

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
The Final Crossing – Enduring to the End  
by Judith Ingram

When I met Brandi, I finally felt that I had someone who would support and help me to deal with the stressful situation I was enduring. She seemed to relate to what I was going through, and at first, I thought her intentions were a prayer come true. When I had my first interview with her, she showed up in a caregiver's outfits. She was young and appeared professional. I was happy that my mother immediately adored her, and I saw how Brandi's bubbly personality would make her life a little brighter ... and in turn, make my life a lot calmer.

From the first day she started, and then on she showed up in short shorts and a low neckline to where her large breasts were quite an attention grabber, but I didn't say anything. I decided not to make a big deal about it, though I wished she had dressed more appropriate for the position. When she said this was her dream job and had quit the care home where she was working, I believed she would be greatly appreciative toward me for the generous pay I offered her. Then when she said my house was her dream home, upon several occasions, I became a little suspicious of her intentions, but I tried not to read anything into it.

For the first couple of months things were going well. She came three days a week for a few hours, and on one of those days she worked in the yard to pass time, something she expressed she loved to do and I greatly appreciated. But she also loved to take mom shopping each week. At first, I didn't say anything, until I saw the credit card statements. Mom was spending hundreds a month.

I went to Brandi and asked her not to go shopping so much, and when she did, to please control my mother from spending so much. She told me my mom had been wanting to buy outdoor plants to put on the front porch, and I told her absolutely don't buy any plants! I didn't want to have to take care of them as I already had so much to take care of, a daily task of watering and upkeep that took a lot of my time and energy. It was summer then, and adding more to the abundance would only stress me out further. I went to my mother and expressed to her not to buy any plants, explaining my reasoning. However, one day I came home from work and found a dozen new plants, bags of potting soil, and planter boxes sitting on the front porch. Brandi had already left before I got home, and I went to my mom in shock that she and Brandi had disregarded my wishes. I told her that I had asked Brandi not to let her buy any plants and my mother's response was, "It's my money and I deserve to spend it how I want!" I was stunned by what she said as it was something she had never expressed to me before ... before, she had told me many times she didn't need or want anything.

As time went on, I began to notice a change in my mom because it wasn't like her to say such a thing. My mom was a simple person. She would rather shop at secondhand stores than spend money on new items. She just didn't think that way of deserving something because she was perfectly happy that way, not expecting more or selfishly deserving. I felt she was shaming me for questioning her right to spend her money as she pleased. I wouldn't have had a problem with that if it weren't for Brandi gradually ignoring my wishes and instead, apparently, feeding and

promoting such ideas to my mom. In turn, my wishes became more like orders, and the more I realized that she wasn't giving me the respect and loyalty she had at first understood and agreed upon, the more irritated I became. Realizing how much she loved to spend my mom's money, I began to get suspicious of her as I had heard many stories about caregivers taking over and pushing the family out. I heard how some elderly have given everything to them upon passing, and I wasn't going to let that happen here.

I reminded her one day that I hired her, therefore I was the boss ... that she worked for me. I felt I needed to say that when I saw how my mom was growing closer to her, beyond a caregiver, or even just a friend. I saw how she was becoming emotionally dependent on Brandi, and how I was becoming the enemy. She was aggressively defensive toward me whenever I complained that Brandi wasn't doing the things I ask. She would accuse of me of being mean to her. It finally came down to where Brandi could do no wrong. It was me who had the problem, and indeed, I had a problem, alright. I didn't like being pushed out. I didn't like that my mother was becoming distrusting and suspicious of me and my intentions. Where she got such ideas, I could only conclude the obvious.

Brandi had told me she knew how to use a cell phone, text, and use apps. She also said she had a little experience with computers. I was thrilled about that because my mother was having, and had ever since I got her a cell phone, a hard time trying to use it. I tried to teach her, but that didn't go so well and only frustrated and upset her too much. I thought if Brandi taught her that she be more open to learning. That didn't happen. Upon asking my mom how the phone lessons were going, she told me they hadn't. I inquired to Brandi several times as to why she wasn't teaching her but every time she dodged the question and would apologize, saying she would start doing that. It took common sense and observation but I realized she knew very little herself, so how could she teach my mom. I finally quit mentioning it and put the task in my mom's hands. I told her it was up to her to ask for lessons or not. The 'not' was what occurred.

