



# CAREConnections

Information and Inspiration for Caregivers

A Publication of Boulder County Aging Services November/December 2011

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### Dear Caregiver,

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a designation that draws attention to the many challenges facing family caregivers and raises awareness about community programs that offer needed support. It is a time to thank, support, educate, and celebrate more than 65 million family caregivers across the country—thousands of them right here in Boulder County.

Every day we talk to individuals who are taking the first steps on the journey of caring for an older loved one: a parent, grandparent, spouse, partner, or dear friend. For each, caregiving requires venturing into the often baffling worlds of health care, family dynamics, community resources, financial and legal matters, end of life issues, and much more. And yet they do it. They choose to start the journey in order to help a loved one, and it surely will be one of the most significant experiences of their lives. For some the experience will last a short time; for others it will continue for many months or years. In all cases, it will make an important difference. As caregivers walk beside older loved ones who face illness, frailty, and eventually death, they express a compassionate choice that positively affects not only their care recipients but also the entire community. We *all* rely on family caregivers, for they provide the great majority of all long-term care required by our communities' elders.

To celebrate National Family Caregivers Month, we are pleased to devote this issue to the writing of caregivers. Nobody can tell us about the journey like they can. We thank them for sharing, and we honor all of you for the choice you make to care for others.

*The Editors*

**Letting Go**  
by Kika Dorsey



I'm the kind of person who loves to be alone and read poetry. I am inefficient with the red tape in my life. I tolerate loose ends, though they slightly annoy me, but not enough to take care of them. That I now have two children, three birds, a border collie, and a mother with dementia to take care of is sometimes astounding to me. It's an overwhelming amount of responsibility.

## CAREConnections

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### Care Connections

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My father, who was a paranoid schizophrenic and whom my mother cared for with great love and passion, committed suicide after several years of taking care of my mother, whose dementia was worsening at an alarming rate. They were living in Austria and so we had to rush to Vienna and bring her back. Because I'm the most settled of my sisters, I took it upon myself to find a home for my mother nearby and was very lucky to get her into an assisted living residence where they take care of her with so much compassion that I feel like they have become family to me.

Overwhelmed with handling my mother's affairs in Austria and immigration issues and social security and lawyers and guardianship, I initially felt like I would have a nervous breakdown. All I really wanted to do was make my mother happy, and she was not happy when she first arrived here. She tried to escape continually and kept forgetting that my father died and would have to relive her grief every time she found out. I became so upset with her unhappiness that I was unhappy and panicked about not being able to control reality. It was after talking to my uncle, who told me that I was not responsible for my mother's happiness, that I realized I needed to let go more and accept the turbulence that had become my present reality.

What ended up changing my mother's experience at the assisted living home was a relationship with a 92-year old man. She loves to hold his hand and snuggle with him on the couch and listens closely to his non sequiturs. Their conversations are erratic and nonsensical to my ears, but in each other they have found affection and a gentle caring. She calls him "Jack," my father's name. It has given her a sense of purpose to help take care of him. She also extends her caregiving to the other residents and even helps bathe them at times. It gives her a sense of purpose and community and also, I believe, some pride, because she was always the caregiver and now so much of her life is about being cared for.

And yet there are still days when she tries to follow me out of the memory unit and bangs on the door after I shut it quickly. It's hard, but once again I try to let it go. This letting go is a spiritual practice for me and I'm not always good at it. At times it feels as if a part of me has become detached, but it helps me to fully engage in the present when I am with her. Within this paradox I have found a reservoir of patience and kindness that I didn't know I was capable of. I have no problem repeating myself ten times, and what I savor the most is the time we spend together holding hands in silence.



That silence is the place where her journey will end, where she will find peace. Right now she struggles as the darkness envelops her. It is a tragedy too difficult for me to fully recognize. So I stay present, love her as I always have, and realize it is all I can do.



