

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
A Daughter's Tribulation - Finding Sanity  
by Judith Ingram

Never did I imagine the stress and emotional turmoil it would cause when I made the decision to bring my folks to Oregon, give up the comfort of my home, and sacrifice every breath to taking care of them. Never did I imagine that after Sam passed that things would turn more dire, to the point many times I wanted to die. I'd heard stories of how hard it is caring for your folks, how it can take a great toil on one's whole being, but I never imagined it would be like that for me.

When Sam passed away in February 2018 at the age of 91, it was my hope that my mother and I would be able to get along better. More and more that hope seemed in vain. The more I tried to make conversation with her, the more we would get into bickering back and forth. Her overly opinionated and sarcastic comments became overbearing. I can see now that I didn't handle things the right way back then – heck, I didn't even know how to handle things back then. I took things too personal and my feelings were affected too deep. My battle became within. I knew somehow, I had to disconnect from her as my mother. I had to try and keep focused that she wasn't my mom any longer, and accept I would never have the kind of mother-daughter relationship I thought we would share in her final days. I never spent much time with her over my adult lifetime. Between her and Sam always working or traveling, with an occasion visit to see me and the girls, we never spent any real quality time together. I suppose I am also to blame for that, with all the moving I did to places far away.

Though I had made countless visits to see them in California over the decades, and they treated my girls to some wonderful memorable summer vacations, short visits never really gave me the time to spend with her. I really didn't know her like my girls know me. I would have loved having the kind of relationship I developed with my daughters, but the sad truth is, we never really had a relationship ... we had occasional visits. Since she didn't like to talk on the phone, saying she had nothing to say most of the time, every call was disappointedly short. Before cell phones and unlimited long distance, her go-to excuse to get off the phone was, "Well we better hang up before it cost you too much," or "Well, this is costing you so we better go." Frankly, I can't recall a time when she ever called me. Over the decades of time my calls to her became far and in-between.

Although it bothered me that we couldn't chit chat and have real conversations, I accept that was just how she was. I had known others who had a hard time talking on the phone. I can't say I understand that, as my phone conversations with others can last more than hour. However, I learned through their boxes and boxes of photo albums, she had a lot to say, yet, she rarely spoke of their travels or shared photos. I realized then that her and Sam had lived a full life ... a life many only dream about, and saying next to nothing of it, and yet, when I saw all their albums it disturbed me that she hadn't shared that part of her life with me. I wanted to get them out and have them both tell me their stories, but every time I mentioned it, I was put off to another time ... a time that never came. Sam once said he was too tired to tell, and by then he truly was.

Most of our problems were caused due to her accusing me of saying things I didn't say. When I tried to correct her, denying what she thought I said, she would get upset and start screaming at me, clinching her hands around her head and yelling for me to get out, calling me a liar. She would say hurtful things and after I had expressed to her my feelings, one day she crushed me when she brushed me off by saying, "Oh Judy, you're too sensitive," as if that were a bad thing. Many times, she snarled at me, "Judy, you have a mental problem. There's something wrong with you." More often, however, she would just accuse me of lying and trying to drive her crazy, accusing me of things that weren't true. This made communicating with her something I tried to avoid. I learned the hard way that the best course was to keep things simple.

By being a caregiver and not a daughter, it seemed to reduce the stress, although the daughter still tried to interact at times with repeated failure, frustration, anger and sometimes tears expressed most deeply within the walls of my backyard room. Spending the funds to remodel that shed for my living space was the best thing I ever did. Living in the house was not an option for my sanity after Sam passed, and I think for her as well.

After sharing what I was going through with family and friends, they all told me that it sounded like she had dementia. The paranoia she developed caused mistrust and suspicion. She feared I would commit her to a nursing home, though I tried to convince her I would never do that. She saw how her own mother was put into a nursing home, and how terribly sad that was. She said she couldn't care for her because they lived so far apart. She wasn't able to make the same sacrifice I had made for her, and I believe she harbors some quilt for that.

