

From the Bottom

The Life of Myrna
Continues

By

Tim Basham

**** Caution ****

This is a continuation of

From the Bottom:
The Life of Myrna

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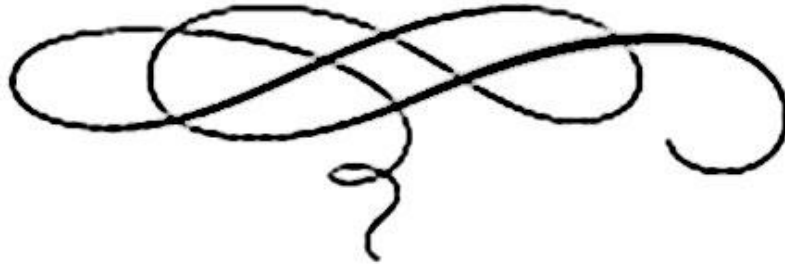
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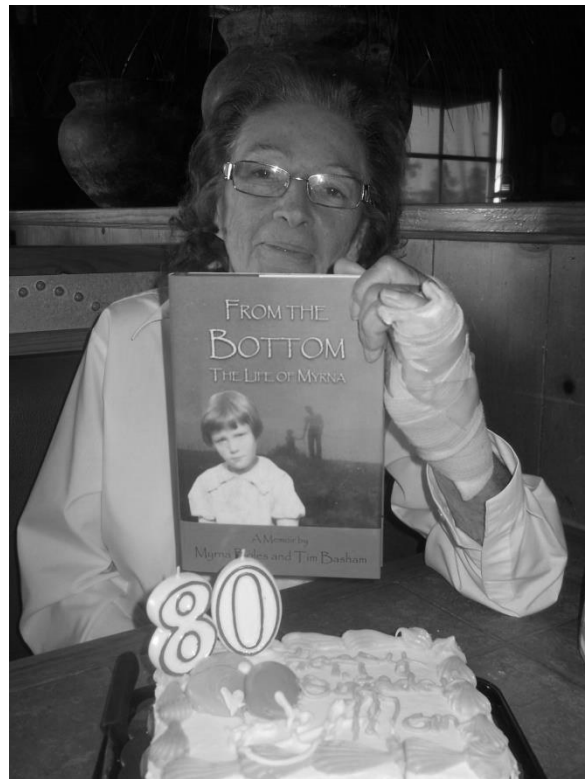
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Life Continues



I Have to continue writing about my mother's life. There are many more stories and she would want to keep everyone updated as her journey continues. I will keep this going so others can see her full life.

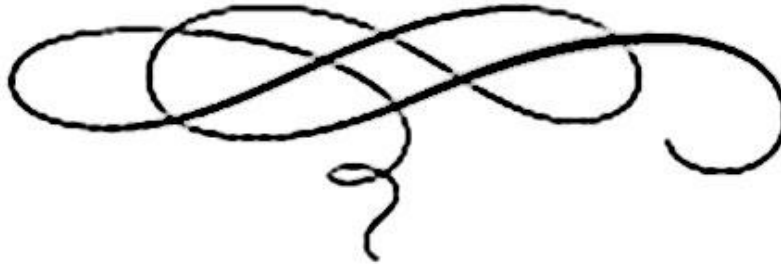
The release of her book brought a happier time in my mother's life. She celebrated her eightieth birthday with us the same month it became available. A great burden had



been lifted from her. She told her secrets to the world and everyone now knew her many struggles. She felt free and proud of her accomplishment and hoped others would learn from her mistakes.

Many of her friends were proud of her also and encouraged her to speak about her book and the lessons it contained. She sent her book to centers for abused women and the local police were interested in using the book in their abuse programs. She was also a guest on a popular internet radio show in a segment about bullies. She felt like she was helping people and this time in her life was good.

Attacked



Soon after this happy time my mother was walking her dogs in the neighborhood on a colorful autumn day. To her, walking meant having them in a dog stroller. One of the neighbors had lost their dog and my mother decided to help find it. She searched up and down the street, rolling her dogs with her.

She passed by a house with multiple American flags. They were stuck all around in the grass. They also covered the front door and most of the porch. She thought it was very odd. She then noticed a man who appeared to be wearing a long black wig sitting on the porch staring at her, but she kept walking. He didn't say a word as she passed by, but his steady gaze made her uncomfortable. The man stood up and sprinted towards her. He

grabbed her from behind and wrapped his arms around her. She screamed for him to let her go but his grip tightened as he began pulling her towards his house. Desperately struggling, she was able to briefly free herself, but was quickly grabbed again. Now fearing for her life, she struggled once more which was enough to throw the attacker off balance, allowing her to slip down under his clenched arms and break free again. She pushed her stroller down the street as she ran, hearing the man shout an unusual thing, "What's your doggie's name?"