### What Respite Meant to Me

by Jan Davies

I cared for my mother for a little over five years. During that time I also kept my involvement with a few of my outside activities. One of them was playing my steel guitar with the senior band *Almost the Greatest* as we played musical entertainment at Boulder Manor weekly and at Manor Care once a month. Many times I would take my mother along in her wheelchair, but there were also times when I needed another care provider to stay at home with my mother so I could get out by myself. I tried a couple of agencies, but my mother fired those caregivers. Then I was able to get a neighbor lady I knew and whom my mother learned to trust. My neighbor had some experience working at an adult center and was able to convince my mother that things were under control and that I would be back shortly. When my neighbor was not available, my husband (bless his heart!) was the next resort. I needed to know that my mother was in good hands while I was gone, and that gave me peace of mind. I could thoroughly enjoy myself, and others commented on how happy I looked as our band played on. Doing something that I enjoyed gave me the uplift I needed during the week, and I was able to come home and share my happiness with my mother—and it did rub off on her. Even though she preferred to be with me, she knew there were times when she could not get out. I let her know she was part of the “team” even when she had to stay

at home. Another thing I did was make videos of our band playing. My mother watched these videos when I was gone, and my picture on the TV gave her the confidence that I was still “with” her. The old saying is true: “If Momma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy!”

### Despair with Gift in Dementiaville

by Juliet Archer

I enter Romeo’s room at the nursing home. He lies in bed, eyes closed. I quietly slide a chair to his bedside. He opens his eyes. I smile. He responds with a quizzical look.

“Who are you?” he asks.

My heart sinks. I think this is a joke. He’s teasing me, right? He knows who I am, right? He’s always recognized me! Surely he knows who I am! Surely he knows that we are the loves of each other’s lifetimes, that we are husband and wife! Right?

Maybe not. My heart sinks deeper with the realization. In any case, I cannot react as if Romeo’s not knowing me were a joke. If he truly does not know me—well, I’ve made a vow to myself that I will always take him seriously when things like this happen, to preserve his dignity. He’s entitled to his dignity.

“I am your wife, Juliet.”

“Oh.”

“Do you remember me?”

“No.”

“It’s okay. May I hold your hand?”

“No.”

“Would you like me to read to you?”

“Yes.”

So I read. Later, when we’re finished, I ask again if I may hold his hand. This time he says yes. I hold his hand softly, so grateful to have him. We sit silently for a time. He drifts into a shallow sleep, comes back for a few seconds, eyes fluttering as if he’s struggling to stay awake.

“Would you like me to leave?”

“Yes,” he says.

“Is it okay if I kiss you?”

“Yes.”

I kiss him gently on the cheek. He closes his eyes. I leave, holding back oceans of tears, not knowing if he’ll know me, hoping he’ll know me when I visit tomorrow.

Still, everyday life goes on. I stop at the grocery store. At the entrance is a small display of carnations and beside it a sign:

*Need a Lift? Take a Free Carnation.*

Immediately and without a doubt in my mind, I recognize this as a gift from divine grace. I silently offer my gratitude: “Thank you from the depths of my being.” It responds by sending a wave of love that washes over and through me. It dances around me, surrounds me, embraces me gently. I smile, close my eyes, inhale that love and hold it. It’s so good. “Thank you.”

I choose a plump red carnation. At home, I put it in a vase and place it on the coffee table, then settle in on the couch. As I admire and study this simple flower, tears come. I cry with abandon, and I cry for a very long time. I cry for Romeo and me, for our pain, for our loving and losing each other. How good it is to cry. How good it is to love and be loved. How good it is to feel the essence of divine love. I smile, I laugh, I cry some more, for I am supported and embraced and cared for and loved, and always will be. And so will you.

Rest in Peace, Sweet Romeo  
November 23, 1944 – July 26, 2011

Visit Juliet’s blog at [www.RomeoandJulietinDementiaville.com](http://www.RomeoandJulietinDementiaville.com).



**“Love is not affectionate feeling,  
but a steady wish  
for the loved person’s ultimate good  
as far as it can be obtained.”**

— C. S. Lewis

## Memorial to Gram

by Olivia

I spent last summer in Boulder with my grandmother and wrote this piece.

Standing in front of the kitchen window, nothing was clear to Gram anymore. While her eyes were fixed on the wind that bent the trees, her hands folded a napkin that had already been folded an uncountable number of times. Nothing made sense anymore, everything seemed distant, and in the rare moments of lucidity she surprised herself doing the most absurd things. We laughed together when the sincerity of her phrases showed the complete loss of that filter which is normally placed between thoughts and words. I was never able to understand to what extent she was aware of all this or if she was ever scared about what was happening. All I know is that to me she always seemed extremely serene.