Whenever she went into a mental frenzy, I tried to calm her down but that only made her more furious at me. One day while standing in her bedroom an argument flared up when I told her it was time to take a bath, and even though I would approach her with a gentle tone, she would start to make up excuses to avoid it. The more I tried to get her up, the more she got worked up and would order me to leave.

After she had first arrived, it took months to get her to bathe. I had that down to weeks, letting her slide over and over, but on one particular day, I had to put my foot down. When I refused to leave, standing firm in the doorway, she started screaming, "Get Out!" over and over, until she jumped out her chair and stomped toward me, shoving me out the doorway and slamming the door behind her. I tried so many times to keep my mouth shut while being loving and caring, but somehow anything I said seemed to get twisted, and too many times I lost my temper, screaming back at her. In those times I went to my room, far from her ears where I had to scream it out, scream it all out, then call someone to regain my mind. If I hadn't had those who helped me through the unbearable tribulation of those years, I might have ended up in a mental ward.

It wasn't even a month after Sam passed that my mom started talking about going on a cruise. I didn't take her serious until I realized she was serious, and yet we hadn't even put Sam in the ground yet. She went from near total hibernation in her bedroom to coming alive, mentally that is, for she was still in very poor physical shape. After years of little to no activity, and not looking in the greatest of shape, I told her I wouldn't take her anywhere until she showed me that

she could physically manage such a challenge. I told her to start getting up, get dressed, and I would take her walking, yet, that didn't happen, at least not right away.

When we returned from Sam's Celebration of Life and burial service in Manteca, California, she finally perked up. On the days I was working she would drive to town and stop by to see me while out shopping. I began to see that she was making the effort to get in shape for that cruise. Then the disappointment came when I began to develop COPD and was having a difficult time breathing, even doing simple outdoor chores. At first, I thought I was just out of shape (that's the denial I told myself), so I started walking around the office going up and down the stairs to build my strength up. It did seem to help my breathlessness somewhat, but it mostly made my legs much stronger, which was a good thing as I knew there would be a lot walking on a cruise trip.

Sadly, my breathing issues grew much worse after the company decided to put RE/MAX flags out along the road. Each weekend morning, whether in the freezing cold or 90+ degree heatwaves, I had to carry four long poles with large ballon shaped flags (company logo) outside and walk up a slight hill along the road to stick into the ground holders which were placed along the sidewalk strip of lush green grass. And at closing time go out and get them. Our building was located right along the I-5 freeway. With the busy traffic road on one side constantly fuming with automobiles and diesel trucks, and a freeway on the other side with countless semitrucks and auto fumes filling that area, I believe my condition escalated real fast. It wasn't too bad at first, but after months and months of inhaling gas and diesel fumes, along with my Marlboro cigarettes, my lungs became clogged to the point I couldn't mow my own backyard without taking breaks to catch my breath.

Over time I came to hate putting those flag poles out, especially during whirlwinds. The way the wind would whip down into the parking lot with my hair blowing wildly, while my eyes massively watered causing mascara to run down my cheeks, would really start my day off with a frown. Seemed useless too many times to even go through the effort of 'getting ready for work,' and was an effort ... and effort that got harder and harder.

Some of my regular weekend floor agents saw how difficult it had become for me to haul those flags in and out and showed sympathy, but mostly it was one or two of the male agents who felt sorry enough for me after seeing how breathless, shaky, and basically a wreck I was after doing the miserable task. They were kind enough to help, and I was so grateful!

Sometimes it felt like my lungs were going to collapse, and even at that point, I didn't clue in to what was going on, continuing to assume it was just being out of shape and getting older. But whenever my mom started talking about a cruise, I would have an almost panic attack. I tried to explain to her over and over again that I physically didn't feel well enough, explaining that a trip of such magnitude seemed too monumental of a journey for me, but she would get mad and accuse me of holding her a prisoner. Her selfishness was very hurtful to me, as I was experiencing something that was extremely scary, especially when I would have an exacerbation episode ... though at that time, I hadn't ever heard that term.

