

CONVERSATIONS WITH

# MAMA'S BACKWARD CLOCK



E.V. Sparrow



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Mama, 1928, the first-born to a logger and his nurse in-training wife.

Mama left us for Heaven in 2019, and a new girlie joined our family. Strange, my youngest granddaughter is Mama's spitting image. God is funny that way, isn't He? They look alike, although they won't meet here face to face.

If my kids think of me in the way I think of my mama, I'll know my life meant something beyond success or riches. I want to share my eulogy of Mama with you-

Our family knew her time was drawing near and did our best to prepare. But one is never truly prepared for the good-bye.

On February 24th, 2019, Mama passed into Heaven. Alzheimer's robbed her of so many precious memories, but not of her unique essence.

One of my repetitive childhood themes was telling stories to everyone—I loved talking. I

heard the word “exaggerate” thousands of times. Not exaggerating here.

I enjoyed communicating every interesting event, interaction, dialogue, scene, and if it needed excitement, embellishing the recounting—drama and plot twists changed it into a fantastic story!

Mama always had time to listen to my stories. She did it patiently, and with interest. Her reactions and comments invited me to continue to communicate with her. She never shut me down.

At a writer’s conference the week before Mama passed, I learned that embellishing stories was called fiction or creative non-fiction. Mama allowed me to be myself.

Thank you again, Mama. Your wisdom led me to embrace my life as a fiction writer.

The stories in their booklet reveal how I learned and practiced dialogue through my simple daily caregiver interactions with Mama. She never stopped teaching me.



## 1942: Ben Franklin's Lipstick

Teenage Mama and her friend strolled along the sidewalk of a small town in the California's Foothills. It was a warm September afternoon on the first day of high school.

*Look at her.* Mama crossed her arms and pouted. Grace is allowed to wear that bright red lipstick. She doesn't look like a painted woman. Everyone wears it now. Mama inspected her own face in the front window of Ben Franklin's Five and Dime Store. "Maybe if I purchase a different color."

"I don't know." Grace grimaced. "Your daddy probably didn't mean just the red one. He means any lipstick."

"He doesn't understand how awful it is to look like a blank piece of paper! My skin is pale and my green eyes with blonde eyelashes just fade away into nothing." Mama glanced at Grace and sighed. "You have wonderful dark eyelashes and brown eyes. You're lucky."

“Well, I think you're beautiful the way you are.”

“That’s because you’re my best friend.”  
Mama turned back to the window and stirred up her resolution. “I worked all summer and saved up my babysitting money. I got some of my clothes from the thrift shop, so there's just enough cash left for one more treat.”

“I don’t know... don’t tell him I was with you.”  
Grace glanced over her shoulder for anyone they knew.

The teen friends dashed through the door, ignored the tinkling bell above them, and Mama purchased a peach-colored lipstick. “It’s not red. I don’t feel as guilty.” Mama applied it and closed her eyes. “It even makes me feel less invisible and more pretty.”

"It’s a really good color on you." Grace smiled into the mirror over Mama’s shoulder.

“Thank you. I hope I remember to wipe it off before I get home. Daddy might ground me for life.”

The girls exited the store and bumped into a few of their friends. The friends exclaimed how pretty Mama looked, and every one of them had on lipstick and eyebrow pencil.

I finally fit in. I feel grown up.

The group waved good-bye to Mama and Grace. As they broke apart, Mama spied her dad watching them from a few feet away.

He stood in his work clothes next to his friend by his truck. His eyes wide and his jaw slackened when he recognized Mama. He nodded his head and turned away.

Mama gasped. “Grace, Daddy didn’t say anything.” Her hands shook. “I’m so afraid. Did you see the look on his face?”

“He was shocked, not mad. It’ll be okay.”

Easy for her to say.

Grace patted Mama’s arm. “Don’t worry, just explain how you feel. Better go, I’m late. See you tomorrow.”

Mama dragged her feet all the way home. Visions of never-ending chores played through her thoughts.

