

Dinner with Andy Griffith

Perspectives from a Family/Professional Care Partner
by Aimee Jo Mattson,
Senior Care Professional & Family Care Partner

I am an experienced executive in the senior care industry; I know how to live in the moment when faced with the challenge of dementia. My mother-in-law (with dementia) moved in two months ago, and suddenly I can't put into practice the wisdom that I've shared hundreds of times in my career. The patient mentor that I am at work, turns into something completely different when I walk through the door at home each evening.

As strange as it sounds, my patience is readily drained by the prelude to *The Andy Griffith Show*. This may sound silly, but it's true. Lately, as I come up the walk after work, I steel myself, for I can already hear *The Andy Griffith Show* that is *once again* playing on the large TV over the fireplace. And, of course, the volume will be set on 59. If this was entertaining for Mom I might find some measure of peace in that. In any case it doesn't matter, because she isn't watching Barney Fife act a fool, she isn't watching Aunt Bea bring homemade lunches to the jailhouse, and she isn't seeing Opie waking from school with a belt cinched around his books. She wants it on, but she isn't watching – and as we know, you can't reason with dementia.

We are blessed with four children in the home, ages 15, 8, 4, and 1. In our mind's eye we imagined that they would help to keep Mom busy. We imagined that she would share wisdoms, laugh, and have a better daily experience in a busy household. Well, that does happen... about 15% of the time. Then about 75% of the time she is irritated with them, and the remaining 10% of the time she is mad at us for holding her hostage in this house. How the heck did this happen? More importantly, where do we go from here?

Very often my spouse and I look at each other, incredulous. Volumes of communication are exchanged without a word, largely because we don't know what to say. Often our amazement at *where we are* turns into belly laughs that release the tension that builds up. To our surprise, Mom often joins in the laughter. So, despite all of my skills, our greatest tool on this journey by far is a good sense of humor.

As this journal develops I seek to share some of the simple things that trip us up, and what ends up being the *something* that gets us back to a good place...or at least, not such a challenging place. I also expect to develop a stronger affinity for the distinct whistling intro to *The Andy Griffith Show*.

Aimee Jo Mattson is blessed to work at a job that aligns so closely with her personal values. When she had the opportunity to rebuild her career path, she went back to college and got a degree in Healthcare Management. She chose to align her business strengths with her servant heart... and that landed her in senior care. Her personal statement is found in the blessing of hosting an optimistic vision and a strong heartfelt connection with the mission of providing meaningful service to our seniors. She does this by offering creative support to the teams that serve this population.

Aimee Jo lives with her spouse and four children, ages 2, 4, 8, and 15. Aimee's mother-in-law also lives with them, and she has dementia. So, what she does is obviously very closely tied to who she is. Her journey to blend her family starts fresh every day, and even with her industry experience, the highs and lows are more dramatic than she had imagined. Aimee Jo says that she and her family are incredibly blessed... and she is grateful.