As my breathing situation grew worse, one morning at work no one was there to help me take the RE/MAX flags out. I struggled on whether I should do it, or wait for someone to help, but I was

afraid the boss might come and be upset that they weren't out, so I decided to just go ahead and get it done. I barely made it back inside, dropping exhaustedly into my office chair gasping for air when an agent walked in. My eyes were watering down my cheeks as I tried to catch my breath. He wasn't one of my regular weekend agents. When he saw me, he became concerned and asked if I was going to be okay. For a several seconds I could talk, but I nodded my head. He stood by me to make sure I was going make it, and then asked if I smoked. When I told him yes, he suggested I have a pulmonary test. I didn't know what that was, so I asked. He said it would tell if I had COPD. I didn't know what that was either, so he explained it to me. I took his advice to heart and made a doctor's appointment.

After having some tests done, I remember vividly that Friday morning on August 3, 2018 when the doctor's office called with my test results. The attending nurse said my results showed that I had irreparable lung damage. I asked her what that meant. She said I had COPD. Again, I asked what that meant. She said I have emphysema and that the doctor advised me to immediately quit smoking. I asked her if this was a life or death situation, and something in her tone when she said, "Absolutely!" sent chills throughout me body. The word 'death' kept ringing in my head reminding me of a self-made promise I told myself at very young age ... that if or whenever I got the word that my smoking became a life or death decision, I would stop right then and there.

When I hung up the phone, I threw all my cigarette's away, and bought a bag of candy suckers. I wasn't going to die like my dad had before the age of 70. My fear overpowered my addiction to have a cigarette and I haven't ever smoked again. Even inhaling cigarette smoke can clog my lungs.

Two weeks later that agent came into the office and I thanked him for saving me life. The doctor even wrote a prescription to give my boss informing him that I was not to put the flags out, at my request. I had to have something to give him to get out of that task. He wasn't happy about it, and whenever there wasn't anyone there to help, the flags just didn't go out, or at least until someone showed up who was willing to do it. Then winter came and the flags were put away until Spring.

After several months of recovery, my lungs began to improve with an inhaler. My mom had stopped talking about a cruise for a long time, when she realized I really wasn't well enough to take her. One day while I was taking her shopping, she started to tell me that since I wasn't able to take her, that she went online and posted an ad looking for a travel partner. She said she got a response from a lady who was interested. I just about hit the roof. There was no way I was going to let her go off with some stranger she met on the Internet. She got really upset at me and started accusing me again of holding her hostage. I told her she better write that lady and get out of it before that situation went any further. I realized then that she would do anything to go on another cruise, with or without me, and that made me question her mental state all the more.

I finally talked to the doctor and told him the things that were going on, and that I needed him to confirm or not that she had dementia, as more and more it appeared so. I didn't want to believe it to be true, but I had put it off for way too long. After taking her in, he prescribed donepezil, a medication given to dementia patients, though he told her it was just a memory pill. I didn't want

to upset her by telling what the doctor said to me in private, so I kept that information to myself. I was afraid that if I told her she had dementia, she would become extremely upset, but after I finally accepted the diagnosis, I was able to deal with the situation with a better attitude.

One day I told my mother I would agree to take her on a cruise if she would pay for Karey and Lilia to go with us - her granddaughter and great granddaughter – letting her know I couldn't do it any other way. I had to have help. Danielle would have been my first choice since she was closest to us, but she turned down the offer for a free cruise trip. With some pleading, mom agreed to pay for their cruise and airfare from Arizona to Los Angeles. I convinced her that I needed them to help me because I just couldn't do it alone. The only thing was, Karey couldn't go on a seven-day trip like she wanted, and that meant choosing a four-day trip, and she wasn't happy about that because it meant going to Baja Mexico. Her and Sam had already been on that cruise two or three times before. Karey and I, too, had been on that Mexico cruise when mom and Sam paid for a whole family reunion trip many decades earlier, but I really didn't think it would matter to her where we went since she said she had no plans of getting off the ship and just wanted to be out to sea. She seemed to have a strong desire to be on a ship floating in the ocean, even though her and Sam had already been on twenty cruises and there really wasn't anywhere she hadn't already been before, or seen onshore. But it was obvious she went along with the plan with a disappointed and rebellious spirit.