There were several things that I noticed that began to bother me. Another of those things were meal preparation. Over and over again I asked her to prepare meals. When I would get home from work, it was clear to me she wasn't preparing anything. When I asked her about it, she would tell me my mom wasn't hungry. I informed her several times that I still wanted her to prepare meals and if she didn't eat at that time, then she could save it for later. Still, the meals were not being prepared, and when asking my mom about this, she said she told her not to bother. She was fine with eating snacks and candy and cookies. Brandi was making batch after batch of homemade chocolate cookies, which she just loved. When I tried to stress the importance that she eat something with nutrition, she said she doesn't force her clients to eat, allowing them to have whatever they want. I then insisted she make her meals regardless telling her I could warm them up and feed her later. I told her that if mom smells food cooking, she usually will eat. Finally, she started preparing meals and found that my mom actually would eat if it was presented to her.

My mother was not a fancy type person. She liked things plain. No pictures on the walls, no household décor, no spices on her food. Plain. So, to my surprise when she started wearing colorful scarfs and dressing up to go out, I saw a bigger change in her. I suppose I should have

been happy about that, since she usually sat around in her nightgown and robe most of the time, but it seemed the more she became Brandi's little doll to play with, the more my mom became distant toward me. It was undeniable that all of Brandi's pampering was causing her to grow closer and closer to her caregiver, and one day I overheard my mom telling Brandi how much she loved her, and that she felt like a daughter. Besides that hurting me, especially since I had become the enemy, I clearly saw something deeper was going on. It was then that I started to pay much more attention to the situation.

When my mom began to change - when she saw how Brandi was on her side, not mine – it was ever so clear that Brandi wasn't bringing my mother and I together, she wasn't trying to heal our relationship ... and whether it was intentional or not, she was gaining my mom's ultimate trust, further questioning mine. Eventually, I became the opponent in both her and Brandi's mind. When Brandi completely quit taking instructions from me, giving my mother the full reins, this became a huge problem. When I saw how my mom was manipulating Brandi, winning her over, and most likely was the cause of why Brandi ignored me, one day I told my mom that I didn't like the way things were going. Telling her that Brandi thinks she was the boss and asking her point blank, "Are you the boss, mom?" She answered, "Yes, I am!"

When I first met Brandi, I had informed her that the doctor said she was in the early stages of dementia, and that I would be making all the decisions. She had no problem with that, but it seemed as time went on that Brandi didn't think that was true at all. She once said she didn't see it. When I would remind Brandi that I was the boss, she would smile without a word and go on doing whatever my mom said. The last time I had to remind her of this, she told me my mother was her boss, and that she deserved dignity to make her own decisions. This led to a confrontation to where I brought the three of us together to straighten out who was the boss, as Brandi said she was confused who to listen to.

At this point, I wanted to fire her so badly, but because my mom was gaining her ultimate trust, and becoming totally distrustful of me, I didn't want to add fuel to the fire, so I held my tongue. In that confrontation my mom said most boldly that she was the boss. We got into an argument where Brandi walked out of her bedroom and I went to my backyard room.

On the weekends I would write a list of things I wanted her to do while I was at work. I was hoping if she had things to do at the house, she wouldn't take her out so much to go shopping. When these things weren't getting done, I approached her as to why. Her attitude was always defensive, and she would whine to my mother, leading her to believe that I was being mean to her. More and more I saw my mother's attitude becoming more negative toward me. I knew I had a big problem on my hands that only escalated with time. Her accusations toward me of being mean to Brandi made me very angry. She became upset that that I would fire her so I tried to keep my distance, but when I learned my mother was having Brandi do her banking, that was the boiling point for me. Thankfully, the Credit Union denied her withdrawing funds out of mom's account because she wasn't present, which was the only reason I found out.

Then one day my mom told me that Brandi had told her how depressed she was living in a mobile home park with an older man she apparently took care of – though it sounded more like

he was supporting her ... from what my mom told me. She said Brandi wanted to get out of there but had no money. I could see my mom fell for her story, feeling sorry for her. I wondered why a caregiver would share such personal stories, and I became concerned, since there was one thing I knew about my mother, she was gullible and easily taken. For years she fell for the ads on TV for sending money to organizations to help the children of Africa, or where ever, only to later learn most of the money went to pay for staff who drove expensive cars and lived in expensive homes, living high and mighty. She then became distrustful of them all, even the Red Cross, because she had not the sense to discern good from bad ... it was easier to say they're all bad. I've seen her fall for others lies having been deceived many times for her simple and naïve mind.

