

**Writing Sample: Damian Clarke**

**Brief: Copy for the NRMA Open Road magazine to raise awareness of driving with dementia and to drive enquiries to Alzheimer's Australia and the National Dementia Helpline**

**Ultimate client: Alzheimer's Australia**

**Publication: NRMA Open Road magazine**

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## **Lost and Confused**

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### **Driving with dementia**

Each week 1800 new cases of dementia are diagnosed in Australia and driving is a vexed issue for dementia sufferers, their families and carers.

Imelda's husband suffers from early onset Alzheimer's. "Graham's sense of direction had always been highly developed but now he was having difficulty working out routes which were very familiar. His excellent parking skills were slipping. I spent much of my time in the car praying. We actually had four occasions over the final period, before Graham stopped driving, where the quick reactions of other drivers averted disaster."

In August 2010 a neurologist referred Graham for cognitive screening and a driving assessment. Much to Imelda's dismay, there was a five month waiting list for screening, no driving assessment until June 2011 – and he passed! Six months later Graham refused a repeat assessment and the RTA agreed to cancel his licence.

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and in a terrible state.  
That was the last time he drove a car.**

No cancellation notice arrived so Graham kept driving. Finally, in December 2011, Graham failed to collect Imelda from Strathfield station. She called him. "He said he was somewhere in Burwood but couldn't work out how to get to Strathfield. I said I would walk to where he was but he said he thought he could make it. He sounded awful. He did make it after another long ten minutes. When I got in the car, Graham was shaking uncontrollably and in a terrible state. That was the last time he drove a car."

The NRMA and Alzheimer's Australia have worked together since 2010 and jointly launched [Staying on the Move with Dementia](#), a free guide, in 2014. The Hon John Watkins, is CEO of Alzheimer's Australia and chair of NRMA's Transport and Mobility Needs of Ageing Australians Summit. "We need to ensure the person with dementia is supported to remain independent and to keep driving for as long as it is safe to do so," he said. "And then we must make sure there is appropriate support and information available to the person and their family and carers to make what can be a really difficult transition from driver to non-driver as smooth as possible."

NRMA's President, Kyle Loades agreed, "It's critical that these people and their families have all the information they need to make the right decisions around independent mobility and safety."

Speaking at the launch of Staying on the Move with Dementia, Imelda said, "I have no doubt that, had I been armed with the information, the explanations and the suggestions in this comprehensive document, I would have been able to move from feeling totally alone in a very difficult situation", she said. "Had I been given this document while Graham was still able to read, I'm confident that I would have been able to convince him to move to an earlier decision about his driving."

For more information about Alzheimer's Australia NSW, please visit Alzheimer's Australia NSW (<https://nsw.fightdementia.org.au/>) or call the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.