How I Saved My Grandfather

Scope: What inspired you to help people with Alzheimer’s?
Kenneth: My grandfather has Alzheimer’s, a condition that permanently affects a person’s memory, thinking, and judgment. Patients become disoriented and confused as a result of the illness and can’t remember how to do certain things. If they wander from their homes by themselves, they often can’t remember how to get back.

About two years ago, my grandfather began wandering at night. My aunt, who takes care of him, exhausted herself trying to stay awake to keep an eye on him but often failed to catch him anyway. He once wandered onto an interstate highway while the rest of our family was sleeping. If he hadn’t been found by a policeman, he could have been killed.

So I became very concerned about both my aunt’s well-being and my grandfather’s safety. I searched for a solution to my family’s problem, but I couldn’t really find one, so I thought of one myself.

Scope: You invented SafeWander. How does it work?
Kenneth: A sensor is placed on the patient’s foot or sock. When the patient stands up, a small wireless circuit on the sensor sends an alert to the caregiver’s smartphone. The caregiver will hear the alert, wake up, and stop the patient from leaving the house.

Scope: What is your goal for SafeWander?
Kenneth: At first I wanted to create something to help my family. Then, when I learned that the problems my family faced were just a snapshot of a much bigger issue faced by our entire society, my goal became to create something to protect the millions of Alzheimer’s patients out there and reduce the burdens of their caregivers.

Scope: What have you learned through this process?
Kenneth: Technology can make a huge, positive impact on the world. Anyone can make a difference using technology, if they are persistent and diligent.