It didn’t bother me at all that she would refer to me as the cute girl living with her that summer. In all of her gestures the love she gave me was that of always. As many of us have said, despite everything, Grandmommy had never lost her essence, a mixture of love, irony, and strength.

As Grandmommy was amazing, so were her children. Cynthia, Holly, Mimi, and Mitch all represent to me different ways of loving the same person, and that’s why every one of them gave back to their mother in their own way, creating a combined force that gave love, strength, and joy to Grandmommy to the very end.

## Memories

by Christiane Griffin-Wehr

**I**t's been five years since my mom's death. And throughout all the years I spent as her caregiver, and still today, I've gratefully read every issue of *Care Connections*. The many writings on topics of health and healing, loss and change, caregiving and caretaking, have recently put me in mind of, well, coffee.

Now lest you think that not very high-minded of me, let me clarify: I'm not talking about just any old coffee! Certainly the stuff that's been sitting in the office pot all day and is thick enough to float a horseshoe doesn't qualify. And I don't mean that vaguely dishwater-colored sludge that's on offer at every Quick Stop and gas station. No, what I've got in mind is a brew of boldly roasted beans at an extra fine grind freshly brewed with cold, clear water and topped off with steamed milk to bring the whole concoction to the perfect color and temperature. Now *that's* good coffee—and for me it's true that whether in celebration of a good day, or as a reward for having made it through a particularly rough one, I am always restored with my favorite at Starbucks: a skinny, decaf latté. I smile when the counterperson shouts my order across to the barista as “one tall Why Bother!” since, without fat or caffeine, I can hardly begrudge them the name. Still, sometimes I respond, “Because it tastes delicious.” But mostly I just smile. Because sure, it's tasty alright, but really it's about *much* more than that, isn't it?!

You see, one of my most vivid early childhood memories is the pure pleasure I felt when I got to go to the coffee shop with my mom. Now about six decades ago, I recall few things as more wonderful (in the true meaning of the word: filled with wonder!) than holding my mom's hand and inhaling deeply that rich, exotic mix of coffee

beans, tea, chocolates, and spices that wafted from all those little bins lining the walls around us. The overall feeling of wellbeing brought on just by the aroma was magical.

And to top it off, while I was allowed an occasional chocolate at the store, my mother deepened the mystery by asserting that while I might like the smell of the stuff now, I probably would not enjoy the taste nearly as much. And anyway, I wouldn't even be allowed to drink coffee until I was “much older.” Well, I don't remember when I came to be “much older,” but I do know my mom was right. Actually tasting that dark, almost bitter drink for the first time was a huge disappointment—it was nothing like those sweet, forbidden images the smell evoked.

But once I got “old enough” to regularly share in my Mom's afternoon coffee ritual it began to taste just fine. Grew excellent, in fact, as the months and years and decades of life passed amid laughter and tears, births and deaths, stories and memories—always shared over good coffee. And there's the hitch, isn't it? Memories!

Now I know memories have something of a bad rap these days. Some things surely deserve to be forgotten, while there's certainly wisdom in the admonishment that we ought to “live in the present.” “Be in the moment!” Much is wasted when we trade in what's here and now for residing in our dusty old past or forever planning for a future that is not guaranteed any of us. This is the only time we have!

But I've learned something else about these “only here and now” moments. It happened over one of my daily visits with my mom when she was already suffering with severe memory loss and dementia. I was, what else, happily sucking on my good coffee. But Mom just stared somewhat helplessly at her cup, wondering (probably much like I did that day over fifty years ago) why

anyone would drink that harsh stuff. You see, she had forgotten that for seventy years she had been someone who loved good coffee. And without the memory of who she was, there really wasn't any reason to drink that brew. Or, actually, to *do* anything with this moment—or any other.

