**BACK JACKET**

Imagine this...one day you’re living your life and the next day you’re living with dementia. You don’t have it, but you feel like you do because you’re now a caregiver for a parent who’s living with it. No, you didn’t sign up for this, but as an only child, it’s your assignment by default...or is it your assignment by divine. Perspective is everything. You see the change. You know it’s getting worse. Where do you turn when you’re the only one who can step in to protect your loved one’s interests?

**DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to my mother Leonora, the dancing queen and the stage on which she’s been able to shine each day, GoodLife Adult Day Center. One of my favorite memories is Mom dancing her way out of GoodLife after a day of tasty meals, fun activities, and social interactions. When the music starts, suddenly any pain disappears, and the star is reborn. She never misses a beat and out dances the DJ every time. She always has a word of blessing and a spark of energy for everyone she meets. Her energy is one of her most impressive qualities. I thank her for sharing her love of the arts, travel, and laughter.

**CHAPTER 1**

*Scripture*

***“****O God, listen to me! Hear my prayer!**For wherever I am, though far away at the ends of the earth, I will cry to you for help. When my heart is faint and overwhelmed, lead me to the mighty, towering Rock of safety.**For you are my refuge, a high tower where my enemies can never reach me.**I shall live forever in your tabernacle; oh, to be safe beneath the shelter of your wings!**For you have heard my vows, O God, to praiseyou every day, and you have given me the blessings you reserve for those who reverence your name.*

*Psalm 61:1-5, TLB*



I really want to write this book for you. I have a feeling you might need it right about now. There’s a lot going on, right? The devastating diagnosis that your parent has some level of cognitive impairment that has collectively been labeled dementia. The realization that you are going to have to step up in a BIG way to make sure your parent is not just tossed aside by the medical system, by family members, by their community, and/or by society at large. The coming to grips with all the ways you have to protect your parent from all manner of harm. The social, legal, and medical concerns that you will have to address in a short amount of time.

Each of these individual jobs can be quite daunting. You feel like you need a team to handle things, but there’s just you. You’re the one in charge of this mission. You’re the one making the decisions and tackling task after task with the goal of providing comfort and security for your parent. I know, you’re exhausted. Just thinking about it all is freaking you out. But take one thing at a time and you’ll get through it all. I hope the things that I share will help you to get through it all with grace and a grateful spirit.

I am as overwhelmed by the information that I want to share as you are with the tasks that you have to face. Transitions represent some of the biggest challenges when you’re a caregiver. I don’t like them. They’re uncomfortable, but they serve a purpose. You come out of each transition feeling stronger and more confident about facing the challenges ahead. They’re necessary for helping us to move from one stage of life to the next. We transition from crawling to walking, from nonverbal to verbal, from adolescence to adulthood. And one of the most challenging transitions, from adult child to parental caregiver.

There was a time when my mother took me to New York to see Broadway performances. She loved the theatre. She loved it so much that she subscribed to a discount ticket program so that we could go to as many shows as possible. The theatre shows told stories that I had not heard before. The performers told those stories in such an entertaining way. Seeing people acting out the life of a character was an amazing experience. It was a joy to watch those actors embody the characters with such conviction. Actors are very special people. Their ability to express emotions is so powerful the energy reached into the audience and touched parts of me that I didn’t realize existed. Mom and I saw dance performances that made me want jete along the subway platform and glissade into the closing doors of the subway car as we made our way home. I was already a lover of the arts. I remember being in a dance recital when I was in Kindergarten. I wore the cutest little tutu and ballet slippers. As I recall the song, *“People Make the World Go Round,”* by the Stylistics accompanied the group’s choreography. Thinking of that song catapults me back to that moment in time and I can’t help but smile. Watching the various shows that mom and I attended made my love of the arts so much more intense. I wanted to be on that stage, spreading joy and getting the audience out of their everyday routine for a few moments. The arts have a way of helping people to expand their points of view and to explore different ways of dealing with life’s challenges.

There was a time when my mother took me on trips. She loved to travel. I’m

not talking about a subway ride to Coney Island, although we did that too. I’m

talking about a flight to the Bahamas for carnival. Going to Junkanoo was one of

the trips that I will always remember. Junkanoo is a carnival that showcases Bahamian culture. It features a grand parade with colorful costumes, festive floats,

and lots of dancing and merriment. We stayed at a small bed and breakfast and had fun exploring the island together. I’m not sure from where her love of travel originated. Her home is in the Virgin Islands so maybe that has something to do with it. Taking time to visit relatives back home is something that folks from another country have to factor into their lives, especially when children are born abroad. I remember visiting my mother’s childhood home. I distinctly recall the chamber pot. If I had to use the bathroom in the middle of night, I used the pot instead of going outside. That’s right, the toilet was outside. Can you relate?

Staying in the small, bare-bones home let me see how far my mother had come. It made me very proud to be the daughter of such a determined person. As I grow older, I realize just how fiercely she had to work to transition from those early years of scarcity to the successful career that she earned in the United States. Here is a woman who grew up as the eldest of 14 children and a second mother to them all. Although she spent her formative years sharing a small no frills space with several people, she ended up owning her own home and having her own space with indoor plumbing. She worked to be able to show me some of the finer things in life. I never really appreciated her journey until I thought about sharing my journey of becoming her caregiver. That journey began in 2012.

For at least 8 years prior, there were signs of my mom’s cognitive decline. The clutter in her home was an indication of the confusion in her mind. There were so few open surfaces in her place, it was as if she needed to have all of her possessions in sight so she wouldn’t forget what she had. Amongst all those possessions was a foreclosure letter from the bank. The letter was several weeks old and needed to be dealt with as soon as possible. So, one of the first massive tasks on my to-do list was to find an attorney to represent her interests as we addressed this pressing legal matter. I asked for recommendations from people that I knew. I thought that having a referral would give us the best chance of finding someone that would do a good job and be attentive to our situation. I found someone that was quite considerate of my mother’s condition and how it led her to arrive at this unfortunate moment. However, in the end, my mother was given only a couple of months to vacate the property. So, just like that, the next massive task was added to my list. Clear out the house.

I had to make the decisions that my mother could not make. She didn’t want anything to change. She didn’t want to let go of the independent life that she had crafted. She couldn’t admit that she had changed. That she was no longer the capable individual she presented to the world for so many years. She couldn’t admit that the world was noticing the change. She couldn’t admit that the change could have deadly consequences if she didn’t let someone take charge.

She didn’t like this transition and questioned my judgement every step of the way. It would have been much less stressful if both of us were a part of the decision-making process. However, when I tried to get her input on the decisions that had to be made, it was a frustrating endeavor. Even if we worked together to make a decision, her cognitive impairment caused her to forget or misremember what we had discussed. Any moments of clear thinking lasted for a shorter amount of time as the disease progressed. I would have preferred to have her input on decisions that would impact her life long-term, but it wasn’t always possible. Considering the time constraints, it was a lot easier to get the task completed when my mother was not around. As I mentioned, she didn’t want to let go of anything. Therefore, along with the job of clearing the house, I had to figure out where she was going to live when the house finally went into foreclosure.