My mother reached a neighbor who quickly called the police and the man was caught and arrested. She discovered he was recently in trouble for verbally abusing a very young girl who walked by his house. He said some horrible sexual things to her.

"I'm proud of you for fighting back so hard", I told her. "You are a tough eighty year old!" She smiled, but I could tell her soul was a bit dimmer after this event. She realized everything was not going to be great after her book and her struggles would continue.

At the man's trial, his excuse was he was just trying to hug her because she was looking for a lost dog. My mother faced the attacker and commented to the judge that if the man had mental problems, he should be somewhere where they can watch him. The man was then taken to jail for a time.

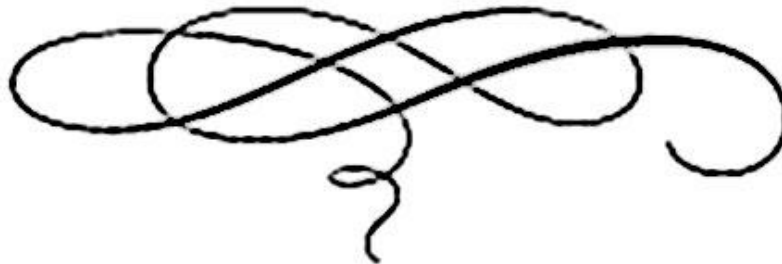
Several months had passed by and she heard the man had been released. She did not know if he was back in the neighborhood, but she did not venture on that street ever again. I drove down his street several times to be sure he was not out on his porch waiting to grab others. Every time I passed his house, his many flags were unattended, fading, and falling down one by one.

Who knows what his next steps would have been. It is very possible he could have dragged a young girl into his house. My mother broke the chain of events that may have led to more serious crimes by this man.

While at the local grocery store, she overheard one of the cashiers talking to a customer. "Did you hear about the woman that was attacked by the crazy guy? What's this neighborhood coming to? I hope that woman was OK."

My mother spoke up said, "I was the woman he attacked, and I'm alright"

Detroit



Traveling to Detroit on one of her many quests to help people, she stopped by her childhood home to speak to the woman who had lived there all these years. She discovered over a dozen cats unattended as the woman seemed to no longer live there. The cats were wandering and hungry. Not wanting to call the animal shelter and risk having them euthanized, she took it upon herself to feed and care for them.

My mom seemed to have a connection with animals and always felt emotionally attached to them. At times she was far too attached as she often felt sorry for neighborhood dogs that seemed to be taken care of fairly well. She often commented on

how animals in this world are abused and began donating to the Humane Society.

Every few days she would drive to the store to buy a bag of cat food and deliver it to the cats in Detroit. She had an affection to one particular cat that would ignore the food for a while, rubbing up against her leg and purring for a time.

After several of these trips she decided to take this cat home with her and stopped by once more to pick him up but the cats were all gone. Someone must have contacted animal control to take them away. She was very upset as this added to the bad memories from this house.

As she stood there sad and upset over the loss of the cats, she heard some dogs barking. They were three large Rottweilers in the yard of a run-down abandoned house. She immediately felt sorry for them and drove to the store to get food.

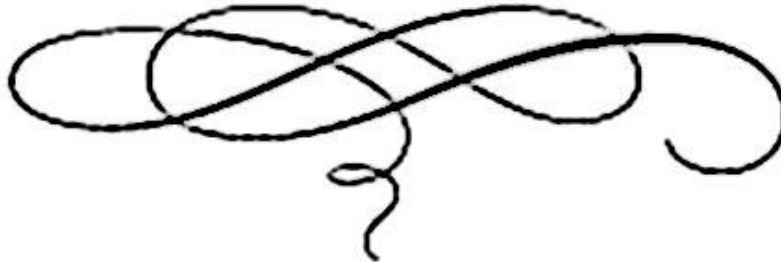
Over the course of several weeks she would buy forty pound bags of dog food and travel back to Detroit to feed the dogs. An eighty year old woman dragging a forty pound bag of dog food to feed Rottweilers in Detroit must have been some sight for the neighbors. She would just drag the food out of her car, open it, and dump it over the fence. She said the dogs were very happy.