Since then it has seemed to me that without remembering our past, there really is no “I” to live in the present. Isn't it precisely our memories of places and people, loves and losses, hopes and nightmares that remind us how we came to be, for example, individuals to whom life matters enough to care for someone? And how we came to be people who shared those loved ones' journeys through the forgetting, diminishments, and dementia? In fact, only by thinking back do I remember how I ended up being my mom's caregiver and became a member of that noble community of the many who are still doing that hard work. It is our individual and collective, shared memories—of much more than good or, for that matter, even lousy coffee—that assure we don't forget just exactly who we are. Or, to answer the barista more fully, why it is that we bother!

So since seeing all that was lost in my mom's forgetting, I've stopped worrying about the fact that I love to remember. I no longer apologize for our routine that, regardless of the day's commitments, my husband and I start every day with a slow, comfortable, good cup of coffee in bed—checking in with ourselves and each other by taking time to remember. I'm no longer concerned about my fitness plan when I'm supposed to be marking a particular running tempo along the Mesa Trail and instead scoot off the path to sit at my mom's grave and remember, before resuming my pace. And even though we might have plans scheduled for which we're running late, when my sister grins her apology at my

front door and asks, “But we still have time for a cup of coffee, right?” I always agree ... so we can remember.

My memories are not only shadowy reminiscences of the past; they are thoroughly creative of this moment! Remembering neither idolizes the past (let's face it, the coffee wasn't always that great, or the events all that noteworthy), nor does it deny us a look toward the future. What memories *do*, however, is hold a reassuring mirror to this moment allowing us to reflect back to each other who we are. And with your willingness to continue sharing your stories, you've given me, too, this great gift of remembering why we bother about caregiving at all. So, to my dear mom, for having given me my first taste of coffee and memories, and to you my fellow caregivers for having shared the aches and triumphs of your caregiving journeys, I say, “Thanks—for the memories!”



### Happiness at the Nederland Carousel

*by Jan Tull*

**T**his is the story of a magical moment in caregiving. Those of us in the caregiver role know very well that we face many stressful challenges when responsible for the one we love. Having little moments of connection and joy with the person I'm caring for is what keeps me going and feeling grateful for my life.

My mom has lived with my husband and me the last year and a good part of three previous years in the mountains of Nederland. She has diagnosed dementia, pulmonary fibrosis, macular degeneration, and difficulty walking, even with assistance. On the bright side, she is happy, has her sense of humor, and can put a smile on my face in an instant.

I can recognize those days when Mom wakes up more alert and energized, and I try to take



advantage of them to do something different. We might go for a drive, get coffee or ice cream, or even be more adventurous. I remember one of those days as though it were yesterday. Mom woke up asking what we were going to do that day. I took that as a good sign and said, “Let’s go to Nederland for a mocha latté.” She smiled with her entire being! Off we went.

While sitting with our coffees, I said to Mom, “There’s a wonderful old-fashioned carousel next door. I want you to see it.” We went in and Mom immediately lit up upon seeing all the gorgeously carved animals going round and round. “Let’s get on,” she said. I put her on one of the benches and around she went. The look on her face was magical – like a little girl experiencing the carousel for the first time.

When she got off she turned and said, “I want to ride the one that goes up and down!” It didn’t happen that day, but on Mother’s Day my sister from Minneapolis came to visit and we took Mom back. She rode the bench again and wouldn’t stop there. Her eyes were on the animals going up and down. “Who cares if I’m 94; I want to ride the one that goes up and down!” is what I believe she was thinking. With trepidation from my sister and me, we enlisted the assistance of the carousel manager. He brought a step stool and hoisted Mom up. Yes, she rode the one that goes up and down!

Mom experienced her magical moment all over again. My heart opened with such joy watching her. It was a magical moment for all three of us, one that will be remembered forever.

**“When you carry out acts of kindness  
you get a wonderful feeling inside.  
It is as though something inside  
your body responds and says,  
Yes, this is how I ought to feel.”**

*— Rabbi Harold Kushner*

## Scatters of Reality by Karen Hershberger

**O**ne day my mom got in her car, put on her seat belt, and drove to the country club to meet her friends for dinner. She started to step out of the car but couldn’t remember how to remove her seat belt. She was trapped in her own car. Another time, she drove to a place she had been many times before. It was a short distance and in a part of town where she had grown up and with which she was familiar. She got lost that day and couldn’t find her way home. My mother never drove again after that incident.