My mother was desperate to stay in the town in which she was living, so my research began with that goal in mind. I found out about a local presentation being hosted by Nancy, a social worker who worked at a nearby adult day center. I was so happy that we attended because she spoke about the kind of issues my mother was facing. The forgetfulness, the fretting, the confusion, the lack of judgement, and the inability to manage a household. She became a trusted resource that I could count on for information that spoke to our concerns. At the adult day center, her clients spent the day in a safe space, had meals, and enjoyed therapeutic activities and social interactions. There were about 15 clients participating on any given day. I liked that fact that it was a small group. I felt like she wouldn’t get lost in the crowd. For the most part, she’s a “don’t rock the boat” kind of gal and may not always express her displeasure of her needs in a large setting. My mother enjoys being around people and participating in activities, so she was agreeable to going to the day center, so I eventually signed her up to attend Nancy’s day center. Thankfully, they provided transportation, and my mother was able to get in and out of her house independently at that time.

Nancy became a valuable resource for me. I continued to have conversations with her about senior living communities in the area. When I researched her suggestions, I found that the places had a range of prices and amenities. But the bottom line was that they were all very expensive and would become more expensive whenever the managing corporation decided to increase the monthly fees. The one that we could afford at the time was not the greatest, but it allowed her to stay in town as she requested. I was trying my best to honor her wishes. At this assisted living facility, she had to share a room.

In the beginning stages of dementia, my mother had a difficult time going to sleep. Most nights, she would be up worrying and wandering about the house. If she did get to sleep or, at the very least, lay down, only a short time would pass until she’d be back up again worrying and wandering. I found out that she was displaying behaviors known as sundowning or late-day confusion. Sundowning is most often experienced by people with dementia. It can cause a variety of behaviors, including confusion, anxiety, aggression or ignoring directions. Although it can potentially occur at any time, the behaviors typically start or get worse around sundown and lasts into the night. In my mother’s case, worrying and wandering throughout the night did not lend itself to sharing a small space with a person that you don’t know. Needless to say, her roommate was not her biggest fan.

Mind you, my mother was not the biggest fan of assisted living facilities. *“Where’s my bag?” “Where’s my watch?” “These people are thieving my things.” “Where is my check going?” “Who’s taking my money?” “I’ve got to call the bank and find out what’s going on.” “Where’s my cell phone?” “These people are thieves.”* She would complain to me about the staff and the other residents, but would laugh and smile in their presence. In her mind, hiding her things was the answer. When I would come to visit, I would find the things she claimed were stolen in a bag under her bed or in the pocket of one of her coats or stuffed in the back of one of her drawers. Most of the time she was hiding things from herself. I felt like I was being forced to play a game of hide and go seek the things that she said were “lost.” It’s a horrible game. I don’t recommend it.

Nancy was not only a great resource regarding eldercare and care of people living with dementia, but she was a nice person. She was available to take my calls and calm my anxieties about this new caregiving territory that I was living in.

I met a lot of nice people as I researched the best place for my mom. Not only did she need a place to stay, but she needed a particular type of care to keep her healthy, happy, and safe. Unfortunately, the cost of the accommodations and care are out of pocket. If your parent is a veteran of the U.S. military, you should receive a discounted price.

There seems to be a lot of services for seniors, but they do not provide enough assistance to significantly help my mother as she ages with dementia. The programs that supply the most assistance, require the recipient to be penniless. Keep in mind, you will have to provide the individual agency with financial information so they can verify your parent’s eligibility. These agencies are very intrusive. You will not have access to the resources unless they have access to a lot of personal information. Honestly, the beginning of my search for proper senior care was the beginning of my disappointment in the way that this country provides for the health and well-being of older people, especially older people with dementia.



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, dementia is scary. The very thought of it terrifies me. I confess it is difficult to believe you are loving and strong while at the same time you allow this tragedy. Help me believe you have a purpose in all that you do. I want to trust you, but it will be easier if I can get a glimpse of the purpose you intend through dementia. By your Spirit, guide my thinking and my emotional* *responses. I pray this for my good and for your honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (p. 28)*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

Sundowning: Late-day Confusion Information -

*www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/expert-answers/sundowning/faq-20058511*

**CHAPTER 2**

*Scripture*

# *“Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.**For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. The Lord says, “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”*

# *Psalms 32:6-8 NLT*



We are faced with a never-ending stream of decisions from the moment we open our eyes and place our feet on the floor. *“What am I going to wear?” “What am I going to eat?” “What to-do list task do I complete first?” “What street am I going to walk down?” “What time do I have to leave?”*

It's been suggested by the scientific community that people make around 35,000 decisions every day. Most people manage these decisions without much thought. is not important. What is more important than the specific number of daily decisions is that each one carries a consequence be it good or bad. Some of the smallest decisions can result in the biggest consequences. We must pay attention to our choices because, according to John C. Maxwell, *“Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.”* Maxwell is a speaker, leadership/inspirational coach, pastor, and author of “*Success Is a Choice: Make the Choices that Make You Successful,”* from which this quote is derived.

Now add dementia to this decision-making process. The complex thinking of a person living with dementia is severely compromised. This brain cannot successfully make many or any of these daily decisions. That means that this person has to allow others to take charge of a significant part of their life. Each decision that is taken away, has an impact on that person’s self-esteem and sense of identity. If every choice you make makes you who you are, what happens when that person is not making their own choices? Do they lose who they are and how much will be lost?

Why am I telling you about this? Well, I want you to realize that you are caring for a person, not a condition. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to care for all aspects of that person. Their mind is affected by the fact that their brain is shrinking rapidly. But their spirit is just as affected because a variety of their abilities are shrinking rapidly as well. Having the experience of so many skills slipping away from their control makes them behave like a different person.

# In my case, I noticed that something was just not right about my mother’s behavior. There was a lot of verbal repetition. She kept repeating thoughts and asking questions over and over. This was a sign that I needed to be concerned. So, I made an appointment to get help from a professional. I started with her doctor in order to identify the degree of her impairment. If I needed reliable recommendations further into this journey, I figured the doctor would be the one to provide them because he is most familiar with my mother’s condition. The Mayo Clinic provides a resource entitled *“Diagnosing Alzheimer's: How Alzheimer's is Diagnosed”* where you can learn about identifying the symptoms of Alzheimer’s dementia and the ways of diagnosing the condition. It lists the early symptoms you should look out for, the diagnostic assessments that are available, and additional testing recommended by memory care and neurological professionals.