Once I found out what was going on I asked her to stop driving there. It was not a good neighborhood and was dangerous. Of course, being stubborn she decided to go again.

This time she was met by a man at the Detroit house yelling at her to stay away. He was the owners of the dogs, but didn't live at that abandoned house. She left, but returned a few days later to see a large sign on the front door, "Old woman stay away or you will be shot." She couldn't resist tossing one more bag of food to the dogs before leaving.

Finally, she agreed that Detroit was too dangerous to be driving around at her age. I previously bought her a GPS unit for her car with a home button in case she ever got lost. She admitted she was pushing that button more and more often to find her way home.

A Downturn



Walking her dogs was always something my mother liked to do. When the weather was nice, she could be seen walking around the neighborhood with her dogs in and out of the stroller. At eighty years old, she did very well and the exercise was good for her and her dogs.

During one of their walks, she tripped on a raised piece of cement. She fell to the ground, hitting her face on the cement. The result was fractured facial bones, a lot of cuts and bruising. Luckily, her neighbors witnessed her fall and called an ambulance for her.

Soon after her recovery from this accident, I noticed more forgetfulness. She had to write everything down. Soon another

symptom appeared. She was getting sick when taking a bite of food. I took her to several doctors who ran a multitude of tests. They could not discover what was wrong.

During this time she had a scheduled meeting with a group of teachers to speak about her book. She was determined to go as she had been waiting for months for this opportunity. She was weak, but we managed to get through it and felt good for making it through. As we left she commented to me, "That made me feel important. They were listening to me and liked what I said. I had fun."

Her weight loss continued. After a loss of over almost forty pounds in a few short months I was getting desperate. She was weak and could barely walk. She was giving up and preparing to die.

The last specialist could only tell her to eat or be force fed through a stomach tube. He only suggested protein drinks and wanted to see her again in a month. A month! Out of desperation, I said, "There has to be some medication you can give her to increase her appetite!"

He stood there thinking for a moment and an idea came to him. "Yes there is!" He said. The medicine was prescribed and she began to slowly gain her weight back. I couldn't believe I

had to think of the solution for the doctor. Over time her weight recovered, but still took the medicine from time to time to make sure it didn't happen again.

Her muscles remained weak from the months of losing weight and she was her forgetfulness was getting worse. During this time the doctors had physical therapists visiting her several times a week to exercise. Walking her dogs, she fell again, this time fracturing her wrist and rib. After another lengthy recovery, one of her dogs ran out of her gate. She reached down to pick it up and lost her balance, falling forward and hitting her face on the cement again. This time she had more fractures, a broken nose and stiches. A short stay in the hospital and she was released.

The doctor told her she should use a walker, but my mother was stubborn saying, "Walkers are for old people." We bought her one despite of what she said. She could still walk fast because she was always on the go, but at times she would get wobbly and needed something to hold on to in case she lost her balance. We also got her a wheelchair to make it easier to get around in her home. My mother's friend said my mother could live at her home because someone was there almost all of the time, but she refused, saying she did not want to leave her home.

I stopped by one weekend to visit like I always did and found her sitting on her couch in a daze. I asked her what was wrong and she told me some relatives had stayed the night and kept her up. She was confused saying she had been driving a truck most of the night at the airport. After a long time of trying to sort out her story, I pieced together what I think had happened. One of her nieces and her husband had stopped by her house at about 1am on their way to pick up someone from the airport nearby. There was a lot of confusion and arguing between those family members. Somewhere along the night they took my mother with them to the airport. She was sitting in the truck for a few hours and at one point wandered the airport looking for coffee for someone. They dropped her off at home and left.

She very upset and sleep deprived. This is the first time I had truly seen her confused and not making sense. After some good sleep and some hours of talking, she seemed to return back to normal, although she remained very upset at them. I called her niece and informed them they were not welcome at night anymore. If they wanted to visit, it could only be short visits in the daytime.

In the weeks following, she confided in me that at times, she would think they were still in her house. Once she thought they asked for coffee and she got out of bed to brew some and

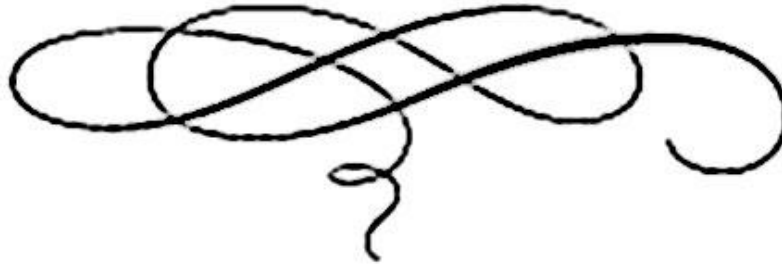
noticed they weren't there. She informed me she was getting worried. She knew something was wrong when she began thinking other people were in her house. She said "After a few minutes I know they are not here, but it feels like they are."