For a while, Mom hid her forgetfulness well. Then one day I found that she wasn’t balancing her checkbook and lots of unpaid bills were stuffed in dresser drawers. The house she once kept immaculate was in disarray with dust all around. She forgot how to change the channel on the television. Her nails, previously so well-manicured, were now chipped and in need of attention. She forgot appointments, names of common things, how to use a can opener and the microwave.

I started doing Mom’s accounting. It seemed strange; after all, it was she who had helped me when I struggled with math in school. I made sure she had meals, when before it was she who had prepared so many wonderful meals for me as I grew up.

Mom lived only an hour away from me, but I constantly feared for her safety so I moved her to an assisted living home closer to me. I visited her daily and we went out to lunch every week, a time together that she really looked forward to. Then came the time when she forgot how to use her silverware, and one day she ate her napkin, and we stopped going out for lunch.

Next came incontinence and then the wandering. She was trying to leave her building at night, so I had to move her to a more secure living arrangement in a long-term care facility.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

*This column provides information about coming events, helpful services, and other resources of special interest to family caregivers in Boulder County. (See “Where to Turn” on the back page for ways to learn more about local resources.)*

**Medicare Basics Classes**, for anyone wanting to learn about benefits, costs, and choices under Medicare, are provided monthly by Medicare Counselors from Boulder County Aging Services. Classes are on Thursday, November 3, and Thursday, December 1, both 2:00 – 4:00 p.m., at 3482 N. Broadway, Boulder (call 303-441-1546 to register); and on Tuesday, November 22, and Monday, December 19, both 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., at Longmont Senior Center, 910 Longs Peak Avenue, Longmont (call 303-651-8411 to register). Classes are free, but donations are appreciated.

New this year, **open enrollment dates for Medicare Parts C and D** are earlier. Beneficiaries may drop, change, or enroll into a Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan from October 15 to December 7 (new plans start January 1, 2012). **Medicare Part D Clinics** to help beneficiaries compare or choose drug plans will be held at senior centers during this period. Call 303-441-1546 to learn more.

HospiceCare of Boulder and Broomfield Counties offers **When You’re Supposed to Be Happy, But You’re Not**, about dealing with holiday stress when you may not feel like celebrating, on Monday, November 7, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., at West Boulder Senior Center; Monday, November 14, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., at East Boulder Senior Center, and 3:00 – 4:30 p.m., at Frasier Meadows Independent Living; Thursday, November 17, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.,

at HospiceCare Longmont office; Tuesday, November 22, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m., at HospiceCare Boulder office; and Tuesday, December 6, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., at Louisville Senior Center; and **The Holidays – A Time to Remember**, about finding ways to honor, celebrate, and incorporate memories of departed loved ones, on Monday, December 5, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., at West Boulder Senior Center; Tuesday, December 6, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., at Longmont Senior Center; and Monday, December 12, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m., at East Boulder Senior Center. Registration is required; contact Kim Mooney at 303-604-5214 or [kimmooney@hospicecareonline.org](mailto:kimmooney@hospicecareonline.org).

In celebration of National Family Caregivers Month, Lafayette Senior Services invites Boulder County caregivers of older loved ones (60+) to a **Caregiver Luncheon** on Tuesday, November 8 [*Note: The date was incorrectly listed as November 18 in the September/October issue.*], 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., at Lafayette Senior Center, 103 S. Iowa, Lafayette. Enjoy a roast pork lunch and some pampering. Registration is required and limited; call 303-665-9052, ext. 0.

Sponsored by The Boulder Seniors Foundation as a benefit for City of Boulder Senior Resources, **Identity Theft and Consumer Fraud Panel and Luncheon** is a panel discussion about the main types of identity theft, how they could affect you, steps you can take to protect yourself and your loved ones, and how to avoid consumer fraud, with Cindy Taylor, Boulder County District Attorney’s office, and Peggy Goehring, Certified Identity Theft Risk Management Specialist, on Wednesday, November 9, 12:00 – 2:00 p.m., at West Boulder Senior Center. Fee is \$15; includes lunch. Registration is required; call 303-441-3148.