I believed Brandi figured this out, and was playing on her soft heart, and when a mobile home in the same park she lived in came up for sale by owner, mom told me that Brandi was sad because she didn't have the down payment, and was desperate as ever to move out of the man's place. I told her she better not give Brandi any money. Her response was a sneaky little grin. Brandi also never said a word to me about this, which led to further believe she was working on a plan ... a plan I quickly put an end to.

One weekend, I left a note for Brandi to wipe down the inside of the cupboards. It was getting too costly taking my mom out every week shopping that I figured she needed more to do at the house. It was obvious that Brandi loved to spend mom's money, and with the wages I was paying her, she was making more than she ever had. Of course it was a dream job for her, and becoming a growing nightmare for me. When the weekend was over and I saw that she didn't wipe down the cupboards. When she came the next week, I mentioned the cupboards again and she apologized and said she would do it. When it still hadn't been done, I went to mom to complain. She told me that Brandi didn't know what I meant, which I thought was ridiculous. That next weekend I left a note for Brandi reminding her of the cupboards and explaining what I meant. I wrote down simple instructions that she take out all the dishes and glasses and wipe the cupboards down and put the dishes and glasses back in. I know it was being belittling, but it was such a simple task I couldn't believe she didn't know what I meant.

Well, that note was the end of her. Mom said she was very upset, and that I had made her cry. Mom was upset at me, saying she thought Brandi would probably quit. She was right. Brandi wrote me a letter in response, a not so nice letter, telling me she was done taking my abuse. She said I was unfair toward her and she couldn't work under those circumstances. It was a rather long and expressive letter stating that she had never been treated so disrespectful. I was relieved that she quit, as I knew if I fired her then mom would not forgive me. But although my mom was very sad that she left, I was thrilled.

It was nearing the end of 2019 and in late December we had an all-out fight. I broke down in her presence and told her I just can't do this anymore. I told her I was on the brink of a mental breakdown. I suppose I was somewhat hurt when her immediate response was asking if I would put her in a nursing home, something I knew was her greatest fear. I assured her, as I had many times when she accused me of doing such a thing, that I had no intentions of doing that. I did however ask if she would consider an assisted living facility. She wasn't aware that her long-term insurance covered that, and I wasn't sure myself until I had recently looked into it. She had

told me all along that they only covered a nursing home, but I didn't want to activate the claim until if or when I would need it, and that time was well overdue. When I told her I confirmed that they would pay for it, her attitude suddenly changed. She was all in for that plan.

At this point, she knew there had to be a change. She knew she also was on the brink of a mental breakdown. She knew the situation wasn't going to get any better. She did admit that I had tried everything I could to make it work to keep her at home, but after seeing me break down in tears it activated her emotional sympathy for me. Immediately, the next day I took her around to different facilities in the area to find one she would like. She was excited when she saw her options and of course she chose the most expensive place, and picked the costliest unit they had available. It looked like a one-bedroom apartment costing over seven thousand a month. I didn't care about the cost at the time as her long-term insurance was paying for it. I just wanted her out ... but I also wanted her to be happy.

It was a gorgeous facility, and once we signed the papers, she seemed to get more excited as the first of January 2020 fast approached. She packed all her boxes herself with clothes and books, piling up wherever I could stack them. Then the day came and Dani and friends helped me get her moved in. I gave her most of the furniture, her queen bed, two dressers, PC computer and laptop, desk and office chair, two recliners, a loveseat and a few small end tables. Even with all that, the place looked near empty. It was a huge unit. Her cat Muffy went with her, of course, having to pay a non-refundable thousand-dollar deposit, that the insurance didn't cover. I spent several days going there to help her put things away to get organized, while preparing the house for me to move back in.

Once mom was out of the house, I hired a crew for a professional carpet cleaning. With her cat, Muffy, living in the house, never having been outdoors, and knowing she got sick a lot and threw up everywhere, that task had to be first and foremost. Then I got help to move my furniture from the backyard room into the house. It was so wonderful. No more going in and out countless times a day to cook, to shower, to have a real toilet (my nights of a portable poddy were over!). Three and half years I lived in that 12X12 foot remodeled shed. But it truly was an escape to keep my sanity, and it was quite cozy and private. It may have been a huge sacrifice but not without an end time blessing.