I asked her if she actually sees these people. She said "No, I never see them. I just feel like they are here."

My grandmother's mugging began to fill my thoughts. She had been attacked and severely struck in the head and afterwards she had many of the same symptoms.

My mother seemed to still be functioning alright, but her friend arranged to have her examined at the University Of Michigan Hospital and I arranged to have her examined by my doctor. We all felt her current doctor was not helping as much as he could. He did have physical therapy coming a few times a week for exercise along with a nutritionist and a nurse checking in but he always seemed rushed when speaking to her. This caused my mother to be uncomfortable going to him.

The Fall



Before either of these appointments happened, more tragedy struck.

After work on a snowy and cold January day, I stopped by to check on her. I found her lying on the living room floor. She had fallen in her hallway and had been dragging herself to her phone. I called an ambulance. She sat up and leaned against her couch and remained fairly still. She complained about the pain and wanted her socks on but didn't say much else. It was discovered that her hip was broken. She had also hit her head once again as she had bruising above her right eye.

When the ambulance arrived, the paramedics were asking her questions and she was answering very oddly. They looked at me and I told them her doctor said she had some signs of early dementia, not realizing how much this fall had caused it to progress.

At the hospital, they needed to operate and conduct a partial hip replacement. She came through the operation fine. When she woke up, she was very confused and not making much sense. One of the first things she did was place her finger across her lips with a very quiet, "shhhh!" She was looking around and very frightened. She whispered, "We have to hide!"

In a normal voice I replied, "Why do we have to hide?"

Again, she placed her now trembling finger to her lips and whispered, "Shhhhh! We need to hide from Sarah. She's in the other room looking for me."

"Mom, Sarah's not here. Those are the nurses talking in the hallway." It took me a while to calm her down.

I just thought it was the anesthesia, but days after her operation, she was still talking nonsense and I was getting extremely worried.

One day she thought she had a farm with a white horse. Another day she said she had been at a carnival riding the

merry-go-round. I was greeted by the nurses with congratulations as she told them that my wife and I just had a baby. Many times she would speak about my sister and her children being in the room with her, even though she hadn't seen them in years.

With her confusion they had to restrain her to prevent her from falling again. She kept trying to get up and managed escape her restraints and pull out her sutures and IVs. The hospital needed to bring in "sitters" to stay with her. During this time she would see the staff cleaning her room and would tell them, "You don't have to do that! I can do it. Just sit down and have a cup of coffee."

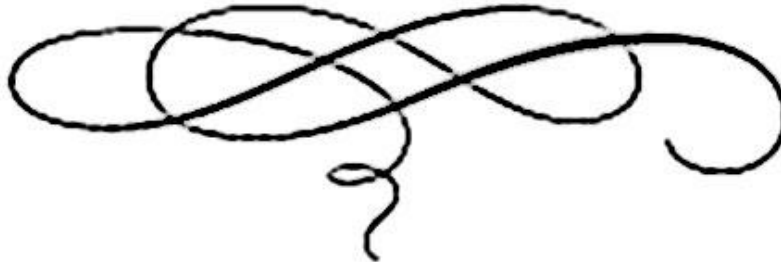
When my wife and I arrived, she would say, "Have a seat and I will fix you some breakfast!" She would then try to get up and realize her restraints. A sad look would come over her face as she settled back against the bed.

I really missed our Sunday breakfasts together. For a few weeks I still went to her house on Sunday morning and make myself breakfast just to try to feel right. It was empty and cold and I couldn't get that feeling back. I missed the mother I had just a short time ago. I just wanted to talk to her so she could make me feel better as she always did, but I couldn't. I felt alone and sad.

Her confusion continued. The doctors and staff kept asking me, "Was she like this before her fall?"

I repeated over and over, "No, she was not like this at all. I was talking to her fine before the fall! I don't understand why she is like this!" I would also tell them she did confide in me that she was thinking people were in the house from time to time, but nothing like this. I could tell by their dismissive attitude they didn't believe me.

