

With warmth and openness, Maki shares his Monday Musings—stories inspired by his journey of caring for his mother

Aging is similar to the sun slowly setting on a summer evening. Initially, the change feels gentle; the light begins to fade, shadows stretch longer, and the day gradually transitions into night. Then, almost unexpectedly, dusk arrives, the sun disappears, and you realize that time has quietly moved you forward. In my twenties, I moved through life as if I were untouchable, gifted with a kind of superpower that let me recover from anything quickly. I could work long hours, stay out until dawn, juggle the demands of two young children, and still summon the energy to build and manage a small business.

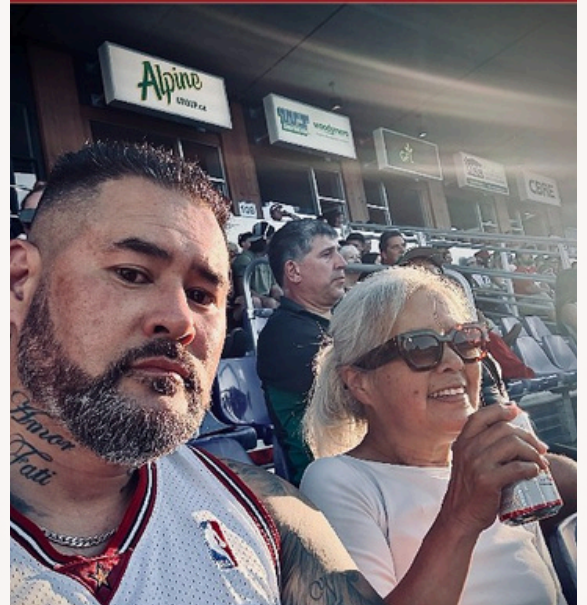
By my thirties, I began to feel less invincible. I realized I needed more sleep, and activities that once felt effortless now required more drive. Nevertheless, I pressed on, determined to maintain my pace, even as the weight of responsibility and the effects of time weighed down on me a bit more.

Now, in my late forties, the reminders are everywhere, subtle yet undeniable. The stiffness in my joints when I rise in the morning, the muscle aches that linger longer than they used to, and the days it takes to recover from a late night out. I catch myself squinting at my phone, tracing the wrinkles etched across my forehead, and notice the grey hairs multiplying faster than I imagined. These changes remind me that I no longer move through the world as I once did. Instead, I carry the marks of a body that has logged thousands of miles, a testament to the years I've lived.

And then there is my dear mother. Eighty-two years old, with decades of living behind her. She speaks often in the passing of her time now, not in days or schedules, but in what remains of her life. There is a stoicism to her reflections and a bluntness, a harsh reckoning with the truth that the horizon is nearer than it once was.

When my dad passed away, it was just days before my parents' 49th wedding anniversary. Nearly five decades together, and then, in an instant, he was gone. I couldn't comprehend the depth of that loss or how my mother was bearing it.

The only time I ever heard her cry was on the day he passed. She called me, her voice breaking through the phone, "Maki... Dad is gone," she shrieked, and then in the next moment quickly gathered herself. That moment of rawness was fleeting. Soon after, she returned to her steady, unshakable self.



My brothers and I thought she might benefit from speaking to someone about the grief she was holding inside. When we suggested it, she dismissed the idea with a quick laugh. "I'm fine. Maybe you're the one who needs to talk to someone," she said, brushing it off with her small, deflective laugh.

Six months passed, and my wife and I observed quietly, wondering how she was doing. People often asked me about her, and I would respond the same way: she was keeping busy, going to the gym, having coffee with friends, and caring for her dog, Honey. While that was true, I sensed it was more than just that. Honey wasn't filling her days; she was helping my mom stay active, focused on caring for something, and providing companionship.

At first, it was small things: misplaced items, repeated questions, a story told twice in one sitting, confusion about which bill to pay and when to pay it. Then, gradually, it became clear this was more than grief. And then the diagnosis came. Alzheimer's had slipped quietly into her days and was carving away at my mother.

This disease is like a mist that gradually rolls in over time, thickening as it progresses. It wraps itself around everything you love and cherish, slowly suffocating the life out of your loved one. The journey has been arduous, and navigating this process has been challenging. I am learning as much as I can about the disease, how to handle its various stages, and how to communicate and care for my mother while I helplessly watch her decline.

In many ways, I've come to see my mother in a new light. One notable change is her personality. The woman I grew up with was gentle and reserved, a traditional Japanese lady who covered her mouth when she laughed, as if even her joy needed to be modest. Now, she laughs freely and joyfully, which makes me smile. She expresses her thoughts more openly, without the careful filter she once maintained. Her emotions can surface more easily now, and she can sometimes be quite sharp when disagreeing.

My dad would proudly remind me, "Mak, on your Japanese side, the Fujita name can be traced back to a samurai clan. You have samurai blood in you. Don't forget that." I often reflect on those words as I watch my mother quietly fight her battles with unwavering determination. In her everyday life, I see that warrior spirit; she fights not with a sword but with courage, grit, and dignity.

She diligently writes everything down in her notebook and on the calendar. The hallway is lined with sticky notes to help her remember important tasks. She manages some of her bills and banking, and she enjoys walks to the gym on pleasant days. She travels to visit her grandchildren and regularly meets friends and colleagues for lunch or coffee. Some days are better than others; I can see the weariness and frustration she experiences, but despite that, she perseveres.





The most remarkable part is this: amid her struggle, she got a part-time job as a florist at the same shop where she once worked while pregnant with me nearly half a century ago. To me, that is her warrior spirit made visible, choosing to keep living, contributing, and finding purpose even as the battle grows harder.

I will continue to celebrate every small victory, whether remembering my birthday, recalling the code to the front door, or reminiscing about memories. Each of these moments is a battle won in a war that she ultimately cannot win. The tide will keep rolling in, erasing not only memories but also pieces of the woman who gave me life. I know that one day, she may look at me with eyes that no longer recognize her son.

In this, I find myself mourning her in fragments, little by little, as this disease steals her away. It is a slow death, stretched out over time, unlike my father's sudden passing, where the pain came all at once. With him, grief struck in a single, devastating blow. With her, it lingers like a storm that will not pass.

For now, I take each day as it comes, time spent watching movies together, grocery shopping, and shared meals. In these moments, I will remember my mother for who she was and not what is coming. The love I can show my mother now is by standing by her side as the mist closes in, until all that's left is the shell of her and the echo of a son and mother's bond that this disease can never erase.

Perhaps this is the gift of aging: it teaches us to hold the present with more reverence, to treat each moment not as a given, but as something precious.

Stronger in thought than yesterday,
Maki Riddington

Source from Maki's Monday Musings