

A Caregiver's Story

by Gardenia T. Bulluck

Handout

I wanted to be suited for the tasks, especially when it came to Mom. She was now my baby and I wanted to take care of her. My reluctance to allow others to help was part of my unwillingness to let go. It was part of how I was raised – be the super woman!

Trying to keep the lights burning on all ends...well..

Today, I am even more grateful for what I learned along the way. I share a little in this article to bring some comfort in knowing that God does know the plans He has for us and He does give us hope and a future.



Legal Disclaimer

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A CAREGIVER'S STORY



ARE THESE MY BEST DAYS?
His promises are "Yes" and "Amen."

A Caregiver's Story

We plan for the future; but there is so much unknown. Caring for a parent with dementia was not in my plan. I did not imagine that as part of my future. Yet, it happened.

Mom had always been the one who we relied upon. Now, it was my turn to be the mom for her. Today, I am even more grateful for what I learned along the way. I share a little of my story to bring some comfort to someone in knowing that God does know the plans He has for us and He does give us hope.

First, I found it difficult to acknowledge that mom had a diagnosis of an incurable disease (based on current medical science). Mom, of course, knew that she was experiencing memory loss and physical disabilities. As a wise woman, she had made plans about her future.



Mom had always been the financial planner in our family. She believed in always thinking

ahead. Because of her personal experiences, she would caution us to set your house in order.

These are some of the preparatory things that were done as part of her plans.

♥ **Power of Attorney/Living Will** Mom had a North Carolina will and testament.

When she relocated to Florida, we had to update it according to Florida statutes. This is very important. Be sure your estate is updated according to your residency.

♥ **Knowledgeable Representatives** –

Attorneys and legal firms are not all the same. Mom's legal firm had experience in Florida Estate Planning, Probate and Medicaid matters. This is financially worth it for your loved one.

♥ **Insurance and Trust** – By the time mom needed additional insurance, due to rising costs, the insurance premiums were extremely high because of her age. Working with the funeral home, a trust account was and pre-need arrangements were made. This allowed her to budget a monthly amount toward the trust account.

Dementia happens in stages. At each level, it called for additional medical care. I took free classes offered to me as a caregiver. Selfishly, I did not want anyone else to take

care of Mom but me. It took a toll on me. There were days when Mom could not sleep. The family worried about both of us. Over time, I had to give in to allowing medical support staff in our home. In doing so, I learned even more as her primary caregiver. These are some of the types of care that were available in the home to support us:

- ♥ Compassionate Care
- ♥ Hospice Care
- ♥ Home Care Assistance
- ♥ In-home care
- ♥ Personal Care
- ♥ Companion Care
- ♥ Respite Care
- ♥ Counseling

In the "Maze"

Family Budget/Financial Changes – My sister lived not too far away from my Mom; she was the one who checked in and spent time with Mom in the early stage of dementia. They both lived in NC so I would visit and talk every day with them. Unexpectedly, my sister died. Now, I was the only biological child Mom had left.

The needs of my mother overruled my job. I needed to be available at any time for her. My husband and I made the decision that I needed to resign from my job to do that.

We added up the cost; but Mom was priority. We had to trust God. I do not regret the decision and thank God for my husband's support.

For a year and half, I traveled back and forth until she came to live with us permanently.

Adjustments "In the Maze"

There are a few things that I would like to mention here. These are basics that you do not think about at the time, but are necessary in taking on a loved one with dementia or other illness in your homelife.

Meal Preparation – Preplan! You have to budget, especially when incorporating healthy eating. There are great time-saving recipes that I still use for hubby and me. I still freeze vegetables and fruits to save time. I still use recipes from our local grocery store. And I still substitute for more inexpensive veggies and fruit .

Family Time – It was especially important that our grandchildren understood Mom's illness. I was to help other family members adjust to Mom's new personality. My grands asked questions and I answered in their language. I made them a part of my setup as much as Mom would allow. Allowances were made around Mom's resistance and the difficulty of recognizing

family members. We managed to make family time as much about "fun as it was about caring" for her. As you can see from my picture, Champ, the family pet, was our little "nurse." He was the great nurturer.

Caregiver Support - Initially, I thought having someone to assist me in the home meant giving up. First, I was resistant to the doctors' recommendations about the need for hospice support. To me, it meant I was giving up and had stopped looking for that miracle.

Accepting that the miracle from God may not align with my wishes took some time in this new "maze." God, however, was patient with me. He gave me time to understand and accept that her care, as the Great Shepherd, was under His masterful control.

Thank God for my family and Mom's doctors, who continued to urge me to accept helping hands. Even though I remained her primary care giver, the decision to allow homecare was the best decision for Mom and me. The Christian counselor, nurse, etc. from the hospice system was there for the family and not just the patient! I learned a great deal from this support system.

Being such a Great Shepherd, God gave me time to shift in the "maze." I finally prayed,

"Dear God, help me accept thy will be done; let Your will become greater than my selfishness of wanting to keep her here when You want her with You.

Mom transitioned on Easter Sunday, Resurrection Day, in God's time and way.

That morning, Mom and I had listened to her favorite songs. From 2:00am until 6:00am, we had praised God. She could hear although she did not speak. Her hand went up and down as the songs played and I read scriptures. Since that day, I have been trying to find that choir on YouTube. I have not been able to as of today. Now I know – that was our miraculous miracle!

Ministry – I hope you will read my article "Shut In but not Shut Out." This will shed more light about the impact of ministry in our situation.