Recovery



It was time to transfer her to a rehabilitation center for long term care. When she arrived, she was very confused and disoriented. She was talking about babies and people being cruel to animals, but we finally got her to bed.

The next day during the initial consultation, I discovered the hospital had put her on multiple medications including two anti-psychotic pills. In addition, she was being given medication to relax her. I questioned them about the medications and they weaned her off of them. They were confused why the hospital had given such high doses of these medications as well as put her in restraints. I thought maybe, just maybe, getting off these medications would bring her back.

Every time I visited my mother, she continued to be confused and disoriented. At the beginning of our visits, she thought I was her brother, Charles. It usually took about ten minutes to convince her otherwise.

A large block of her memory seemed to be missing as she often spoke about her mother and brother coming to visit her. She also continued to talk about the carnival she was at the day before or just getting back from roller-skating.

After about a month she could recognize my wife and I if I started our conversation with, "Hi Mom!" She had one visit from one of her nieces, and my mother-in-law stopped by several times. But there were no other visitors.

On one visit, she told me there is a woman in the nursing home that looks like her mother. "I know it's not her", she says, "But I like to pretend she is and help feed her. It makes me feel good."

She struggled to walk again with daily rehabilitation sessions and was eventually able to walk about two hundred feet with a walker. She complained about the pain on multiple occasions, but kept trying.

The nurses would call and let her talk to me if she up upset and confused. Once she was looking for me and said the

taxi had dropped her off there. They said she had been searching all of the rooms for me. Another time they put her on the phone and she told me to pick her up at the police station.

On both occasions I was able to calm her down.

The Plateau



During a consultation at the rehabilitation center, I was told she has plateaued. She could now walk two hundred feet with a walker, but could not progress any further than that. Her medical insurance would not take her to the one hundred days as planned.

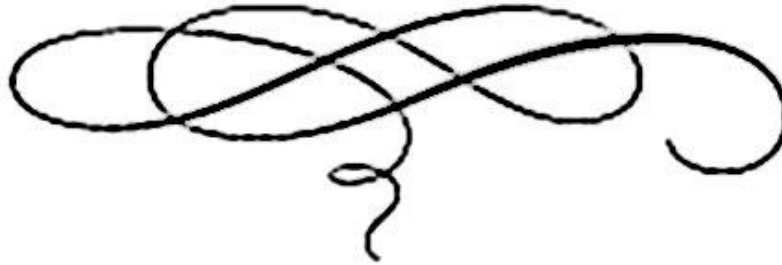
I scrambled to find information and toured assisted living as the social worker at the rehabilitation center suggested. They were too expensive for her unless she was able to qualify for a Medicare waiver. She was denied because the program was full. I had lost another week and she only had one week left in her stay. I had nobody to care for her since my wife and I work

all day and didn't have enough money to pay for someone to stay with her.

As I was looking for assisted living, she fell once more in the rehabilitation center and this time was sent to the hospital with some broken toes. I knew now that assisted living was not the answer and made the hard decision to place her in a nursing home. I believe it was the toughest decision I've ever had to make. I knew deep down it was the right thing to do, but I felt so horrible.

I knew she wanted to go home and continue her life, but there was no doubt in my mind she would fall again. She could barely walk and needed assistance to dress and bathe herself. She could easily wander off and get lost in the state she was in at times. I would have felt worse if I didn't try to protect her.

Nursing Home



Finding a decent nursing home was difficult. Reading reviews and touring all of these facilities really took its toll on me. Most were very depressing places.

In one facility, the guide kept joking around and referred to the bathroom as "The crapper" and pointed out the heat lamps in the shower are the same ones used to incubate eggs.

In another facility, we were greeted by the tour guide saying, "Who be your peoples?"

I said, "You mean our names?"

He replied, "No, your peoples. Who be stayin' here."

Even though that facility seemed average, they should have sent a better representative.

Another facility tour really devastated me. This place was horrible. Residents were wandering the halls and it was dark, dreary, and crowded. The smell was horrible, the rooms were packed, and one of the residents was rolling around with open wounds on her legs. There were several residents waiting by the back door to be taken outside to smoke. I felt sorry for the people in that place. It seemed more like a place to be discarded and forgotten.

Finally, I found a fairly nice nursing home that would take Medicaid insurance and they would help me apply for it. I had a few days left until she had to leave.