Karey was excited to take Lilia, my thirteen-year-old granddaughter, and although Karey had already seen most everything there before, sharing the experience with her daughter was worth going again. When mom finally agreed to my plan, I set everything in motion. Karey said she couldn't go until Spring break when Lilia would be out of school, so we booked the cruise for May 2019. For a year my mother had nagged on about taking a cruise, and yet from the moment I booked the trip, she was knowingly unhappy about it, wishing it was a longer trip. It wasn't the trip she seemed have dreamed about doing after Sam passed, but in her mind, it was better than nothing. I booked a motel in Portland the night before, and things went alright between us on the drive, but heated up at the airport the next morning. I decided to check my car in rather than try to walk the distance from the huge parking structure with all our luggage. She didn't see the necessity in it, saying it cost too much. I got perturbed from her lack of concern for my health, and I told her I would pay for it. For me, it was a lifesaver. While walking through the airport I became breathless and had to find a place to sit down a few times while getting to our flight. Hauling one large suitcase and another carry-on bag, as well as a large size canvas overfilled shoulder bag, it was near grueling. Mom had her walker and was doing great, but she wasn't able to help me.

Standing in the long, slow line to check in, my back started to hurt and ache to the point I had to take a couple of Aleve. At least when I checked in the large suitcase, it helped a great deal lessen the load. Mom said I packed way more than I needed, having little sympathy for me. I suppose I was resentful toward her because I was doing it all for her, and she didn't act grateful. Her pouting formed her expression and caused a negative response in me. I was already regretting the whole trip. Had she showed even a little excitement, it would have made things better, for all.

I had coordinated our plane arrival about the same time in Los Angeles that Karey and Lilia would arrive. We were a little earlier than them. Mom had to use the bathroom, and then we headed to where they would be coming in. When I saw them, I was so excited. Mom tried to be happy, but then was upset when Karey noticed she had toilet paper sticking out the backside of her pants. I never saw it since she was always trailing behind me, but in that moment of realization, she felt totally embarrassed and turned to accuse of me of humiliating her. She called me a liar when I tried to explain that I never saw it. Karey looked shocked at her reaction and tried to calm her down, telling her it's okay.

Karey had called for a Lyft and we all stood outside waiting for our ride. As Karey and I chatted, mom stood around with a frown. When we all loaded into the SUV. She was put in the front seat, and Karey, Lilia, and I were in the backseat. Our conversation continued as mom kept looking back at us with a nasty expression. She finally got upset enough to speak up, complaining that she couldn't hear our conversation and felt left out. But it wasn't so much the words she spoke as the way she spoke them, face wrinkled up in madness in an irritable tone. Karey whispered to me saying maybe we should be quiet. The irritation started from the moment we all piled into the Lyft and it only got worse. I could tell Karey was shockingly embarrassed when her grandmother became upset and lashed out at us. It got depressingly silent after that, all the way to port ... at least for me.

When we reached the port, she took off on her walker like she was mad and got ahead of us. While lugging all our suitcases up the ramp that seemed endless, and about half way up, I couldn't haul our two bags any longer. I felt like I was going to drop. Even though Karey and Lilia had their own very large sized suitcases, they each took one of mine to help out. When mom reached the top of the ramp and was rushing to the crossover bridge to the ship, Karey said, "Gee, mom, grandma sure is excited to get onboard." I felt she was just mad and acting like a child, but I let Karey think the positive. Lilia had been quiet as a mouse the entire time.