Another behavior that I noticed happening to my mother was getting lost. One day I got to her house, and she wasn’t there. When I called her phone, she said that she was in the car, but couldn’t remember how to get home. After a few questions, I figured out where she was. She was just a few minutes away from her house, but she couldn’t work out how to get back. I drove to meet her so that she could follow me. Issues with the car were not limited to her loss of direction on local streets. As I continued to clear the clutter, I found police reports that indicated she had problems while driving on a highway as well. Even though the routes were familiar to her, it was clear that she could not manage the car now that her cognition was impaired. Soon after discovering the extent of her driving issues, I pushed her to stop driving. Getting lost while driving is one thing, but getting into accidents while driving was something entirely different. Not only can car accidents can be very expensive, but they can be deadly.

Her judgement was compromised is other ways. Driving was just the beginning. Making purchases and judging the authenticity of incoming phone calls became just as impossible to navigate on her own. At that point, I had to make a note of the incidents that I discovered to determine any patterns that I could share when seeking medical/behavioral advice. I tried to talk to my mother about what I observed and my growing concern about her safety. The response was usually, *“I’m fine.” “Don’t worry.”* That response indicated that nothing was going to be resolved after one or two conversations and I would have to be persistent. Of course, persistence doesn’t mean being intimidating or being a bully in order to get your own way. Persistence means staying focusing on your parent’s health, happiness, and safety so that every decision works for their good.

As my mother’s ability to use proper judgement diminished, her ability to live independently diminished as well. Families like mine need assisted living facilities to make this caregiving mission possible. Unfortunately, as my mother requires more support, our experience with assisted living has become more disappointing. Either I’m dealing with the lack of affordable quality facilities or I’m dealing with the lack of proper care delivered by the caregivers at the facilities in which I’ve put my trust. The cost of one of the nicer facilities in the Northeast region is at least $8,000 per month. That’s about what you can expect to pay to have your parent stay in the section designed to service people living with dementia. This section of an assisted living facility is typically known as Memory Care. In the memory care section, there is a smaller number of residents compared to the more independent living section of the facility. You would expect that the quality of care would be equivalent to the amount of money you’re asked to pay however, that is rarely the case. I have found that there are rarely enough staff to deliver the expected care properly. The staff don’t appear to have the training needed to work with people living with dementia. the staff at the last place we used complained about my mother being head strong. Duh, of course she is. She’s in an unfamiliar location with unfamiliar people, and an unfamiliar routine. I really want the assisted living facilities to train caregivers in the to recognize and respond to these basic dementia related behaviors. They also need to hire more caregivers. Often they are understaffed and don’t have the time to care for the residents as compassionately as I would expect.

# Be aware that dementia is an umbrella term that incorporates all manner of cognitive impairment. Memory care services could be labeled as Alzheimer’s and/or dementia. The residents in a memory care unit are unable to complete many of the Activities of Daily Living also known as ADL’s. The more services your parent needs, the more vulnerable they are in these assisted living facilities. When there are too few staff members to properly perform the required tasks, the residents that suffer the most are the ones that need the most care. According to the *National Library of Science* website the basic ADLs include the following categories:

* Ambulating: The extent of an individual’s ability to move from one position to another and walk independently.
* Feeding: The ability of a person to feed oneself.
* Dressing: The ability to select appropriate clothes and to put the clothes on.
* Personal hygiene: The ability to bathe and groom oneself and maintain dental hygiene, nail, and hair care.
* Continence: The ability to control bladder and bowel function
* Toileting: The ability to get to and from the toilet, use it appropriately, and clean oneself.

Typically, the nurse at the facility will assess a new resident to determine their ability to perform each basic ADL. The results affect the level of care a resident would need in order to remain healthy, happy, and safe. The more assistance a resident need, the higher the cost of their stay. The nurse’s assessment can also determine their eligibility for state and federal assistance programs. Also, assessed are the Instrumental ADLs.

The instrumental ADLs are those skills that require more complex thinking. Skills such as:

* Transportation and shopping.
* Managing finances.
* Shopping and meal preparation.
* Housecleaning and home maintenance.
* Managing communication with others.
* Managing medications.

Seniors who live in the more independent section of the assisted living facility are better able to hand most of the ADLs and IADLs on their own. Those residents can do most things for themselves. They have a reasonable portion of their physical and mental ability intact and can handle activities that require mobility and complex thinking skills. Most importantly, they have the use of their voice. They can speak up when things are not satisfactory. They are connected to reality, they have an awareness of their surroundings, and their minds are clearer. They are not living in a mind of tangled thoughts and time periods. Therefore, the lack of staff doesn’t have as much of an impact on their health, happiness, and safety.

I want you to remember the importance of occasionally taking a break from the day-to-day duties of caregiving. Arranging for proper care while you are away is vital. Before you choose an assisted living facility, do a lot of research and ask a lot of questions. Prepare for your assisted living tour by thinking of questions to ask ahead of time. Keep track of the questions and how each community responds. Later you can compare their responses to help you make a final decision. Obtain as much literature as possible from each facility to compare important details that matter to you and your family. Read the online resource entitled, *“Questions to Ask Assisted Living Facilities When Touring,”* for help with crafting your list. This resource is from A Place for Mom, an organization designed to simplify the process of finding senior living and home care by providing personalized guidance to families at no cost to them. The questions should include the following topics:

* Pricing
* Floor plans
* Amenities and services
* Programming and activities
* Levels of care
* Caregiver training
* Staff friendliness
* Staff-to-resident ratio
* Community culture

In my experience, these communities never live up to the glossy brochures and the heartfelt promises presented by the marketing specialist. As a result of my mother’s most recent stays, I do not plan to ever spend money at an assisted living facility ever again. If I have to go out of town, I will only leave her with a friend or a family member that I know and trust or I won’t go out of town.

One of the things that led me to this conclusion is the level of confusion that she experienced when she was there. The longer she stayed in assisted living, the longer it took for her to get back to the level at which she was functioning when she moved in. I was not satisfied with the level of support that she received. My mother presents herself as someone who is a more independent and confident person than she actually is. If the caregiver is not paying attention, he or she will miss the fact that she requires a lot of support to keep her mind and body functioning in a stable manner.

When she is in a strange place, she gets extremely disoriented. Therefore, she needs a higher level of support in the form of more frequent check ins throughout the day and especially overnight. She wouldn’t tell anyone, but the new environment made her anxious. She experienced behaviors associated with sundowning and end up worrying and wandering all over her room. She pulled everything out of the closet and out of the draws in an attempt to make sense of where she is. Unfortunately, at those moments, no staff was there to get her back on track. When they showed up in the morning, they had their list of tasks that the facility requires them to complete, so they didn’t have enough time to put her things back in the proper place. Heck, they didn’t even know how her things were arranged in the first place. Maybe being familiar with how her things were arranged would have shown a family like mine that they were serious about providing a high level of care that was geared to my mother’s individual needs. That seems like it would be a small service to add to their routine, but it would have raised my impression of the staff and the facility.