When the day came I stopped by to pick up my mother. The nurses at the rehabilitation center had become very attached to her. Most were crying which caused my mother to cry. She became upset that she had to leave. She said, "They are like a part of my family now. I haven't felt that in a long time. We look out for each other and they treated me so good."

Tears were running down my face as I had to take her away. The insurance had stopped paying. I tried to explain this to

her, but she just said "I'll just drop the insurance, then I can stay here. It will be a long time until they figure it out."

One of the nurses told her that wouldn't work and I loaded her into the car still crying. It was heart breaking. As I drove her away, she waved and said, "They are still waving at me!" But it was just her reflection in the windows.

The drive was only about twenty minutes, but seemed like hours as she sobbed heavily. She kept repeating how they were family to her and she could not take this anymore. She sobbed, "How did I get into this mess! I just want to go home!" I could not take her home and felt like I let her down.

Once we arrived at the nursing home, we checked in as she was drying her eyes. We went to her room and in a moment of clarity she told me it would have been easier if she would have just died from the fall. "I have nothing to look forward to. I have no goals and nothing to accomplish anymore."

I was so choked up at that point all I could say is "That's not true mom." I then just lowered my head in silence.

Later, as I was leaving, the nurse ran to me and told me my mother had something to say. My mother paused and with tears welling up in her eyes said "They are taking me to play a game,

so that's where I'll be." I said my goodbyes once more and left feeling devastated.

The next day I was exhausted as I just couldn't sleep. It seems she couldn't either as they said she was wandering the halls all night in her wheelchair thinking her granddaughter was in the building. When I visited her, she kept falling asleep and could only speak to me for a few minutes at a time. The next day they had to move her to the second floor because she was wandering and trying to follow people out the door. It is primarily for the more severe dementia residents.

Just visiting her on the second floor was traumatic and depressing. The staff seemed good, but seeing people rolling around in wheelchairs dazed and confused was difficult. My mother was placed in a room with two other residents. She didn't like sharing a room.

Every visit seemed to have a theme. "I'm upset today", she said, "I shouldn't have signed those papers. They talked me into it. Now I've lost custody of my frogs!"

Looking up at me from her wheelchair she said, "Doesn't that seem crazy? That's crazy, right?"

Nodding my head, I said, "Yea, it does sound a little crazy."

With a very serious look, she replied, "I know. But it really happened! Isn't that crazy?"

Trying to divert her attention to something else, I said, "Mom, did you exercise today?"

"I sure did! They let a bunch of frogs loose in the building and we had to run around to catch them all. They were all over the place. Some went under the beds and we had to crawl to catch them. That's how they got us to exercise."

Trying to once again divert her attention, I asked, "Did you play any games?"

"Yeah, but they were boring. It was almost like we were back in school. We were learning about frogs and how they jump and croak. I didn't want to do it because it didn't feel like a game." Sometimes I wonder if any of these thoughts started from a trigger, like seeing frogs on television. They may be childhood memories that were coming back to her. I just don't know.

I felt I was losing her more as each day passed. I brought her purse and placed makeup, a brush, and a notepad in it. After she thought I hadn't been to visit her in weeks, on the notepad's cover I would write the last day I was there to visit and I would "Be back in a day or two." I hoped she would read it

when she was lonely and know I was there for her and would not abandon her. I also wrote that I was safe, so she would not worry. It didn't help very much. They asked to put her on an anti-depressant that would also help her appetite.

Delusions



A Desperate call came to me one day at work. My mother was out of control and they wanted me to talk to her. She thought they were trying to kill her and was striking the staff.

They put her on the phone and she was in a panic. "They are trying to give me poison and kill me like they do to all the other people here! There are fifteen of them and I can't hold them off forever. You need to come and get me out of here!!"

I heard the phone drop and then a lot of commotion as my mother stood up and the nurses rushed over to catch her.

Thinking she was being attacked, I heard a scream from my mother like I have never heard before. Then she shouted "Tim, please get me out of here! If you don't get here, I'll be dead within an hour!"

The nurse picked up the phone and simply said, "Get here quick."

Once I arrived. My mother was sitting in the corner calmly and didn't seem to remember the situation. They suspected she may have a urinary tract infection or getting used to the new anti-depressant.

The following week she seemed much better. She was talking calmly and laughing. I was feeling so good about her mood, I approached the nurses to ask how she was doing. The conversation started with an eye roll and a sigh, which was not a good sign. I was told the previous night she had been throwing vases and trying to use the call buttons in various rooms to call the police. They weren't able to get her to sleep until the middle of the night. "Unfortunately," the nurse said, "that's the disease and how it affects them."

