



March 2011

Am I an Elder's Daughter or a Geriatric Care Manager?

There is a question that has been floating in my mind over the last few weeks: How come I can help you with your parent, but I'm frozen in my tracks with my mom? After 27 years of helping families understand and cope with dementia and/or memory loss, I find myself riding the same wave. Sitting on this end of my career, what I find colliding with my family life, is a feeling of denial and grief.

I love my mother and want to respect her autonomy, but her safety is now an issue. A few weeks ago, at my weekly visits, I noticed some subtle changes. I knew she was failing, but I didn't like what I was seeing because it meant I was going to have to intervene more to keep her safe.

I have said to my clients that it isn't *you* taking the control away, it is (name the illness). However, right now, it sure feels like it is me. Parent care is "tough love" and just about as hard as parenting a teenager. As tough as it is, I know what I feel is "grief" – losing her bit by bit.

My mother said to me a month ago that she told the ladies in one of her clubs that her daughter was her new "mother." She said this with a smile and not in anger – in fact she thanked me for all I'm doing for her despite my career and family. But, her comments have me thinking about how I might remind her to take her medications without me being "bossy" or making her feel as if she can't do anything on her own.

Then a couple of weeks ago, my 88 year-old mother had a stroke. It is



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surprising the scenarios that go through your head and the decisions you start making way before it is necessary. Can she live alone? Should I insist she move closer to me? Can she drive? Is she a target of exploitation? Will a caregiver who lives-in take advantage of her? Should we spend all her savings on home care if that is her wish or what if she can't make that decision? Will she regain her ability to live independently?

My brothers have opinions different from mine at times. I know they love her, but I have questions about why they think any differently from me. I am the Geriatric professional, but am I being selfish wanting her closer to me than in the city she was born in and has lived the past almost 89 years?

After we had a confirmation on the stroke she asked, "Does this mean I can't drive?" We said, "Let's take this one-day at a time." What a wonderful spirit despite facing uncertainty. I hope I can be like her if life also throws me a curve ball.

One day, during rehab, I walked into her room as she pointed to me and said to the aid behind her, "I don't like her – she put me here." Mind you, she is in one of the best rehab

centers she could be in post stroke and one that is sometimes difficult to get admitted into. So, of course the rational part of me wanted to tell her how lucky she was to be in this place. But, the emotional part of me was crushed.

What I said was, "Have you been working hard today?" "Are you tired?" And, I said that with a smile. I discovered in the next hour that she had participated in two therapy sessions and a neuropsychological evaluation. I know from my years working with clients, when someone doesn't do well on those evaluations, they really feel bad about themselves. They are often aware they didn't answer questions correctly and can project their anger onto family members or medical providers. The results of these tests help families make sound decisions because they reveal functional capacity in the realm of self-care, judgment, memory and safety.

If Mom didn't like me because I arranged for the best rehab, how much will she like me or even love me when I find her an assisted living environment? I knew I was going to have to resource the "spiritual" side of my soul to walk this tightrope because my clinical skills and love for my mother would not be enough.

Life is full of "pot holes" that we didn't see coming and we find them hard to get out of. I just didn't want to feel as if I ever had to take control from my mother – but, it looks like I will have no other options.

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That fateful day came that I had to break through any denial that my mother needed more help. Yet, I still felt somewhat guilty and I know better on a professional and concrete level.

I took her and her beloved cat to the assisted living community directly from the hospital. My brothers had moved all her own furniture in, hung her clothes and stocked the cabinets. Her computer is up and running – as my brother calls it “the \$1,000 solitaire machine”. It looks very welcoming, much like Mom’s home, and it has a

nice little view of a courtyard with a fountain.

Mom is curious about what happens next and is asking good questions that I don’t have answers for just yet. When she seems disappointed about the move and projects that onto me I feel bad – thinking she could die not loving me. But, in my heart I know better.

The hard part is seeing her changes and knowing she will never be the same mother I had just a few months ago. But, despite my grief and having her project some of her

anger onto me, I love her even more. I pray I can be kind and look for the sunshine in every minute I have with her. She is a good and kind mother – sweet and caring to all she has met. I don’t think in my entire life I saw her get angry with another adult and be less than a lady. What a legacy she has modeled for her heirs – better than financial resources, she’s given us a legacy of kindness. I hope I do what I need to do to preserve her dignity and give her some semblance of control over her life.

Eldercare Services provides Counseling, Support Groups, Caregiving, and Care Management to aid Family Caregivers. If you or someone you know could benefit from self-care, give us a call at (866) 760-1808 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com.



Eldercare Services works with Seniors and their families in Walnut Creek, Alameda County, San Francisco and the Tri-Valley, CA. Visit us on the web at <http://www.EldercareAnswers.com> for more information.

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

Families Dealing with Dementia

3rd Friday of every month from 10 AM to Noon

1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information regarding classes and support groups, visit us at www.EldercareAnswers.com or call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM
605 A Chenery St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups: None
Support Group Registration: Not required