Another thing was the treatment of her clothing. During the last experience, the care of her clothing was not acceptable. I could tell that the laundering method use water that was too hot because it left her clothes looking blotchy. I had not experienced that problem during previous stays. Another problem was that her items were misplaced and were not available when she was ready to leave. My advice is to take a picture of all the items that you leave with your parent. That way, when you bring your parent home, you can reference the picture(s) to be sure you have all the items you brought on moving in day. If something is misplaced, you can show a picture of it to the staff, so they know exactly what to look for.

The biggest reason for my decision to never have my mother stay in an assisted living facility again is that issue of staffing. There was not enough staff to give my mother the attention that she needed. In addition, they don’t seem to have training that is thorough enough to prepare them to be aware of the various phases of dementia, how to recognize them, and how to address them. The staff was charmed by my mother’s energy and her wit and forgot that she was not as independent as she pretended to be. That perspective caused them to overlook what she really needed. Her easy-going nature is another reason that her needs got overlooked. She didn’t speak up when she needed something. However, if the staff had the proper training related to dementia and enough experience working with people living with dementia, they should have anticipated those needs.

Also, if the staff had fewer residents to care for, they could have had the time to be more attentive. During past visits, that lack of attentiveness led to my mother falling, hurting her head and having to go to the hospital to have the injury stitched up. During past visits, that lack of attentiveness led to her a significant amount of water retention in her legs and poor skin care. Again, I had to take her to the hospital to get evaluated and treated.

If you decide to register your parent into one of these communities, I suggest arranging a respite which means a short period of rest. During the respite, plan to visit your parent at different times of the day. If you can have friends and family join in on this reconnaissance mission, that will add another level of scrutiny to help you make an informed decision. This strategy will give you an opportunity to see how the facility operates. You can get a sense of the number of staff that is on duty and the number of residents for whom they are caring. You’ll also see the condition of the other residents and get a sense of the attention that they require. Being able to see, feel, and taste some of what your parent is experiencing helps you to go beyond the glossy brochure and be more realistic about how the facility can serve the needs of your parent.



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, I know that you are all good and all powerful. If you have entrusted me with the responsibility of caring for a victim of dementia, I pray that you will allow me to find refuge in you. I long to have your wisdom and your strength and pray that you will graciously provide so that I may learn to trust you more. As I see other selfless caregivers sacrificing so much of their lives, I pray for them and ask you to show me how I can be of practical help. I pray this for the good of your people and for your honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (p. 82).*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

National Library of Science - [*www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470404*](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470404/)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

# Diagnosing Alzheimer's: How Alzheimer's is Diagnosed -

*www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alzheimers-disease/in-depth/alzheimers/art-20048075*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

# Questions to Ask Assisted Living Facilities When Touring -

*www.aplaceformom.com/caregiver-resources/articles/choosing-the-right-assisted-living-facility*

# Staff-to-Resident Ratios in Assisted Living: A Detailed Look -

*www.aplaceformom.com/caregiver-resources/articles/staff-ratio-assisted-living*

**CHAPTER 3**

*Scripture*

 *“Don’t panic I’m with you. There’s no need to fear for I’m your God. I’ll give you strength. I’ll help you. I’ll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you.”*

*Isaiah 41:10-12 MSG*



You’re going to need strength. You have a lot to contend with. One of the first things is talking to your parent about how their abilities are changing. This conversation is tricky. Your parent is going through a change that they may not recognize yet. If they do recognize that a change is occurring, they may not want to admit it. Breathe. Find your patience. This may take a more than one or two conversations. Imagine if someone told you that you are not able to conduct your life as usual. No, sorry, you can’t be in the house by yourself. Why? Because you might leave the stove on and burn down the house. No, sorry, you can’t drive. Why? Because you got into a lot of accidents this year. You could have hurt yourself or someone else. No, sorry, you can’t walk to the store to buy a few things. Why? Because you ended up getting lost for hours. When I tried to call you, your phone was still in the house.

Those places never live up to the brochures and heartfelt promises they present when you meet the marketing person. This is a horrible commentary on how our society treats our elderly. The most vulnerable population in our society are very vulnerable when they do not have the personal resources to arrange for the daily care that they need.

Like me, I imagine you would have a hard time accepting any kind of restrictions on your life. No matter the reason, you would fight for your independence. So, get ready for that push back and get ready to back off when the conversation is too adversarial. Plan to revisit the conversation when the emotions are less tense. You’re going to have to figure out the best way to transmit your message to your parent. I sat with my mother in an area that had few distractions. Then I spoke to her in a way that would let her know that I was here to help her live her best life, not destroy her life. I kept the message short and simple. I found that short conversations are the most successful. I always ask her response to what I said. I let her know that her opinion matters. As the disease progressed it was more difficult to obtain an intelligible opinion, but even if I was the one making the final decision, I still asked. Acknowledging that she is still a person who matters. She’s still a person who has a say in what happens in her life.

The Lord says, “When he calls to me, I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him.” Psalm 91:15 ESV.

You are going to have to make a lot of timely decisions in a short time. Each decision has to make sense for your parent’s future comfort and safety, not to mention, your peace of mind. What’s the first step? Get the power to speak on behalf of your parent. Do it now while your parent can understand what’s happening. At some point it’ll more difficult to get any kind of authorization to make decisions on behalf of your parent. This is essential. You are going to need access to financial accounts, medical records, and emails. If your parent is tech savvy and uses online accounts, you need the login information. You may even want to direct important communication to your email address and your mailing address. You do not want to miss any important correspondence that is delivered. Many of them come with a deadline that you do not want to miss. Making the right decision can help to make your life easier and your parent’s life easier for you to manage.

Consider purchasing two items that can boost senior safety. Patients living with any form of dementia are often unaware of their own symptoms and caregivers must take precautions to keep them safe. The first item is a medic alert bracelet for your parent. Medic Alert *(1-800-432-5378)*invented the original medical ID bracelet in 1956. It is globally known and trusted by first responders. If your parent is unable to communicate, the bracelet can deliver essential information to any concerned party. The engraving is always free and allows you to customize the text to describe your parent’s condition. I wish I would have had this item when I was notified that my mother had walked off the premises of the assisted living facility and they had no idea where she was. This incident occurred at the start of us using assisted living. At that time, she stayed in the more independent section. Thankfully, after being missing for several hours, the police returned her to the facility unharmed. But the hours that she was unaccounted for were the most devastating of my life. I was out of town and there was nothing I could do but worry. At the end of the nightmare, I was informed about how she spent those hours. At some point in the day, she walked off the assisted living premises. When the facility realized she was gone, I got the call.

Hours later, my mother somehow ended up 25 miles away, back in the town where she previously lived. She went to a restaurant and ordered a meal. Although she had a purse, she had nothing of significance in it. No ID. No money. Nothing that would allow someone to contact me or get her back to where she was supposed to be. I don’t remember if see had a cell phone at that time. I had to take it away because of the relentless calls from the worst individuals in the world - telemarketers and scammers. These greedy individuals take advantage of older people because their judgement diminishes as they age. They are not able to determine when people are being truthful or deceitful. Therefore, the continuous calls from friendly voices on the line are tremendously confusing. In my mother’s case, she provided them with whatever information they asked for, but didn’t know to ask for information in return. The more she was willing to talk, the more they were willing to cash in on the information. She didn’t have any cash to send, but she did have personal data that they could sell for cash.