About a week later I received another call to try to help her calm down. She told me they were blowing up residents one at a time. "There are pieces of people and their wheelchairs

everywhere", she said. "They also put chemicals in our shampoo to make our hair change color. People are crying about it and they just laugh at us. This place is horrible!"

I told her I would be there the next day and check everything out and make sure they didn't do that anymore. It didn't really calm her down.

She then said, "Your mother is here too." This confused me. I'm not sure who she thought I was at that time. The nurse took the phone back and thanked me for trying.

Not long after this, the staff informed me she had picked up a dining table and tried to break a window to escape. They could not calm her down so they removed her from the area. She came back with a wet floor cone and threw that at the window and had to be given medication to relax her.

When I came to see her after this episode, she thought she was in prison. She explained to me that people were put in this prison for stupid things. "They put me in here for just putting too much food color in my recipe" she said. "Do you know when they will release me?"

I replied, "I'm not sure, Mom. But the food is pretty good, right?"

She nodded her head and said "Yea, it is pretty good."

Soon I received a call from the doctor on staff. Her violence continued from her delusions and they are afraid she will hurt herself, the staff, or the residents. The doctor needed to put her on a low dose of anti-psychotic medication to improve her well-being. I waited a few days to go see her while the medication took effect. The other residents were playing a game and bouncing a beach ball up in the air. My mom was sitting in her wheelchair at the end of a hallway gazing out a window.

As I approached her, she was crying. She said "I'm freezing and can't take this anymore! This is no way to live." I wrapped the blanket around her and moved her into the sunlight. "You need to be at work", she said. "You shouldn't be here visiting me. You're going to get in trouble at work." This was more like her real personality. I explained her that I was on vacation and wanted to see her. I took her outside in the sunlight and I finally was able to stop her from crying.

The doctor told me the medication should keep her from having these delusions for a while, but as the disease progresses, they may need to increase the dosage. Their hope is to take her off the medication after six months if they see improvement. "I'm not going to give you false hope", the doctor said, "There may not be any improvement."

In the back of my mind I thought maybe a medication would change her back or she would just miraculously go back to normal and I could take her home again. Everyone was telling me not to worry and she is too strong willed to let this bring her down. They said, "This is just another event in her life that she will get through it." I had some slight hope but who am I kidding. She is in no shape physically or mentally. My hopes of her 'snapping out of it' are now gone. As time goes on, her dementia continues to slowly progress. A second broken hip from a hospital visit set her back even further.

She recognizes me, but sometimes thinks I am her husband or brother, so I continue to start out my conversation with, "Hi mom!" It seems to help her remember. One time she even commented she only remembers me because of my eyes. She usually asks about my wife also. Her grandchildren and friends seem to have mostly faded from her memory. She began feeling there was no point to her life and was just waiting to die. I asked the nurses in the nursing home to give her some sort of job. They moved her into a semi-private room and began to let her fold towels so she would feel useful. Since she has always wanted to work in an office, I created some medical forms and color coded them in folders. The nurses would mix up the papers and give them to her to sort and

she feels like she is helping with their record keeping. This helped for a few weeks, but didn't want to help them anymore.

Over the next few months there were steady declines, although I would at times I would get lucky and visit her at just the right time. Even though a lot of what she said didn't make sense, I still enjoyed the conversation.

Once I was sitting next to her bed watching the other residents pass by in their wheelchairs. My mother said, "Look at all these people" as she waved her pointed her finger at them. "They roll up and down the hallways all day. Did you know that more than half of them don't have jobs?" I had to laugh and write it down so I wouldn't forget. When I would leave for the night, she would always say, "Don't forget about me!"

My reply was always the same, "I never will mom. I'll always come back."

I received a call from the doctor at the nursing home with a status update. They suspected she may have some sort of cancer, but they were not sure without multiple tests and some would be evasive. I made the decision to leave her alone. She had been through enough. The doctor suggested I speak to hospice. I felt bad for her as this was an indication that the end may be coming.

After speaking to hospice, I decided to think about it as there was some indication that the medicine that helps her appetite may be taken away. After the hospice meeting I went to see her. I had the most active conversation with her in a very long time and felt better about my decision to postpone hospice. We didn't know for sure if she had cancer anyway.

A few months pass and the nurses let me know that she was eating less and less. She began to lose weight and was only eating about fifty percent of what she needed. This soon changed to twenty five percent. She was still on the medication to increase her appetite, but it was becoming ineffective.

