

By Sharon Poole Blair / Tales of Alzheimer's & Caregiving / September 15, 2015

A Daughter's Journey Through Dementia— With Advice for Caregivers

I was stumped when my very healthy, 83 year old mother, Eileen Poole, began to show signs of short-term memory loss and bits of confusion. Of all the people I had known in my life, I never expected for my mom to have these issues.

It's hard to say what exactly brought it on. Predisposed genetics, a mild stroke from a fall, early years of an excessive lifestyle. In her case, she was completely unaware of the subtle changes that were taking place however it became clear to me that she was different.

If you have followed my blogs, I talk about my mom, Eileen Poole, her gifts and talents in nutrition, her many years of working with people, and saving many lives along the way. Besides her family, her work was everything to her.

[\[Lessons on Courage & Caregiving From Growing Up With a Differently Abled Brother\]](#)

She had been a highly regarded nutritionist based in Los Angeles, with clients all around the world. Her practiced spanned more than 40 years but she had begun to show signs of short-term memory loss and moments of confusion.

Then, she sadly lost her husband Richard Poole, my stepfather. Richard was a wonderful warm man, acclaimed artist and numerologist (author of the *The Numeric Personality*) and often depicted my Mom in his vibrant paintings. My husband Dain agreed to have my mom live with us, and it was a blessing to have her with us to balance running our thriving business with quality family life.

First and foremost, when my mom's Dementia kicked in to gear, it was heart breaking. There were many challenges I faced as a daughter, and my family faced having her in our home. I was the only child and extremely close to my mom. She was my best friend, my confidant and my guide in life, but the impact of her changes affected all of us.

[\[How to Deal With the 3 Most Painful Situations Alzheimer's Caregivers May Face\]](#)

I knew it was important to keep Mom working as long as possible to help structure the day, so she continued going to her office along with her assistant, Robyn and only saw existing clients. During the sessions her mind somehow cleared. Her guidance and recommendations were solid. Weekends were filled with excursions to farmer's markets, the zoo, theatre and much more, as she loved being out and engaged.

We managed to maintain a steady routine for about a year and a half until one day she stopped wanting to go to the office. Her energy had shifted quite a bit. The activities she enjoyed became more basic, she still liked to sit the garden and being out doors in the sunshine.

Anyone familiar with Dementia or Alzheimer's will unfortunately also be accustomed to one of the symptoms—Sundowning Syndrome: when people suffering from dementia have no sense of night or day, becoming active when it would be more appropriate to be in bed. We reached this stage when Mom was 85. She would often wander around the house between 1 and 3 in the morning leaving herself completely exhausted the next day. Conversations with her had also become vague and limited. She could carry on a dialogue, but it would be circular, then disjointed, then gone. Luckily, most of the time she would be good humored and content.

[\[It's Important to Talk \(& Listen!\) to Your Parents: Here's Why\]](#)

One morning Mom asked to be taken home. She proceeded to tell us she was ready and packed, pointing out the window to her 'other home'. We looked at her with astonishment, followed her to the bedroom to see every purse and tote bag stuffed with her clothes.

I realized that because of the dementia, she no longer felt at home within herself. She was seeking herself and by doing so, looking for the home where she might find herself. It's hard to explain, but it is really important for those of us on the outside to understand the torment of feeling deeply lost for people who are suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

We soon learned to acknowledge that she would go home, but suggest waiting until the next day. She would agree, relax and go about her day. Showing kindness, empathy and understanding is crucial in Elder care. Patiently we would unpack her, put things back in place but we would never challenge her.

[\[The 8 Most Important Things to Do When Planning for Elder Care\]](#)

We were lucky to be in a position that as things became overwhelming for our family, we moved Mom to her own place with dedicated full time care. She was then 86. It was a difficult move for us all, and I had to be very creative with my insightful mother. Up to this point, I had not given her medicine because of her closely held beliefs. However at this stage she would get more anxious and frustrated, so we would give her mild medication to calm her. This worked very well, and she would relax.

Every day, every week, and every month we all adapted and moved forward. She enjoyed the home we provided for her, the surroundings and all her favorite things around her. She enjoyed music, but mostly liked to watch TV. It gave her a social center. A world outside of hers, that offered her color, amusement and entertainment.

In her final few months, she was quietly happy, speaking to the spirit world, smiling and loving.

I had already mourned the loss of my mother in the early years of the dementia taking her over. Many tears and much sadness over came me when sitting with her. The tears did not stop until the day she passed away. She passed a couple of weeks after her 88th birthday. I was so happy for her to leave the body that kept her trapped in a world that prevented her from living the life she

once loved. My tears that followed were mixed with relief and the loss of my deeply loved mother.

[\[Read Maria Shriver's latest 'I've Been Thinking' essay\]](#)

If you find yourself in a similar position, do your best and do not judge yourself. It's not an easy journey for all involved. Be compassionate, loving and kind, while taking care of yourself along the way.