At the top of the ramp, I was able to take back my two suitcases as we headed for the crossover bridge. Mom was pretty far ahead of us and by the time we were only half way across, she had reached the threshold in a fast pace ... and then all of a sudden we saw her and the walker take a dive to the floor. We all dropped our bags and ran toward her. She was going so fast that she didn't see the slight hump between the bridge and the ship crossing. When her walker hit that gap, she totally went straight forward tumbling over her walker and smashing face first into the floor. By the time we got to her there were two large men and one woman helping to get her up. They helped her to a chair to sit down and see if she was hurt. Karey and Lilia went back and got all the luggage while I tried to get her to make out an accident report. She kept saying she was alright and just wanted to get to our cabin. One man went with us to make sure she made it ok.

That was the start of our cruise trip and it only got worse. For the rest of the day and into the night she was pouting, looking like misery, but it didn't have to do with any physical damage from the fall. It had to do with her foolish rush onto the ship and taking a tumble. She felt more embarrassed than anything else. I felt she wasn't telling me the truth about her hurting, and before bed I checked her and found bruises. I was concerned with the one by her eye, but she

kept saying it didn't hurt. She refused to make out an accident report at the time of the incident, but the next day I made sure we filed one.

The next day I wanted to get off at Catilina Island with the girls, but at breakfast she started complaining her head hurt. I was afraid of leaving her alone so I stayed back. I'd been there before, as Karey had many decades earlier, but it was all new for Lilia and Karey was so excited to take her. While they were gone for the day mom and I walked around the ship. She kept saying she didn't like the ship, there was nothing new, nothing to do. While we were sitting down having a meal, we got into an argument. I don't even remember what it was about, but it was enough to make me angry and I left her sitting there and went back to our cabin, where I cried. After awhile she returned and took a nap. We didn't speak to each other until later when we were going to dinner. Karey could feel the tension between us and it was making her uncomfortable.

At dinner we sat and listened the wonderful day the girls had, and mom seemed to be coming out of her mood. Afterward we went to watch a show and while her and I went back to the cabin, the girls stayed up wandering around the ship. The next morning we arrived at Ensenada and I told mom that I was going to shore to spend the day with the girls. She did so well the day before that I wasn't worried about her. I thought she would enjoy spending the day to herself. I told her if she started to feel ill, to go the ship's doctor and pointed to her on map where it was. I could tell she was disappointed that I was leaving her, but she certainly didn't want to go herself, for moment I felt selfish, but also deserving, though I hadn't planned on being gone so long.

Karey paid to take us on a special trip to La Bufadora to see the Blow Hole. A man then guided us to a black SUV and sat the three of us in the backseat. He stepped away for a moment to have a conversation with a man standing near us. I said to Karey that it felt weird because I thought we were supposed to take the bus with other people. She agreed. Thankfully the man came back and said there was room on the bus and ushered us out. I felt so much better.

When we arrived, we wandered around the marketplace and to the end to see the blow hole. On the way back to the bus, we sat down and sipped a glass of wine. Lilia wanted to go back to where she could take some more pictures of the ocean, so Karey stayed to have another glass of wine while I went with her. I had to go the bathroom really bad, or I would have never gone there. After paying a dollar, it was so disgusting, and no toilet paper. Lilia had to go too, but she decided she could wait. She took her pictures and we headed back. Karey bought a couple of items for Lilia and I bought a bottle of pure vanilla extract for my mom. I thought she would really like it for the homemade chocolate chip cookies she loved so much. I wish we would have had more time to browse but the bus was loading up.

On the trip back, we stopped at the Pai Pai petting zoo. Karey and Lilia were able to go into one of the glass cages with the monkeys. I watched with such smiles of joy at the fun they were having, hearing Lilia's laughter. Then Karey paid a fortune so Lilia could go inside the cage to pet lion cubs. They looked so cute and irresistible, I admit, but within minutes one of the cubs took a bite on her bare leg, as she was wearing shorts. An attendant rushed in and guided her out, cleaning the wound and bandaging it up. She wanted to go back in and get her times worth, so the attendant stayed right there to make sure she was safe so Karey could get some photos

through the glass wall. It was a long day but I had so much fun and was in a great spirit, until I got back to the ship. Mom was waiting in the cabin, and she was fuming.

