. 1).

Tangles

In her debut graphic memoir, Sarah Leavitt tells about her mother who started showing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease at age 52. Sarah Leavitt took regular notes and drew pictures during the experience of her mother's decline, trying to "keep every trace of her." (Leavitt, 2010, p. 7).

This was a tough read. Graphic memoirs can put us in the head of the narrator unlike any other medium, but *Tangles* takes us through the gradual decline of a loved one and a family's unrelenting focus to care for her until the end. This is must read for caregivers and readers who want to empathise with those living with dementia.





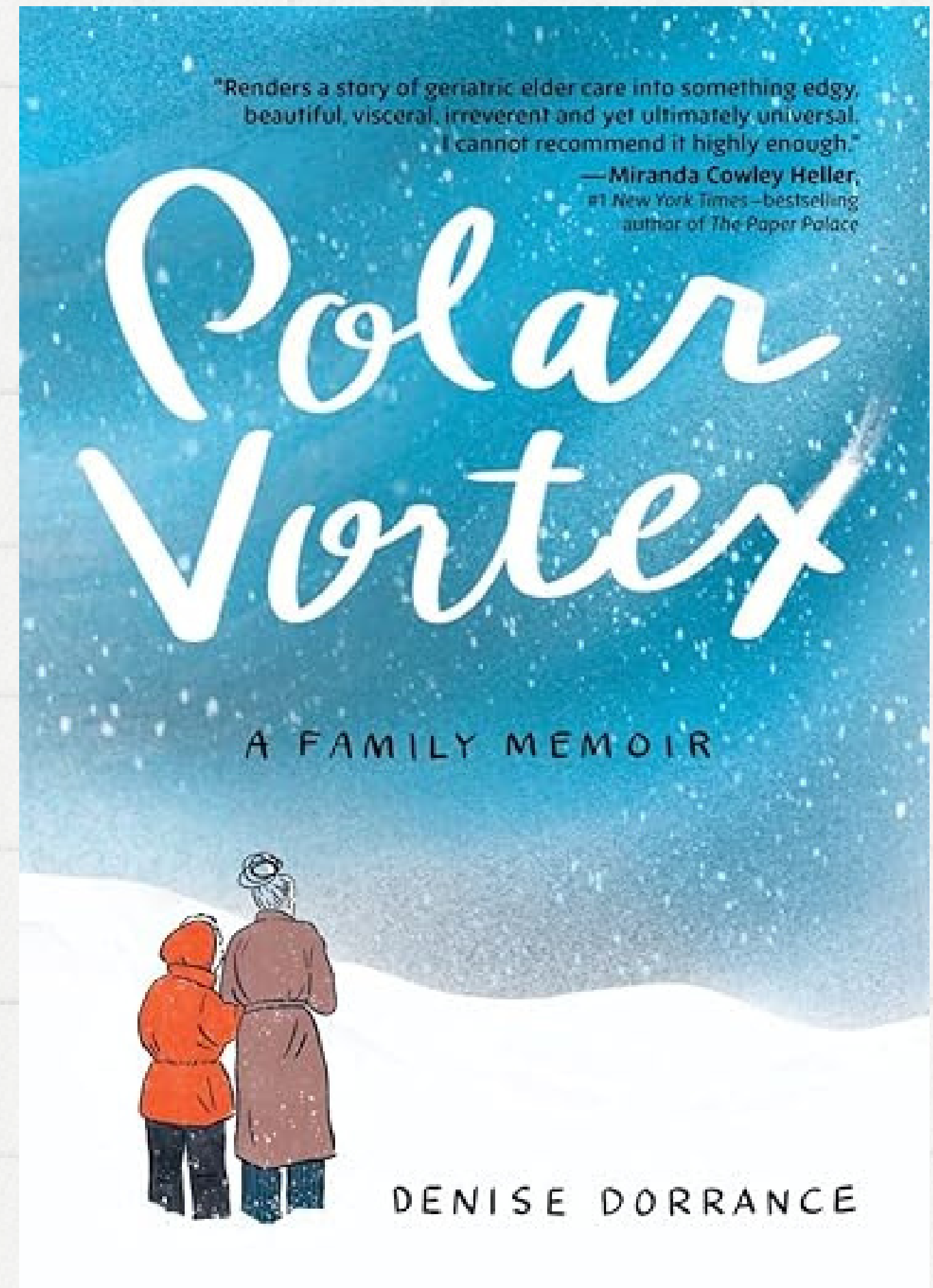
Loss of sense of smell

Loss of sense of smell has been linked to Alzheimer's. This is known as anosmia and is an early indicator of Alzheimer's-related cognitive impairment (NIA, 2022, para. 1)

Our narrator recounts how her mother lost her sense of smell when she could no longer smell ripened tomatoes and garlic. Her mother also began to devour sugar even though she had rejected sweets most of her life. Her loss of smell caused a radical change in her behavior (Leavitt, 2010, p. 59).

Polar Vortex

Denise Dorrance crafted this graphic narrative from the memories of the first weeks of dealing with her elderly mother's dementia and navigating the pitfalls of health care decisions that had to be made. Through humor and heartfelt reflection, our narrator shows caregivers they are not alone in this experience.





Short-term memory loss

While her mother stays in the hospital after a bad fall, our narrator has to keep reminding her mother where she is and what happened to her (Dorrence, 2024, p. 71). One symptom of dementia is forgetting recent events (WHO, 2023).

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