When the restaurant realized she could not pay for her meal, one of the other customers offered to pay for her. Apparently, they realized that she didn’t know where she was, how she got there, or from where she had come. They called the police to help her figure out how to get back safely. Somehow the conversation with the customer or the police revealed my name, and someone contacted me to let me know what had happened. The Medic Alert bracelet would have been invaluable for that occasion. Whoever helped her get to her old town could have used it to get her back to the facility within a several minutes rather than several hours.

The second item relates to senior monitoring systems. There are a variety of devices that can be used both inside and outside of the house. Senior monitoring systems help to lessen dangers such as wandering, falling, and medication mistakes. The Alzheimer's Store *(*[*www.alzstore.com*](http://www.alzstore.com)*)* is constantly testing products for Senior Safety. The products that they offer can help you to determine the kind of devices that you need to keep your parent safe. Security cameras that you can access on your smartphone can give you piece of mind. Some cameras have a two-way audio feature that allows you to communicate with your parent. You can see and address any hazards no matter where you are in or outside of the house. would advise you to get these items in place especially if your parent is living with you. When my mother first came to live with me, she seemed to be capable of taking care of herself. I wasn’t as aware of the varying degrees of her cognitive condition. I didn’t realize she would need so much monitoring at that point. So, when I went to work that morning, I expected she would just wake up in her own time. I expected that she would get to the bathroom, clean up a bit, and head to the kitchen. I expected she would find one of the plates that I prepared in the refrigerator, heat it in the microwave and watch TV for a while. Well on this day, only one of those things happened. She woke up in her own time.

After that, she fell and couldn’t get up. I’m not sure how long she’d been on the bedroom floor, but when I returned, the strong smell of urine was the indication that something went horribly wrong. If I had a camera to monitor the room, I would have been able to see and address the problem before it got so out of hand.

As you may know, attorneys often specialize in a particular area of law. Your best bet is to find one that specializes in Eldercare law this person can help you to anticipate the kinds of options that are available to your family. If your parent served in the military, you may have opportunities to get discounts on the services that you will be accessing in the upcoming months. If your parent owns property, you’ll have to determine whether to keep or sell. Remember that keeping means costs for property maintenance, taxes, and security. Selling means clearing out the house, dealing with the buyers, and the paperwork. That’s why it’s so important to have the power to make decisions on your parent’s behalf.

Or maybe you’re like me and the property is in foreclosure. That makes things easier. The only thing on the to do list is clearing it all out. Yeah, that was a rough month. I’m still paying storage fees for storing stuff that I don’t remember packing. Yeah, I got to get the unit cleared out and stop wasting money. Be careful of those services that cost you money. If your parent has credit cards and bank accounts get access and consider moving the money to a joint account with both of your names on it. This money is for your parent. Use it to handle costs related to your parent’s needs. If you’re tempted to use it to do other things that don’t relate to your parent, I advise you to give this book and the financial responsibility to someone else. The quality of your parent’s life and their dignity is at stake. Now is the time to do your best. Even if that means handing over the responsibility to someone else. Always remember it’s all about your parent, not you. Your parent is the reason you’re reading this book. Increasing your knowledge of the disease your parent is facing is one of the many steps that you will face on this journey. You can’t fight what you don’t understand.

Knowing your parent’s diagnosis is a scary moment. Now you have a reason for all the incidents that have been happening to your parent. Now you have an answer to the many questions you’ve asked over and over. “What’s going on?” “Is this a serious condition or just a little forgetfulness?” “How do we deal with this?” Doing your research is going to help both of you to make decisions that focus on the comfort and safety of your parent. There are plenty of resources that will give you a working knowledge of dementia. Reading about caregiving is a good place to start. There is a thorough online resource called Guide to Being a Caregiver that you can find at https://www.medicarefaq.com/guide-to-being-a-caregiver. It covers a lot of the aspects of what to expect when becoming a caregiver. Caregiving is not just the job of ticking off items on a checklist. Yes, there are things that you have to do for your parent on a short- or long-term basis. Yes, you do have to put plans in place to make sure that those things are accomplished in a timely fashion. However, on top of that assignment, you will not only be focused on what to do, but how to do it in a way that preserves your parent’s dignity and mental well-being. Getting along and being in agreeable is going to go a long way on this caregiving journey.

The www.alz.org site is a good place to go often. On the site you will find many resources, support groups, and webinars that get you informed about the disease and its progression. Another helpful site is <https://arden-courts.org/virtual-events> where you will find informative live and recorded webinars presented by experienced authorities on the topic. I did not have a positive in-person experience with their company, but I can highly recommend their virtual learning offering. From these sites you’ll not only learn about the disease, but you’ll learn about all the additional things on which you should be focused as you help your parent.

Dr. John Dunlop, a specialist in gerontology was interviewed on a podcast entitled “Think Biblically: Conversation on Faith and Culture.” In the interview, Dr. Dunlop said *“He's using dementia to help develop our characters and transform us. Defeating sin. Many people with dementia, it's a great defeat for their pride. And teaching their caregivers to depend more on him.”* Read or listen to the entire interview at Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia - Think Biblically - Biola University.pdf



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, I am grateful that you have placed me in the body of Christ. I recognize that no local church is everything it should be, but because you are there, it has great potential. I pray for my church and other churches in my community, that you will use them to prepare your people to deal with dementia and then stand by families as they are called to go through the experience. I pray this for the good of all your people and for your honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (p. 154)*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

MedicAlert - [*www.medicalert.org*](https://www.medicalert.org) - *1-800-432-5378*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

The Alzheimer's Store -[*www.alzstore.com*](http://www.alzstore.com)

**CHAPTER 4**

*Scripture*

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.”*

*Psalms 57:2 ESV*



According to an article in NEAToday Magazine, About 20 million adult children are caring for a parent or in-law, according to Frances Hall, executive director of Adult Children of Aging Parents. And that number is increasing rapidly, according to AARP.

The article entitled “When Retirement Means Caring for Your Parents,” goes on to quote Kate Granigan, president of the Aging Life Care Association who says “Parents are living longer. It can be a challenging, frustrating, and confusing time—and more people are facing it.” The tasks required may seem overwhelming. Research shows that people who take care of their aging parents overwhelmingly believe the caregiving journey is worth the difficulties, Hall says.

“It can involve interpreting medical advice and test results, helping loved ones stay engaged physically and emotionally, managing financial affairs, preparing meals, or taking care of housekeeping—and constantly being on alert for when the next shoe is going to drop,” Granigan says, acknowledging that this uncertainty creates anxiety. “Many people in these roles don’t see themselves as caregivers, but they are.”