Her daddy waited for her in the kitchen. “Don't ever sneak behind my back again. I understand you decided to resort to deception, partly because of my rules. But I also want to apologize to you. When I saw you with that group of girls and every last one of them had on lipstick, I realized how you must feel left out. From now on, you are allowed to wear your lipstick. If there's anything else, please talk to me first.”

Sometimes, parents can have epiphanies.

Mama's daddy offered to send her to cosmetology school after she graduated. Mama didn't attend, and regrets it, but she did achieve becoming the cosmetic counter manager at our town's only pharmacy. She worked there for thirty-eight years. Mama is eighty-nine and still applies her cosmetics every day using her silver magnifying mirror.



1943: Mama's Tardy

My daughter flew in for a quick visit with her two grandmothers. She surprised her Gram for her birthday, and Grammie (my Mama) benefited from the plans.

A few of us gathered in Mama's room for a chat. The subject of clumsiness came up—a few of us are incident-prone.

“I remember one day at high school.” Mama shook her head. “Before classes began, I rushed to the ladies' room. The bell rang while I was drying my hands. I skedaddled to the door and glanced down the empty hallway.”

We groaned at the embarrassment of being tardy at high school in 1943.

“I noticed the hallway floors were newly waxed and shiny. My class was the last one at the end. I calculated that I might just make

it into class before the sound of the bell ended if I slid without my shoes on.”

We murmured with anticipation.

“I removed my shoes, gripped them tightly, and sprinted a few feet. I slid the full length of the hallway in my stocking feet. It was fun! My plan worked perfectly. Until I grabbed onto the door-jam to stop myself.”

We held our breath.

Mama raised her hands and mimed. “My feet flew over my head and my books scattered along the floor into class. I followed them on my back, all the way under my teacher’s desk. The final note of the bell stopped.”

We squealed.

Mama bit her lip and grimaced. “The class howled with laughter. The wind knocked out of me, so I lay there looking up into my handsome teacher’s face. I wriggled my dress down from where it twisted up around my waist.”

We giggled.

“He was my favorite teacher, and I had a big crush on him.”

We groaned again at the unfairness of it all.

“He stared down at me and said, ‘Miss, that’s the darnedest way I’ve ever seen a student enter my classroom. I’ll never forget it.’ His gorgeous face broke into a grin, and he winked at me.”

There you have it—Mama’s advice on how to make yourself unforgettable.





## 1958: Mama's Blind Date

The cash register's bell dinged, and Mama shut the drawer. She turned to Judy.

"Tomorrow's blind date with Ray won't work. I have an emergency dental appointment. I broke a tooth." Mama pointed to her molar.

"No!" Judy's dark eyes flashed. "You can't cancel again. I've worked six months to set this up... just go anyway. You promised."

Mama grimaced. "How will I eat dinner with a numb mouth? I won't enjoy it."

"You'll like each other. And you'll thank me." Judy looped her arm around Mama's elbow and tugged. "Let's take a coffee break. I want to hear about your dress, and shoes. What about your hair? Can you roll it up and sleep on it overnight? I like your hair best in that new style..."

Judy's excitement squelched Mama's reluctance, so she described her favorite lavender jersey, polka dot dress with a keyhole opening below the collar.

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On the morning of their date, Mama's rotary phone rang. "Fiddle dee dee." She loosened her turquoise scarf away from her curlers, unpinned the bobby pins from the one next to her face, and held the receiver close to her ear. "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Ray. How are you? I'm sorry, but I'm thinking of cancelling tonight. Although Judy will never forgive me." He chuckled. "I had to make an urgent dental appointment for an abscessed tooth. What are your thoughts?"

Mama sighed. "Weird coincidence. We both need to go to the dentist with emergencies, but I agree. It's a good idea. So Judy won't be upset with us, we can go ahead and meet at the dance club, say hello, and then wave goodbye. I'll probably just want to get home and eat some soup."

"Sure thing. Sorry about this. Meet you at 7:00."