When I entered the cabin, she was laying upright in her bed staring at her laptop. I sat down on my bed looking at her angry face, then asked what was wrong. She blurted out, "Why did you leave me all day?" I tried to explain to her that I didn't mean to, but Karey took us out to the Blow Hole. The conversation grew more intense as she tried to guilt me saying she didn't feel well. When I reminded her that if she didn't feel well then to go to the doctor, she got so worked up she grabbed her walker and headed out the door snarling, "Fine then, I'll go the doctor." After she stormed out, I went to Karey's cabin and started to cry. Karey felt so bad for me, but was worried about her grandmother. She told me I needed to go the doctor's office and check on her.

When I got down to the doctor's office, there wasn't anyone at the counter. I looked around and saw an open door, the patient waiting room, and discovered my mom sitting way in the back, out of sight. I went to ask her if she was waiting for the doctor and she said no one had come to see her. I went back out and rang the bell on the counter. A lady came out and was surprised that my mom was sitting alone in the waiting room. I told her about my mom's fall when she entered the ship, and that at first she said she was ok, but that now says she isn't feeling well. I also told her we had just had an argument and she was very upset at me and had taken off. The lady went in the waiting room to talk to her, and when she asked my mom how she was feeling, my mom said she was confused, while holding her hands across her face looking distraught. The lady gave me a clipboard with medical forms, so I sat down beside my mom and together we filled out the paperwork on insurance and medications she takes. I went back the counter and gave it to the lady. She looked it over and went to talk to the doctor. When she returned, she asked if my mom was in any physical pain, and I said no. Then she told me that the doctor said unless she had something physically wrong, she needed to see her doctor when she gets home because he didn't treat dementia. I asked how she knew that, and she by the medication she takes.

I didn't want to tell my mom that, so I only told her if she wasn't hurting anywhere specific, then we just need to go back to the cabin. I got her to calm down, but the whole ordeal put a damper on the evening. Things were pretty quiet at dinner, and she wanted to go back to the cabin afterward. I asked her if it was ok if I hung out with the girls for a while, and she said that would be fine. She wanted to take a nap. I walked around with the girls for about an hour going through the shops looking at so many nice 'expensive' items. I bought Lilia a hoodie that cost over \$50.00, and I think that was on sale. When I returned to the cabin, mom was awake on her laptop playing games. She was in a nicer mood and I was able to share with her the day we had on shore.

The next day was an onboard day and we all hung out around the pool deck and entertainment area. Karey was ever more aware of her grandmother's hearing issue, so she tried to sit closets to her and speak louder. We all had a pleasant day, but I was ready to get home. The next morning I was packed and ready and to go. We took a SUV Lyft back to the airport and said our goodbyes. When mom and I arrived in Portland, I was about dead getting out of there and to my car. I was so thankful I didn't have to walk very far, but when I got all the luggage and the walker and my mom into the car, I collapsed in the driver's seat. I literally could not move for at least five

minutes or more. Catching my breath was the worst of it, though my body was feeling it too. Having had fibromyalgia since the 1990s, stress really takes a hardship on me. For three hours driving, all I could think of was home. Mom and I hardly spoke a word. We stopped for breakfast in Salem and I said to her, "I hope you've had your fill of cruises, because I don't think I'm ever going to do this again." She responded by saying, "Oh no, I'm ready for another one." I remember my whole body filled with resentment and I couldn't speak a word.

Once we were home, and for a couple of months after, she had retreated back to her bedroom desk and computer. Sitting hours in her nightgown and robe day after day. She hardly ever left the house, and her trips to town became next to none after she suffered a panic attack at Albertson's. I didn't know about it until I got home from work. Apparently, she had stood too long in line at the counter and her back went into excruciating pain, causing her to have the attack. She said one of the store attendants had to help get to the car. Once she sat down and rested, she was able to drive home. I do believe that experience scared her, and frankly, I was glad. I was already worried about her going off on her own, but she had her own strong will. From then on, I would take her on my days off.