I started going to visit her once a week, often taking her out to walk around Walmart or Costco, without buying anything except needed food items. I always got her treats and certain items she wanted that the place didn't provide, but mainly because she said their food was awful. When I first put her in, she resorted back to hibernating and wasn't socializing with the other folks. That all changed over time, and she became like a butterfly fluttering around the place getting involved in activities.

Mom hadn't been in that unit but a month when she fell, fortunately she didn't injure herself. Then she fell again in February. It was decided that the room size was too large, too much open space and she needed a smaller room, despite that she had a walker. She was fine with the decision, but I can't say the cost was much lesser. She did seem a lot happier, admitting she should have picked the smaller unit in the first place where she felt safer ... where she was

within reach of a wall or a chair or table to grab onto. It was a big job, after having just gone through it two months earlier. Thankfully, they had a handyman to do the heavy moving, but I had to haul everything else and help her get things settled in again. She did have to get rid of one recliner and couple of end tables, which Dani was happy to take home.

When COVID 19 hit, around April 2020 my visits to see her ended when they shut down visitation. It was around sometime in March when I got a notice that the office would be shutting down in April too, which they said would only be temporary, we thought.

After a month, I was called back. When I returned, they had put all the safety procedures in place. My work station had Plexiglass wrapped around the counter. Everyone had to wear a mask. Doors were locked for customer's but they let renters in to pay their rent. The agents came and went with or without clients. Business was operating again, on a lowkey level. Then, things got worse and they were forced to shut down again a couple of months later, with no idea when they'd reopen. When another month had passed by, I called the office to see what was going on. I knew the office manager was still working while the office was completely locked down. She told me I should apply for unemployment as it looked like the situation was going to be a lot longer. I collected unemployment for the entire remainder of the year 2020 and half way into the 2021 until it ran out. I spent most of the time staying at home, going out only when I had to. I started doing my shopping online either by delivery or pickup, which I continue to this day because it's so convenient. It's absolutely an amazing thing! With my COPD, at times it has been a lifesaver.

When I saw the office was opening up sometime around the end of the year, I called to see what was going on. It was then that I was informed about the selling of the company to another RE/MAX firm, since our company seemed to greatly be affected by the pandemic ... as so many businesses were. It was sad to see that happen, as our company had been around for decades and was the only office open on the weekends. Although my boss sold the company, he owns the building and stayed on to work under the new name, leasing it to the new firm. Unfortunately, the new company didn't work on the weekends, so my position was dissolved. Which is why I was able to remain on unemployment until it ran out.

Although I looked for work during that time, nothing came to fruition. Eventually I realized it was time to fully retire. As it turned out, it truly was a wonderful blessing for me, as I was getting triple in monthly unemployment payments from what I was getting at RE/MAX. As far as my mom goes, the facility was open and closed so much during that time, I wasn't able to see her very often. Seemed every month, or every week, someone, a staff member or resident contracted COVID and the doors were locked again. I did call to check on her often and she seemed fine mentally. Her health seemed to decline with no activity, with residents confined their rooms.

Eventually, she contracted COVID and the ambulance took her to the hospital. I was on the phone with her when they arrived and she didn't hang up, which I don't think she was aware of. I suppose she still had the phone in her hand when I heard the ambulance guy ask her what her name was, and what day it was, and she answered correctly. Then he asked who the President was, and she blurted out with pride, "Donald Trump!" The man said Joe Biden, and she then

chuckle saying, “I know.” Yet, in her mind, she still believed he won, she believed the Big Lie, and still does to this day.

I called the hospital and they told me not to come. After they ran a bunch of tests, she was returned back to the facility with medication. My mother refused to wear a mask most of the time when allowed to come out of her room, following in the way of Trump, until caregivers caught her and she was told many times to put it on. She didn’t believe the pandemic was real. To her, it was a hoax. She also refused any vaccines after having bought into the conspiracy that it would turn you into a zombie, or something else nefarious going on. She believed by Donald Trump playing it down that it was being overblown. She insisted and continues to deny that she ever had COVID, they made it up. She believed all the stories online of hospitals setting up tents due to handling the massive patient overflow and deaths piling up as all lies to scare the people. None of it was real in her mind.