Visiting her, I noticed a glazed look in her eyes from time to time. She said, "I don't know why I'm so tired all the time."

I replied, "Mom, you need to eat something to get your strength up and start causing trouble around here again!" She smiled and giggled, but I knew she was weakening. I gave her a hug to tell her I loved her and she usually gave me a kiss on the cheek since she was too weak to hug me back. This time she pulled both hands out from under the cover and gave me a big hug. I was surprised, but I felt her love as she told me she loved me also.

A few days later the staff could only feed her a minimal amount of food as she would pull the food back out of her mouth. Medicine was now a problem and she would barely swallow liquids. I tried to feed her with very little luck. She now had a blank gaze and was raising one arm up. She managed to get out a word, "Water." I tried to get her to drink something but she was too weak. She looked as if she was in some pain and the nurses explained they couldn't get pain medicine as she couldn't swallow anything. Hospice could get her pain medicine that would absorb in her skin, so it was time for them to step in. As I was leaving for the night, I gave her a hug and told her I loved her. She managed to get out the words, "I love you too." Those were the last words I heard her speak.

The next morning on a crisp autumn day I arrived to meet with Hospice and sign the paperwork. During this meeting, one of the nurses interrupted and said my mom was "active" and that I should quickly stop up to see her.

I thought, "She's going to be ok!!" Images began running through my head as my wife and I went up the elevator. I was going to walk in and say, "Hi Mom!" and she was going to be sitting up looking at me and smile. But as I walked in the room, she was taking short breaths and blankly staring at the ceiling. I didn't see anything "active" about her.

Another nurse rolled in a cart with coffee, water, and snacks. I thought, "That's odd, they have never did that before." Another nurse walked in and took her pulse, then left the room in tears. My wife and I just looked at each other in disbelief. The hospice representative called in their nurse who told us she had a few hours to maybe two days to live. I tried to call my daughter as I was going to run home and bring her to say goodbye.

Before we could contact my daughter my mother took a deep breath. The nurses said the end was near. My wife and I told her we loved her and that she was a good mother. She then took one final breath and the nurses began to cry. She was gone.

This is the third time she had died and it was finally time for her to stay with God. I guess sometime in the past fifty years since her last near-death experience she completed what she was destined to do. Maybe she clothed a needy person and gave them strength to turn their life around. Maybe the money she passed out to the homeless or the toys needy children received for Christmas showed them they were loved. Or maybe her book enabled someone to find strength through difficult times. Whatever the reason, she decided to stay and her suffering was over.

There was an outpouring of condolences from family and friends. Then, as funeral arrangements were being made, many began telling me they could not make it to the funeral. My cousin's mother-in-law died the day before the funeral, my aunt and uncle on my father's side are in poor health and out of state. One of my mother's friends was also out of state caring for her sick daughter.

In all, of our relatives, only one of her granddaughters and her great grandson were able to come to the funeral. Even though my sisters were informed by family members, they did not make an appearance. In place of any mention of her mother's death, my youngest sister posted a smiling photo of herself on social media and waited for her friends to tell her how beautiful she was. They sent no flowers, condolences, or support. It's like their mother never existed to them. After all my mother tried to do for them, this seemed to be just one final slap in the face. I'll let them live with their regret.

I was there, though, along with my family and my in-laws. Some of her friends and neighbors came to say their goodbyes also. I appreciate those who came and those who tried. As my cousin stated, "It's an end of an era." I agreed. She was the last of her generation in the family.

She was taken to Union City, Tennessee, the town where she was born. Her final resting place will be by her mother's side. At first, I was torn and maybe a bit selfish wanting her buried nearby so I could visit her, but she mentioned more than once there was an available space in the family plot in Union City. I knew it was what she wanted and the right thing to do.

During her funeral service we were asked what she would most be remembered for. It was an easy answer, her unwavering generosity and strength to survive.

When collecting her possessions from the nursing home, I discovered a journal. Mom had been writing in it the first year she was there. She was using it to try to remember things. She wrote her address and the ages of her children and seemed to think we were still very young. In this journal were thoughts that other residents were better than her and she felt that she didn't belong there. She also wrote about how cold she was and there was one entry asking me to save her, which made me feel bad.

The journal entries started to get more cryptic as she tried to draw pictures of her brothers to remember them. Then one day they just stopped.

Her very last entry in her journal was, "I love all of you."

I love you too mom. I will miss you. And don't worry, I will never forget about you.

