

Spring has transitioned to summer, to fall, and is now moving quickly toward winter since Dad passed away. Mom has actively assumed the role of family matriarch in her own right. This has not been easy for her or for us kids who have been assisting her. However, Mom has not compromised her principles, leading very much by example.

We have been blessed with a mother who is most pleasant and patient...and loving... in spite of her infirmities. In each of us kids this punctuates the way she raised us....in unconditional love. This makes assisting Mom a rewarding and joyful challenge for us kids, keeping her comfortable and happy.

Mom loves to get out. Aside from simply taking walks (wheelchair rides) around the neighborhood with her kids, she has taken a couple of county bus rides for a little shopping at Trader Joe's and getting some frozen yoghurt. She was all smiles for the walk down to and around the Santa Clara Art and Wine Festival in Central Park.

Mary enrolled Mom in some adult ed classes (exercising, cooking and speech) on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, having arranged for a van to transport her with one of us kids (or grandkids) assisting. It's hard to say if she enjoys the social aspects of the classes, with social time on Thursday afternoons where everyone eats what was made in the earlier cooking class, or the exercise instructor, Ed, more. She has taken a liking to him which has helped in getting her to be more diligent in neck and upper body stretches (we turn her wheelchair so she has to stretch a little more to keep eye contact with him).

Dan built a ramp for ease of access at the front door. Dad may have snarled and grumbled about this, but it is well made, even getting compliments from the van drivers who like to wheel Mom to the front door.

Meanwhile there are activities indoors at home to keep Mom active and stimulated. She reads newsletters and cards (most with separate personal notes) she receives in the snail mail. She loves getting personal mail, so a big "Thank You!" to those who keep those letters and cards coming.

Mom enjoys music, concerts, nature videos, inspirational talks, chair exercises and hula dancing (yep, wheelchair/chair hula) on YouTube. She plays puzzles and games with us kids, but it seems more to pacify her adult kids and grandkids. But, when the great-grandkids come around (the 14 and younger crowd) it is great fun and games for Mom. She also enjoys gazing out the front window, watching people go by and taking in the sunset.

With her home work ethic clearly an integral part of her being, she is adamant about getting chores done. She folds laundry, wipes counters and sinks, points out if cupboard doors are left open and if there is something left on the floor. And she expects the same from us, like when each morning she scrutinizes Mary's room as she passes by, making sure the bed is made and things are picked up. Should something be out of order it is not uncommon for Mom to make a guttural "you do see that needs to be picked up and you will get it done immediately" sound (and is that a raise eyebrow?) or gesture....and it gets done.

Mom is still on hospice services. She remains physically strong. However, she began eating less as a result of difficulty in her skill/brain function [using a fork or spoon], eating more finger foods, more at comfort foods. Taking a look more closely at her diet, we eliminated a fairly wide range of foods that exacerbated severe bloating and IBS symptoms. Due to this change in diet, which also challenged us to make her meals tasty and enjoyable, we were unable to supply ample protein and calories for Mom, resulting in her losing weight, albeit she tended to be in better spirits. So another change was made. With Mom's delighted approval, she is now eating adequate portions of meat, helping her maintain her strength and to gain some weight. She has always been good about knowing what foods her body needs, so we trust this was the right decision as she has been in improved spirits and comfort with the change.

Although some days and nights are better than others, Mom's dementia remains about the same depending on hydration, sleep and over-stimulation. She seems to recognize faces, but rarely names. She often needs a lot of prompting in activities of daily living but can be fairly engaged with dressing, brushing her teeth, combing her hair, etc.

Mom misses Dad, often calling to him by name. She does go through periods of "ethereal visitation" with those who have already passed, but she seems happy and content (and, at times, busy) during these periods.

We are all blessed to have this time with our Mother and know how fortunate we are to share our days with Mom and her pleasant, loving, humorous and sometimes assertive qualities.

Praying you are filled with joy and happiness this blessed season.

The Aldridge Children (as Dad said, the "Terrific Ten")