She points out that families often don’t anticipate or identify future needs early enough and stumble into the role through “caregiver creep.” What begins as an occasional visit or a few rides to the doctor becomes much more responsibility. Families should determine caregiving responsibilities early and distribute them fairly, Granigan advises.

“All it takes is one fall, one accident, or one diagnosis to send everything into a tailspin and turn a family’s world upside down,” Hall says. “Sometimes critical decisions must be made quickly. Families should do their homework before it is an emergency.”

The purpose of this book is to share my experience of becoming a caregiver and growing to embrace the role. I want it to help you to understand what it means to be a caregiver so that you can decide whether you want to assume that role. Remember it is for an undetermined amount of time. Once that decision is made, I want to help you navigate the challenge of life as a caregiver. Although it’s often thought of as a challenge, changing the way the caregiver thinks about caregiving can uncover opportunities that benefit all parties.

Always remember that this time with your parent won’t last forever. So, you want to make the most of every moment. Think about how to make special moments that you can commit to memory and recall when your days of caregiving end. Take pictures and put them in places where your parent can see them. I have a digital photo frame onto which I upload images. The images rotate continuously. Talk to your parent about the images when they appear. “Who is that?” “What’s happening in the picture?” Engaging in discussions with your parent is an important part of exercising brain functions. Although they are deteriorating, these kinds of activities can help to decelerate the process. Another strategy is to label the people in each picture so that your parent can have another way to make a connection. Use the text feature in your photo software to write text onto your image. My mother and I took a picture in front of the mantel piece wearing matching Christmas pajamas.

While you’ve been reading the information that I am sharing, you have also been reading the prayers at the end of each chapter. These prayers help me when I’m experiencing difficult days so I hope they will help you too. I found these prayers in a book that I read called *“Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia”* by Dr. John Dunlop, a specialist in the field of gerontology. Dr. John Dunlop not only looks at dementia from a scientific perspective, but he also looks at it from a spiritual perspective. Dr. Dunlop uses his experiences working with many patients and their families in order to make their lives more livable. This is a must read for every caregiver, especially those who draw strength from God’s word.



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, as I confront dementia, I am fully aware that there is little I can do to control the disease itself. I am thankful that my life is in your hands and that I can trust you. I pray that I will have wisdom to take advantage of the treatments you have provided, but I know they will not do anything unless you are in them. I am grateful that the ability to cure is in your hands, and if it be your will, I pray for that. If not, I pray for the ability to cope and that this dementia would accomplish your sovereign purpose, for I know that you are loving and strong. I pray this for my good and for your honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (p. 60).*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

# When Retirement Means Caring for Your Parents -

# *www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/when-retirement-means-caring-your-parents?utm\_source=neatoday&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=20240523\_retirednewsletter&ms=email\_neatoday\_20240523\_retirednewsletter*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

“Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia” by Dr. John Dunlop

**CHAPTER 5**

# *Scripture*

# *“Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter varioustrials,knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

# *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*

# *James 1:2-5, NASB*



Right about now, you’re appreciating the enormity of this caregiving mission. But you’re still with me, so I think you have the strength to endure the challenges ahead. I’m proud of you for doing your research. The greater your knowledge, the greater your value to your parent. When you have more knowledge, you have more options. When you’re preparing to be the best caregiver you can be, one important thing you need are options. Especially when you’re building your support system.

You may be an only child, but you don’t have to be the only one contributing to the success of this mission. An African proverb reminds us that it takes a village. There are a lot of tasks that need to be completed as you begin your caregiver journey. I know you’re skilled and qualified to do many things, but you will burn yourself out if you try to do it all on your own. You don’t need to be an expert in everything. Remember your main role is to be an advocate for your parent. That means putting people in place to help you cross a few tasks off your To-Do list. That doesn’t make you any less skilled or qualified, it makes you more likely to succeed. Now let’s build your support system.

Let’s start with your medical department. This department supports your overall wellness. Just as you care for your parent’s health, you must care for your own. Your good health is your parent’s lifeline. If you’re not well enough to care for yourself, you cannot care for your parent. Use your health care resources to maintain your physical and mental well-being. Regular trips to your general practitioner are essential. You may need to talk with a professional to maintain your ability to “keep it together.” The healthier you are, the more helpful you can be. Keep in mind, your goal is to help your parent live life with dementia in a way that assures them the maximum level of quality and dignity.

Next, your community outreach department. This department supports your efforts to maintain your identity. It comprises of resources that can help you to continue to be your own person. The demands of being a caregiver can be great. They may be so great that you must consistently put aside the activities and routines that give your life joy and meaning. Finding people and places to assist with caregiving is a challenge. Not only do they have to provide the resources that you need, but they must be reliable, competent, and trustworthy. Face it, at some point, you’re going to need a break. Your hope is that your substitute will care for your parent’s physical and mental well-being just as well or better than you do. I hear you asking me, “Where do I find someone/someplace like that?” Word of mouth is a good start. Ask advice from people that are in or have been in a similar situation. Those people may be family members, church members, colleagues, and/or members of your social or professional organizations. Getting their personal recommendations inspires confidence and delivers a higher probability that things will work out.

Additional options are your doctor’s office, the Adult Day Center or Senior Center in your town, and/or the Senior Services department in your state. These agencies can tell you about the caregiving services available to your family. They may be able to refer you to a social worker who can direct you to resources that help you to manage many of your caregiving responsibilities.

Remember, you will still have to interview the people that you want to add to your Community Outreach Department. They are your potential employees. You must be as certain as possible that they are a good fit for your family. They must provide the help that you need while meeting your standards of care. There’s an article entitled “Senior Caregiver Interview Questions to ask when Hiring,” that provides a list of interview questions you’ll want to ask a candidate when discussing a position as caregiver for your parent. There are questions that cover the basic interview topics; questions that explore their employment background, and questions that clarify the duties and expectations of the position. More advanced questions help you to discuss safety issues, review potential scenarios, and identify red flags in the candidate’s background.

Next, your Accounts/Receivable department. This department supports your financial wellness. Unless you have someone helping you with money matters, you are the Accounts/Receivable department. You handle the bills, the payments, the deposits and the savings. You’re also keeping in mind that all those funds are for your parent. They are necessary to cover costs such as medical services, prescriptions, day center facility, home healthcare aides, food, clothing, travel, and housing. No shopping sprees for you. Whatever is needed to keep your parent living in a comfortable, dignified manner comes out of that money.

# As such your first order of business is to be named your parent’s Power of Attorney. According to AARP in an article entitled, *“Powers of Attorney: Crucial Documents for Caregiving,”* the power of attorney (POA) is a powerful legal document. It can give tremendous authority to another person, including the right to access bank accounts and to make decisions on your parent’s behalf. In times of crisis or declining health, a power of attorney is the essential tool in your

# caregiver toolkit. AARP also has a Family Caregiving Toolkit that provides counsel. Check with an attorney to make sure you have the correct POA for your family’s needs.