Shortly thereafter, I was severely injured while doing cleanup work out back behind my room. While picking up old loose fencing boards, I was tossing them behind me when suddenly I felt the muscle in my chest snap, like a rubber band reverberating in the most intense pain. Instantly, I froze in place, breath and all thinking I could die. It felt like I had cracked my sternum and for a several minutes I couldn't move, fearful I would drop to the ground right there and no one would know. I became scared and had to force myself to move.

When I started to take shallow breaths, I knew I was in trouble. I knew I had to get into the house to let my mom know. With all my might I slowly made it to her bedroom. She was sitting, as usual, at her desk computer and when she saw I was injured she panicked. She wanted to call 911 but I insisted that she didn't. I knew all I needed was to lay down. Any movement at all beyond that, scared the hell out of me. No, I didn't want to deal with that situation. I didn't want to go to the hospital. She kept asking what she could do, and there wasn't anything she could do. I just asked her to let me rest on her bed for a while. I laid there for hours before I could move. Very slowly she helped me back to my room where I was able to take some pain medication and lay back down. Once I made it back to my room, she cared for me for the rest of the week, which was a big challenge for her, but I was thankful she was there to help.

The accident happened on a Monday, and the entire week I was doped up on muscle relaxers and pain pills ... medications I happened to have had on hand from years of fibromyalgia ... that I only took upon occasion, so I had enough to survive that ordeal. By that next Saturday I was able to make it to work and do very little movement. For many weeks it was long, slow healing process.

I began to think it was time to start having caregivers help me. After that accident I felt much weaker. I started to look into her John Hancock Long Term Insurance that she had purchased for her and Sam decades earlier. It turned out to be real blessing. At first, I hired a Caregiving company and for about two months every week someone new would show up and take mom out,

do a little housecleaning, prepare a meal, and every other week give her a bath. If she had it her way, she would like to bathe once a month.

She didn't like any of the ladies that came so I changed to another company. Unfortunately, a month later it was the same, new people every week. She couldn't get comfortable with just one person and complained she didn't like them either. One day the emergency alarm went off in my room and I rushed into the house. The caregiver was standing at the bathroom door. She said she couldn't get my mom out of the tub, telling me she wore a back brace and needed help. That was the worst thing possible for me, but when I saw my mother laying naked and helpless in an empty tub, shivering and crying, I had to get her out. I did manage to get her up with every ounce of strength I had. Her hundred and seventy pound body was totally lifeless, she had no strength to lift herself. Her arms and legs were like wet noodles. The caregiver just stood there while I maneuvered her body to sit down on the nearby toilet seat. When I let go of her and stood straight up, my back seized, which felt nothing like a pulled muscle. I'd had plenty of those, but that was different, that was paralyzing. I had never felt anything like it before, and it took a long time to heal, wearing a back brace. Eventually, I had to have physical therapy.

Over time I felt I had aged well beyond my years, and my body was breaking down, as was my mental and emotional state. I don't know how many times I called my brother and sister-in-law in Alabama and cried and cussed, and had mental breakdowns – knowing they couldn't help because my mom didn't like her daughter-in-law at all. She would never go live with them. So, I couldn't count on that brother, nor on my other brother in Arkansas. There was no way he'd ever help. I really felt stuck. I prayed for someone to rescue me, and then I met a lady who was an independent caregiver, meaning she didn't work for a company. And when I introduced her to mom, they hit it off perfectly ... much too perfect, I would discover.

I had opened up to this person and told her of my difficult time with my mom. She could tell there was a lot of stress in our situation. She said she fully understood, and in a most sincere, compassionate way she eased my mind by saying she wanted to make life easier for the both of us. She said she wanted to help heal our relationship. I thought she was heaven sent ... but time revealed otherwise.