When things began to open again, I started to take her out for lunch and do a little walking around her favorite Dollar Store or Salvation Army. She didn’t buy much, she enjoyed just browsing mostly. Everywhere we went there were COVID standards in place for masks and six feet apart policies with large X marks on the floors, and plexiglass at every place we went, yet, she wouldn’t wear her mask, saying it was ridiculous. She would ask people to excuse her - if they looked at her – saying she couldn’t breathe, as her mask hung down under her chin for appearances. I wore my mask, the good kind, but not everyone had the good kind. It seemed to become a fashion statement to many, over safety, really. Most didn’t believe a mask made any difference anyway. There was a lot of rebellion around here about those masks.

For my mother, going into the assisted living facility was greatly disappointing due to the timing of COVID. When she first moved in, they said they take the residents out on adventure trips, like a bus drive to the coast for a Fish & Chips lunch, or tours of the wineries, as well as other outings, but none of that happened. She was confined to her room most of the time. The beautiful dining room wasn’t open very often, having takeout containers delivered to all the rooms. By the time her meals arrived, the food was cold. Mom stopped eating much then, she didn’t like most of their food anyway, and now she just refused to eat it. It wasn’t anything like ordering off the menu and being served a hot dish to the table, which she did miss. I bought her a lot of frozen stuff to microwave, plus snacks and drinks, which seemed unfair since the cost of the place was supposed to provide all that. If the facility was shut down, I would bring the groceries to the door for a caregiver to deliver, so she had food she would eat.

Well, it wasn’t the facilities fault, I only wish she could have enjoyed it there better. But she found ways to keep occupied. She enjoyed watching youtube videos and Netflix, while working daily on her book ... a book she started over twenty years ago. I don’t know if she’ll ever finish it as she still rewrites it every day, but it keeps her mind going. It gives her something to live for as it became her life mission to teach the ways of Scripture. She says her book keeps changing as new knowledge and wisdom comes to her. She seems to find comfort in writing and figuring out life from a Biblical perspective, but it’s a perspective that I don’t think anyone has ever known.

Unfortunately, the funds ran out at the end of August 2022 and after nearly three years, her time there had run its course. For myself, it was a wonderful nearly three years. Just being able to unpack all my belongings and set up my home again was a great joy. I bought a whole lot of house plants to replace all those I lost over the years from moving. I've always loved having house plants around me, and unlike all the watering I had to do outside, indoor plants had a way of lifting my spirits. By then, I felt fully recovered from the previous four years, and mom and I had developed a real mother/daughter relationship ... sort of. All that horrible stuff in the past was in the past and we had both moved on from that. Once Brandi was out of the picture, things got much better, although she did visit mom a couple of times ... then she finally faded away.

When I brought my mother and her cat Muffy back home in September 2022, she went into Sam's past room. It's much smaller than the master bedroom, which is where she had been before, and I now occupy. She was just happy to be home and it showed in her gratitude. When Muffy returned, and realized this is where she lived before, she seemed to think this was her home. That attitude didn't go over well with my cat. When mom moved out, I had taken in a stray cat, a sweet little boy with a bobtail. I named him Ronnie. Though he can't take the place of my Lilie May, he does warm my heart and I've come to dearly love him. He had been living in the wild for some time because I saw him many times hop the backyard fence and run across the yard, disappearing from my sight when I was living in my backyard room. He even survived one the worst ice storms we've had, that left us three days without power – before mom moved out.

He was a survivor, but it took a long time to tame him. I started to put food out when I was still in the backyard room. It took a while to get him to trust me. He finally would come into my room and look around, then run away. When I moved into the house, he was so scared he wouldn't come inside, at first. Now, this is his home. So, when mom returned with Muffy, Ronnie didn't know how to adjust right away. He stayed outside for days, then eased his way back in. He ignored Muffy, who was very fluffy.

The first time Muffy and Ronnie met, they slowly approached each other, and then Muffy took a swipe at Ronnie's face and Ronnie turned around and walked off. After that, he didn't want much to do with her, while she pranced around like she owned the place. I didn't give her any attention because I didn't want to hurt Ronnie's feeling. I gave him lots of loving, and in time he settled in with the new situation. Regrettably, I had never treated Ronnie for fleas as he always took care of them himself. It didn't dawn on me that Muffy would get them from him since she had never in her entire life stepped outside, so she wouldn't know how to deal with them since she never had a flea. When she got them, that started a nightmare situation ... and that is putting it lightly.