My last suggestion is your legal department. This department supports just and equitable treatment for your family. Even before you have a problem, find a legal representative that will have your back and keep them on board. This may be an attorney who does the work for you or one that advises you about how to do the work for yourself. Your legal department will help you to craft important documents that will allow you to protect your parent’s assets and identity. If you plan to use assisted living facilities, you’re going to need to be ready to be go toe to toe with their administration’s legal department. These facilities prepare to refute and/or ignore claims of neglect. Therefore, you should prepare to move forward with your claims despite their attempts to intimidate you. A letter to the company head is a powerful action, especially if it is on law firm letterhead. The director of the facility is always interested in maintaining their position and moving up the ladder. A letter from you may endanger those goals. If your situation is publicized, other families going through the same situation may want to unite to confront them. That’s not a good look for the company. Their ability to bring in business will impact their bottom-line. In the end, that is their priority. However, your priority is your parent and their well-being.



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, as I consider all the needs that dementia presents, it is overwhelming. I feel so inadequate. I know I am weak, but you are strong. Grant me the love, strength, insight, discernment, and wisdom to provide for the needs that confront me. I pray this for my own good and for your honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (p. 140).*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

Senior Caregiver Interview Questions to ask when Hiring -[*https://www.care.com/c/senior-caregiver-interview-tips*](https://www.care.com/c/senior-caregiver-interview-tips)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

# Powers of Attorney: Crucial Documents for Caregiving -

[*www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2019/types-of-power-of-attorney.html*](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving/financial-legal/info-2019/types-of-power-of-attorney.html)

Family Caregiving Toolkit - *www.aarp.org/caregiving/caregiving-tools*

**CHAPTER 6**

*Scripture*

***“****Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done.**Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

*Philippians 4:6-7 NLT*



I am the only child of a parent living with dementia. If dementia had to happen, I’m grateful to be in a position to help to bridge the gaps in the road. I am no longer at the beginning of this journey. At times it has gotten a lot heavier than I ever thought it could be, but I am so grateful that I am much further down the road. Even though it is a lot to wrap my brain around and a lot to wrap my life around, I am also grateful that I am not at the end of this journey.

All the resources that I have recommended to you, were necessary to get me to this point along the road. The road is not as curvy as it used to be, and I have a better sense of what may be up ahead. The blockages and potholes that I had to dodge at the start, have decreased because I put the basic financial and medical business accounts in place. Although things are in place, that doesn’t mean I can get comfortable. Now my job is to monitor and maintain everything to keep it all working efficiently. If any changes are necessary for the benefit of my parent’s health or resources, fortunately, I still have time to make them. A big part of monitoring and maintaining requires me to keep educating myself about updates in the field of eldercare. Only then can I determine if a new plan is useful or not. Thankfully, there’s not much that has had to be changed so my energy can be focused on the day-to-day tasks that keep the practical pieces of life in place. With that in mind, here are some resources to help you educate yourself.

First, there is a thorough online resource called “Guide to Being a Caregiver.” As you have learned, the job of caregiver often means facing unfamiliar responsibilities, stress, and a fear of the unknown. This resource is a guide that can help you gain confidence, useful skills and a better understanding of what it takes to be a caregiver. It covers many aspects of what to expect when becoming a caregiver or hiring a caregiver. The topics you will explore are:

1. What Is a Caregiver?
2. What Are the 4 Types of Caregivers?
3. Roles of a Caregiver
4. How to Become a Caregiver
5. Caregiver Stress
6. Who Qualifies as a Caregiver Under Medicare Rules?
7. How to Find a Caregiver
8. Caregiver Assistance

Next, check out the Alzheimer’s Association website. It is a good place to go on a regular basis. There are workshops and events in which you can participate as well as support groups to help you stay encouraged. The organization publishes the ALZ magazine that shares inspiration and information about the fight to end Alzheimer’s and offers tips on how to make your brain the focus of a healthy lifestyle. You can subscribe to stay informed.

# Another resource is from Comprehensive Services on Aging (COPSA). COPSA provides compassionate and sensitive mental health care to the elderly. A multidisciplinary team of Geriatric Psychiatrists, social workers, trainers and peer support specialists provide expert care and support for individuals and their families dealing with memory loss. The COPSA Institute for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders is a statewide program that includes the Memory Disorders Clinic, Care2Caregivers Helpline, Training and Consultation Department.  Institute staff train and provide consultation to geriatric professionals and community members throughout New Jersey.

This part that is of interest to you is the library of materials COPSA provides. The educational guides and brochures cover a wide range of subjects to assist both family members and professional caregivers supporting persons dealing with memory loss and a variety of age-related brain disorders. All materials can be downloaded and/or printed for your reference. There are also videos that you can watch online. If you prefer a print version, you can order by clicking on the links provided. The guides and brochures cover topics such as:

1. Strategies for Keeping Your Loved One Engaged
2. After Your Loved One Moves to a Long-Term Care Facility … What Now?
3. Brain Health
4. Calming an Anxious Person: Rx for Caregivers
5. Communication: Breaking Through the Barriers
6. Dealing with Challenging Behaviors
7. Emergency Care Planning: Are You Prepared for All the What Ifs?
8. Family Caregivers: Special Considerations
9. Healthy Aging
10. Incontinence and Memory Loss
11. Newly Diagnosed … What Now?
12. Nutrition and Memory Loss
13. Self-Care for the Caregiver: Taking Care of Yourself is Important Too
14. Shadowing
15. Signs That Your Family Member May Need Assistance
16. Sleep and Memory Loss: Tips to Help You and Your Loved One Get a Good Night’s Sleep
17. Types of Care: What Type of Care Do I Need?
18. Types of Dementia
19. Understanding Caregiver Grief and Loss
20. What Type of Doctor Do I Need?
21. When Your Loved One Doesn’t Recognize You
22. Care2Caregivers Brochure
23. COPSA Institute Brochure

I would also recommend that you watch a documentary called “The Alzheimer’s Project.” According to the summary, Alzheimer's disease is the second-most-feared illness in America, after cancer. I know I am one of those fear filled folks because Alzheimer’s disease is an irreversible brain disorder that destroys a person's memory and thinking skills. It is a disease that affects millions of Americans but unfortunately, there are so few affordable services that provide significant help for those that are affected. HBO responded to this fear by producing “The Alzheimer’s Project,” a multi-part campaign that looks at the causes, symptoms, treatments and possible cures for this progressive brain disorder. The series profiles seven people living through various stages of Alzheimer's disease to bring forth a new understanding of the disease. It takes a close look at the effects the fatal disease has on both the patients and their loved ones. It is a groundbreaking collection of documentaries that look at Alzheimer's disease and its devastating impact.