Lafayette Senior Services offers two classes for family caregivers: **Nutrition Information and Nutrition Issues for Those Caring for Older Adults**, with a dietician and a speech-language pathologist, on Tuesday, November 15, 1:15 – 3:15 p.m.; and **Medical Equipment Use in the Home**, with a physical therapist and an occupational therapist, on Thursday, November 17, 1:15 – 2:15 p.m., both at Lafayette Senior Center, 103 S. Iowa, Lafayette. Each class is \$10 for Lafayette residents or \$13 for non-residents (scholarships available). Registration is required; call 303-665-9052, ext. 0.

Boulder County Aging Services offers **two training programs for family caregivers of older adults**. The **National Caregiver Training Program** is a 21-hour course (meets once a week for 3 hours) that helps family caregivers acquire the skills needed to provide safe, confident home care for older loved ones. Classes, taught by a registered nurse, cover caring for someone on bedrest, providing personal care, using a wheelchair safely, managing medications, taking vital signs, controlling infection, preventing falls, reducing caregiver stress, using local resources, and more. **Powerful Tools for Caregivers** is a 15-hour course (meets once a week for 2 ½ hours) that gives family caregivers the tools to make sure they take care of themselves while caring for others. Classes help caregivers learn to reduce stress, improve self-confidence, communicate their feelings, balance their lives, increase their ability to make tough decisions, and locate helpful resources. Each course is held four times yearly in communities throughout Boulder County. They are open to Boulder County residents caring for a relative, partner, or friend who is 60 or over (50 or over if the person has dementia). There is no charge, but donations are appreciated. Financial assistance for

respite care during class periods is available. To learn more about course dates and locations, contact Emily Cooper, at 303-678-6116 or [ecooper@bouldercounty.org](mailto:ecooper@bouldercounty.org).

If your care recipient is a veteran, he or she may qualify for **veterans' benefits** such as service-connected disability, non-service connected disability pension, or health care. Widows/widowers of veterans may also qualify for VA benefits which could include assistance for home health care, assisted living, or nursing home placement. To learn more, contact a Boulder County Veteran's Services Officer: Karen Townsend, 303-776-8502, in Longmont, or Michael Holliday, 303-441-3890, in Boulder.

Special Transit offers **low-cost, driver-assisted, wheelchair-accessible transportation** in Boulder County to people who are unable to drive or who have limited driving ability due to age, health, disability, or special circumstances. Ride requests can be made from 1 to 14 days in advance; call 303-447-9636, Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Special Transit also offers a **Transportation Help Line**, which assists people in understanding the various transit services available in their communities (call Barb Borg, 303-447-2848, ext. 1047); the **Easy Rider Program**, which provides one-on-one instruction on using RTD and Call-n-Ride buses (call Susan Unger, 303-447-2848, ext. 1048); and the **Mileage Reimbursement Program**, which helps fund transportation provided by friends or family when Special Transit is unable to meet a ride request and other criteria are met (call 303-447-9636).

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**To share information about a resource or coming event for caregivers, email [ecooper@bouldercounty.org](mailto:ecooper@bouldercounty.org) or call 303-678-6116. The deadline for the January/February issue is November 28.**



It was a while before she adjusted to the new place. She walked and walked the halls until she was exhausted. One day, she fell and the broken glass from her eyeglasses imbedded in her face, and I had to take her to the hospital to have the glass removed. She stopped walking after the accident. When I asked her why, she said simply, "Oh, I don't do that anymore." And that was the end of that.

The losses have continued, as they do with Alzheimer's disease. She began to talk about things that made no sense to me. She has another reality, her own reality. She says things like, "*Then we went out, and we were out going, of course, making the course down, down further a little bit. I'd like to just September. Just 77, 7, would be a good take for anybody. Because they are good on their things, on the bad things, and they won't get past sometimes. I would just as soon to home as to do that.*"

And it all seems to make sense to her. I realize my mother's reality is now different from mine. But one thing is for sure: she is positive that hers is real. So I relate to her in her reality as best I can, and we seem to have a wonderful time together. I see that she isn't scared anymore and that is an immense relief for me. I've heard that life gets better with an Alzheimer's loved one as the illness progresses, and in a way it has. The greatest gift is that I see we are getting the love back.