It was too late when we realized Muffy was covered in fleas and they infested mom's bedroom. I immediately put both cats on flea prevention but that took time. It wasn't long when fleas were in the living room. Mom was like a magnet and they attacked her to the point of total craziness. I tried everything to get rid of them. I bombed the house three times. Had professional sprayers, washed tons of stuff, cleaned thoroughly, and still, at least in mom's room, there were fleas. I bathed Muffy several times, picking them off. I was exhausted by whole situation. Mom had a bottle of flea spray by her side constantly and was spraying it everywhere. I tried to warn her not to do that, telling her it was bad to breathe it in. She didn't care. She was going crazy. Then a

friend told me to get Irish Spring soap and break it up and spread around, saying that will keep them away from her.

I regret telling her that. She went overboard with it, even placing a cloth bag next to her pillow filled with Irish Spring soap shavings. She believed it was helping her to sleep at night, when she said they come out the most. Muffy had pulled all her long beautiful fur out to where she looked like a rat. I tried to get mom to let me take her to the vet, but she didn't want to spend the money. I felt so bad for the poor cat. She quit coming out of mom's room and found a place in closet where she remained. I would put her food and water close by. She only came out to use the litter box. Mom realized how sickly she looked, and wondered if we should put her down. She talked about buying chloroform, recalling how her father used to get rid of the strays and kittens. It reminded me of seeing my grandpa toss the gunny bag into the pond, and hearing all the screams from the kittens inside as they slowly sank down and drowned. I told mom I just couldn't do that, but she didn't want to pay the \$230.00 that two Veterinary clinics quoted to do the merciful task themselves.

Then, in January 2023 my mother had a stroke, only four months after returning home and two months of flea infestation. It was the scariest thing to experience for the both of us. I frantically called 911 and the entire troop came, as they did when Sam passed away. Within minutes the entire house was full of ambulance people, police people, and fire department people lined up all the way down the hallway into her bedroom. She was screaming non-stop before they arrived and continued on non-stop. She couldn't sit up straight and was hunched over, holding her head almost between her legs, shaking and crying. Once the people saw what was going on, all but the ambulance folks had left. They wanted to take her to the hospital on a stretcher but they realized she couldn't lay down without nearly throwing up as her head was spinning. The two men brought in a chair and strapped her in. They and two women carried her out to the ambulance. I could hear her crying loudly inside as they drove away. One of the ladies told me to wait here and to call the hospital after a while as there wasn't anything I could do.

I called Dani right away. She was at work and only five minutes from the hospital. She rushed over and called me as soon as she was in mom's room. It took a while to run all the tests on her and by the time Dani got to go in, her grandmother was unconscious. The nurse told her that her grandmother's brain was bleeding and insinuated she might not make it. Dani called me while I was on the freeway heading that way. When I heard the news, I called my brother Rusty in California. He immediately said he was on his way. I told him to hang tight until I knew for sure what was going on, but there was no way to hold him back. When I got to the hospital I was taken to the room where she was, and Dani was there sitting by her side. Mom was still unconscious and remained so the entire time.

When the doctor came in, he explained that she had a stroke and there was bleeding in the brain. He said they were going to be moving her to another room and that we should come back in an hour. It really looked like she wasn't going to make it. Once she was moved and settle into another room, Dani and I stayed for hours by her side, but she never woke up. We finally left.

I went back the next morning after calling ahead and being told she was awake. I had already called Lea and Karey and Karey had a beautiful bouquet of flowers sent in. I called my brother back but by then he was loading his car and heading to Oregon. He felt she might not make it and he needed to tell her he loved her in person. Mom was pretty drugged up, sliding in and out of sleep. That evening my brother showed up with his fiancée, JoAnn. They got in pretty late and didn't get to see mom until the next day.

We all headed over together to see her in the morning, and found her awake enough to visit for about ten minutes before she slipped back into sleep. The nurse said she was doing well, and the bleeding had stopped. They kept her at the hospital for several days before sending her to the rehab center. Rusty volunteered to take her rather than an ambulance, and a nurse wheeled her out to the car. We put mom in the front seat and took her to the facility. Once she was settled in, we left so she could rest. Rusty wanted to go up to Camas Valley to show Jo where we used live. It was a pleasant ride up the mountain, but the town looked pretty run down from what him and I remembered.