# As you consider the condition of your parent, you may be concerned about your future cognitive abilities. There are some things you can do to keep your brain healthy. In November 2023, AARP published an article entitled *“7 Super Secrets of the Super Agers.”* The tips in the article help you to design a lifestyle that will give you a chance at aging in a healthy way. I encourage you to read it. Until then focus your efforts on the following habits:

1. Control your blood sugar and blood pressure.
2. Avoid stress and take care of your mental health.
3. Protect your vision and hearing.
4. Prioritize sleep.
5. Provide your brain with a variety of activities.
6. Stay connected with friends and social groups.
7. Exercises that focus on improving your speed, mobility, agility and balance. By the way, put a smile on your face when you exercise. It sends a message to your brain that you’re having a happy time doing your reps. I know...it sounds wacky, but it works. Give it a try.

Just like when you exercise, when you help your parent, you will be assuming some uncomfortable positions. I suggest you put a smile on your face for those moments as well. You’ll send a message to your brain that you’re having a happy time completing the task at hand. There’s a saying that states, “Your attitude determines your altitude.” I had that sign hung up in my classroom when I worked as an educator. That affirmation was often the difference between failure and success for students and staff. It’s the figurative difference between living and dying. I understand the word dying can mean many things.

In this instance, I am talking about how your new role can chip away at the person that you were before becoming a caregiver. You have to use a lot of your energy to care for your parent. Therefore, you will not have a lot of energy to participate in some of your previous events and activities. Yes, that bit of life has to change. If you have dedicated, reliable support then you have a chance to hold on to the way of life that you are accustomed to living. For most of us, this is the greatest challenge. For me, I can do all things…during the day between the hours of 9a-3p. Then, like a parent with school aged children when the clock chimes 3pm, it’s all about the homestead. Get out of your “school” clothes, wash up for dinner, watch a little TV, take your meds, get ready for bed. That’s our routine. For the most part it works for us both. The routines help me to stay focused on her needs. The routines help me to stay ahead of those needs on a regular basis to avoid surprises. That’s the approach that helped me to deal with the caregiving position that I was called to assume.

Everyday starts with waking my mom up at @8am. On the days when she attends the day center, she is ready to leave @8:30am. That means that I have to get myself up and ready earlier. Incontinence is an issue that we deal with daily. Each day requires a quick soap and water wash of her private areas. Letting soiled clothing and waste stay on the skin is detrimental to the health of the skin specifically and overall health in general. Without regular care, there’s a great chance that the skin will breakdown, crack, and get infected. Once that happens, it can lead to serious illness. The skin is the human body’s largest organ. If it breaks down or cracks in any way, those cracks in the skin provide a pathway for infections. Infections left unchecked could impact the circulatory system and require treatment such as antibiotics or something more invasive. Therefore, this routine is a permanent part of our process to stay ahead of any deterioration that can turn into something critical.

Time to get out the door and into the car. On our way to the day center, we have a conversation to help me get a sense of the current state of her mind. “Do you know where your going?” “What happens when you get there?” “What’s an example of a breakfast food?” What is the next meal?” “What’s an example of a lunch food?” “What do they serve at the end of the day?” “What’s another example of a snack food?” If her responses are on sensible, I feel good that her mood is balanced, and she’s maintaining her current level of cognition. If the responses are mixed-up and/or not forthcoming, I know that we need to do something different or have something checked. Maybe go to bed earlier, or adjust the temperature in the bedroom, or go to the doctor for a checkup. Usually, the doctor will check for a urinary tract infection (UTI). Typically, the symptoms of a UTI are burning pain and frequent urination. However, in older adults, especially those with dementia, it may present as abnormal behavior such as confusion and lethargy.

If Mom’s behavior is a bit “off,” when we get to GoodLife Adult Day Center, there is a lovely atmosphere that helps her turn it around. She is greeted warmly by staff and the aroma of a tasty meal. There is also a medical component to this facility where her vital signs are checked regularly. She is presented with opportunities to socialize and experience different activities. As I mentioned before, staying connected to friends, family, and social groups is necessary for healthy aging. I really wish the day center had a respite program. That would be the cherry on top. If day centers had a respite component that would cause a lot less disruption to my mother’s mental stability.

When we get home in the afternoon, it’s time for skincare or shower. Once again, regular skincare from head to toe is necessary to keep the skin hydrated, prevent sores, and address skin breaks and bruises. This is one of the critical features of caregiving and the best way to stay ahead of detrimental health conditions. After caring for her skin and changing out of her day clothes, she’s ready to eat. I cook the meals from scratch, but when I don’t have time, there are services that deliver nutritious meals. I’ve tried several of these programs, but the one I like the most is Cook Unity. This program is my top choice because they use minimal packaging. The other programs were frustrating because I would have to deal with recycling so much material. Cook Unity delivers the meals in reusable bags that are returned when a new order is delivered. Another reason is that there are a variety of meals, and they change often. The meals are easy to heat and delicious to eat. It’s an option worth considering when the need arises.

Mom’s appetite is usually good, but she eats very slowly. So, there are times when bedtime is pushed back while she tries to finish her meal. Next, it’s toilet and teeth. One last attempt to empty her bladder and perform oral hygiene. Finally, there’s bedtime routine. We do a quick calendar activity to hopefully orient her in time. I help her to find the current and determine what the next day is on the calendar. Then I have her recite the Lord’s prayer. Again, it’s the end of the day check of her level of cognition. Always end with a positive word and bid her a good rest.

#### Whenever you part from your parent, always part with an uplifting comment that is inspiring, lifegiving, affirming, and positive. If you are huggers, hug. If you are the “I love you” type, say it. Whatever your tradition, don’t miss a chance to exercise it. Afterall, as scripture says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.” Proverbs 27:1, NIV



*Prayer*

*Heavenly Father, now that I know more about healthy and diseased brains, I want to thank you for the miracle that my brain is. Don’t let me waste the years I now enjoy with a clear mind but help me to serve you and be engaged in your work on this earth. As I learn more about dementia, I pray that I will use this information to help others and thus bring you glory and honor. Amen.*

*Dunlop, John, MD. Finding Grace in the Face of Dementia (pp. 37-38)*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

Guide to Being a Caregiver - [*www.medicarefaq.com/guide-to-being-a-caregiver*](http://www.medicarefaq.com/guide-to-being-a-caregiver)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

Alzheimer’s Association - *www.alz.org*

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

COPSA / Care2Caregivers – Helpline 800- 424-2494

[*https://care2caregivers.com/help-for-caregivers/educational-guides-and-brochures*](https://care2caregivers.com/help-for-caregivers/educational-guides-and-brochures)

[*www.copsainstitute.com*](http://www.care2caregivers.com/)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

# 7 Super Secrets of the Super Agers –

# [*https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2023/super-ager-secrets.html*](https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/info-2023/super-ager-secrets.html)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

The Alzheimer’s Project - [*https://www.hbo.com/the-alzheimers-project*](https://www.hbo.com/the-alzheimers-project)

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THIS RESOURCE?**

Cook Unity - *www.cookunity.com*