I love my mother for who she was when she took care of me as a child. I love my mother for who she was when she loved my children, her grandchildren, when they were babies. I love my mother for who she is today. She is happy again, and sweet, and in a very childlike way, open to love and affection. A new reality, but still the same Mother.

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*This article first appeared in the November/December 1995 issue.*

## Grandpa Sutt

by Donna Hayward-Schaefer

**A**n eightyish-year old man is playing a game of dog-eared solitaire. "This must be Grandpa Sutt, my fiancé's maternal grandfather," I think to myself.

"I win every game I play," he announces around his cigar stub. I laugh at the outrageous claim, the twinkle in his eye, the merry smile dancing across his naked gums. "I bet you do!" I reply, noticing that Grandpa is cheating. It is mid-July in Long Island, yet Grandpa is dressed for winter. Wearing a brown suit, starched white shirt, sweater vest, tie, and a proper fedora hat, he is the picture of an old-fashioned gentleman.

Grandma Sutt shuffles cautiously into the room. She is a petite, plump-bellied, simply tailored woman in her eighties with silky cheeks, thin hands, and a thick head of "Born to be Blonde" hair styled into beauty parlor-stiff perfection. Waving her hand ineffectively at the cloud of cigar smoke, she grumps, "Pop, take your dirty cigar smoke outside and quit smellin' up the place!" He slowly rises, pulling on his coat. Grandma erupts again. "Take off that coat! Do you want to die of heatstroke? It's 90 degrees outside!" Grandpa carefully returns his coat to the chair and reaches for his waistband. "Do you want I should take off my pants as vell?" The lilt in his voice hints at Polish ancestry. Shocked at his lewdness, I meet that merry twinkle again, dancing a lively jig in those bright blue eyes.

One cannot think of Grandpa without also thinking of cigars. Friends and relatives dutifully shower Grandpa with boxes of White Owl cigars, and Grandpa dutifully smokes every one of them.

Two years later the youngest grandson, Paul, and Grandpa are watching TV. Paul realizes the new color TV is showing the baseball game in black and white, and asks, "How come the game's in black and white?" "I'm saving the color; don't want to use it all up," replies Grandpa.



Another year goes by, and Grandpa's "senility" is diagnosed as Alzheimer's disease. Grandpa's eldest daughter, Irene, is in a state of perpetual panic and calls us regularly. One call informs us, "Grandpa has driven off in the car! He doesn't even recognize his wife, let alone what a stop sign is for." Another call from a shaky Irene: "Grandpa used the gas stove to light his midnight cigar—and then blew out the flame leaving the gas on full blast." One evening Irene calls in tears. "Grandpa's going to the nursing home."

Five years after meeting Grandpa, Bob and I celebrate our wedding. Grandpa wanders through the nursing home, oblivious to the milestone in his eldest grandson's life. Two years later we proudly present our firstborn son to his Great-Grandpa Sutt. Grandpa is wearing a baseball cap and a striped polo shirt. Alzheimer's has stolen Grandpa and left an empty shell with a cigar. We say all the things we need to say to someone we love. Outside, my husband and I embrace, sandwiching our son between us, and sob. Grandpa dies three months later on his 70th wedding anniversary. Even then we aren't ready to say goodbye.

*This article first appeared in the September/October 1997 issue.*

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- Check out **Network of Care for Seniors and People with Disabilities**, a comprehensive online service directory, at [www.BoulderCountyHelp.org](http://www.BoulderCountyHelp.org).
- Call the **CONNECT! Information and Assistance Line**, at 303-441-1617, and Boulder County Aging Services staff will respond to your message.
- Call the **Resource Specialist** in your community (numbers below). Services vary by community but include identifying needs, finding solutions, exploring options, and providing in-depth assistance.

|                           |                                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
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| <b>City of Boulder</b>    | 303-441-4388 (bilingüe: 303-441-3918) |
| <b>City of Lafayette</b>  | 303-665-9052, ext. 3                  |
| <b>City of Longmont</b>   | 303-651-8716 (bilingüe)               |
| <b>City of Louisville</b> | 303-335-4919                          |
| <b>Lyons area</b>         | 303-823-9016                          |
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