When we got back to town, we drove around old town Roseburg so Rusty could get a feel of the good ol' days, then we went to have dinner. I was so happy to meet Jo, and realized how good she was for my brother. After his wife passed away a year earlier, he had been so lonely and depressed. He sold his home and land in Alabama and bought another place in West Point, CA. Jo made happy and content. They were like two peas in a pod with a lot in common. While we were at the house smoking pot in the vape volcano he brought, they said they had set a wedding date for May. As we talked, and as they realized how precious life is and how quickly it can be taken, I suggested they get married here. Jo got really excited about that, and Rusty just went along with it. I told them I would call the Justice of Peace in the morning and see about getting an appointment for the next day.

It was Friday morning the next day, and they had plans to leave on Saturday. When I found out that the Justice had only one available time slot that morning at 11:00am, I took it. I called Rusty at their motel and told them, it's now or never guys. They got dressed and rushed over as quick as they could. We only had an hour and half to get there, but we had to go to the courthouse first to get the license. Talk about a whirlwind marriage! We all jumped in my car and I rushed to the courthouse. We nearly ran to the room where you apply. You had to apply online so I sat down at their computer and went to work fast, since neither of them knew how to use a computer. With the marriage certificate in hand, we rushed back to the car and took off for Canyonville, about twenty-five-minute drive southbound. When we pulled into the driveway it was five minutes to 11:00am.

Jo felt a little embarrassed that she didn't have a nice outfit to wear, but Rusty and I agreed she looked pretty anyway. I stood back while the Justice preformed the ceremony and took lots of pictures. We were all giggles and laughter afterward of what we just experienced. It was rather funny. Now they were husband and wife. I tell people that I got my brother hitched up. A little over a year later, they are still a happy couple. I feel good about that, especially since his deceased wife, Joleen and I didn't along at all, and she pretty much kept me out of my brother's life for decades. Jo and I get along like sisters, but it was a bit of a problem calling her JoAnn

because of Joleen. My brother admitted he had the same problem, calling her Joleen at times, but Joann didn't seem to mind. She was very understanding. For both my brother and myself, we agreed to call her Jo.

When they left the next morning. I went to see mom at the rehab center and saw that she was doing really good. It was a miracle, they said. A few days later they released her and I brought her back home. While she was gone, Muffy had passed away, and although mom was sad about that, she was also relieved. Besides myself, someone else was glad Muffy was gone too ... Ronnie. He got his house back! And after Muffy passed, the flea problem instantly was resolved. As it turned out, it was Muffy breeding fleas and when she was gone, so were the fleas.

After Muffy passed, I thoroughly cleaned mom's room. Got rid of all the fleas sprays and Irish Spring soap and washed all her bedding. We haven't had a problem since, but I do keep Ronnie on flea treatment now, because it only takes one to start the nightmare again, and they are extremely attracted to her. They love her blood! Whereas I hardly ever got bit, so I'm glad about that. I've had flea infestations before, and it really is a nightmare.

So, mom turned 91 years old in December of 2023. She has slowed down a great deal now. Rarely goes out. Has no interest in walking or shopping or anything outside of the house. She stays in her room fulltime doing the same thing she has for years ... watching youtube videos, Netflix, and writing her book. She's very content, and has mellowed out to where she's just waiting to pass on. She eats less and sleeps a lot more. She's approaching her final crossing.

People say that she looks really good and could live another few years. That would be wonderful if she had a quality of life, and if we had good communication and a closer relationship. But honestly, the only communication we have is limited to: Are you hungry? Do you need anything? I try not to engage in anything else because even the simplest thing can end up in an argument. We're on totally opposite sides on our beliefs on just about everything, but mostly about Trump. I have discovered that she believes, tremendously seriously, that God has sent him to do the Lord's work. She has written him into her book, a book I mentioned she's been working on for over twenty years. I learned, the hard way, that if I say anything negative or questionable about that man, she becomes highly agitated and goes into a mental frenzy accusing me of being a hateful person. She gets so upset at the mention of his name and immediately goes on the full defense. She lashes out at me every time, so I just don't mention his name any longer.

Frankly, it's the only subject that she becomes unglued, so I have learned to stay away from that subject. I certainly don't want to cause another stroke, but it greatly disturbs me knowing she has fallen into the deception, and knowing I need to let her do so. In the past, it wouldn't have bothered me so much. I never was into politics until 2020 when I felt the Spirit within open my eyes, and ever since, my eyes are wide open. I'm still hopeful her eyes will awaken before she passes on. I've come a long way in this experience and if anything, I have learned how 'not to be' when or if any one of my daughters end up caring for me. For that, I am glad because I would never want to put any of them through what I have endured.

And this story shall be continued ... as life continues on.