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Mama searched the club's crowded lobby for a tall, very tan man, with wavy blond hair and

sky-blue eyes, according to Judy's description. He also supposedly grinned often. The big band music played, and Mama's jaw throbbed with every beat of the drums, or a blast from the trumpets and trombones. She wished the Novocain hadn't begun to wear off. *What if he doesn't come after all?* Mama glanced at her silver rhinestone watch. 7:10. She headed toward the exit.

A tall, very tan man entered through the lobby door. He stood in the midst of swirling smoke as the door swung shut behind him. He grinned at her and his sky-blue eyes twinkled. "Joyce? I had trouble getting here—were you leaving?"

Wow. She nodded. "Um—"

"When I saw you in the lavender dress Judy described, I couldn't believe you were the one she's been going on about for all these months."

"Ah." She swallowed, and her heart pounded.

Ray offered his elbow. "Shall I escort you out to your car?"

“No.”

Ray dropped his elbow. “I... see.” He frowned.

Mama smiled as she rubbed her jaw. “Do wu fink vey ferve foup hewe?”

He chuckled. “I’d sure like some soup. Let’s go ask.”





## Yours and Mine

My birth order as Baby was definitely the best position—the youngest. We had a “yours, mine, and ours” family. Blended marriages weren’t common in 1959—most kids shared the same parents and their family continued intact. My friends and I had trouble following who was related to each other, and which grandparents belonged to who.

When I was about nine years old, I think someone drew me a chart. But Mama always insisted, “I consider you all my children.”

From the Baby’s point of view, everything and everyone was perfect and terrific. They gave me all the love I wanted. I recently realized all my siblings’ and parents’ halos carry battle scars. But that’s another story.



1961:

Moonie, Teddy, and Kitty lay in a circle around me for story time. I tried making them sit up, but they flopped over. I grabbed my bunny book.

*Boom, boom, boom!*

I froze my book midair. "It's OK. The broken roof." I stretched out my legs and plopped the book onto my lap.

*Boom, boom, boom. Crack!*

Small pieces of ceiling fell on top of my head, my legs, and landed on my stuffed animals. I stared at the ceiling, and a tennis shoe with a foot dangled back and forth, up, and down. The motion mesmerized me. People yelled outside.

My eleven-year-old sis ran into our bedroom and glanced up at the ceiling. "*Uh oh*, Rick's foot went through the roof again. I'm telling Mom." She twirled around and scuttled away. I dropped my book and trotted to the kitchen as fast as my two-year-old legs could follow her.

Mama picked me up. Sis flung open the front door for us. We stopped by the tall ladder that leaned against our house. “Hey, is everyone okay?” Mama waited for an answer while she shifted me onto her hip.

Laughter came from the roof. “Yeah. We pulled Rick’s foot out of the hole,” our oldest brother Raymie said.

“Good thing it’s summer. We don’t have to worry about rain,” Daddy called down.

Sis rolled her eyes. “You’d think Rick would’ve learned to watch where he walks up there from what happened last time.”

Mama shook her head, and we returned to our tasks.

The house quieted with Mama in the kitchen and Sis on the sofa with her book. I stood by the front door. I wanted to see what was so fun on the roof where the guys laughed and banged around. The doorknob was tricky, but I’d watched when the big people opened it.

Mama made noises with the pans. She was busy. I stretched high upon my tiptoes. My fingers closed around the latch, and I squeezed hard. The door swung open.

Nobody heard it, so I snuck over the stoop backwards onto the front porch. Still, nobody saw me. I climbed down three more stairs to the dirt path beside the creek.

My brothers' and Daddy's voices murmured between bangs and thuds. I stood before the ladder and searched for the top end of it.



Daddy called out, "I'll work on this pitch, and you boys take the other." Something scraped and bumped.

*I want to see.* I made my way upward, one rung at a time, until I found Daddy and my brothers working. They crawled along the points of the rooftop on their hands and knees while they hammered nails pulled from their tool-belts. No one saw me yet. I wanted to get closer. "Daddy, I up here."

Daddy jerked around, his hammer dropped from his hand and slid down the roof pitch toward the edge.

Ricky screamed, "She'll fall!"

I frowned. *I will not.*

Raymie pushed Ricky's head down, as he continued to scream. "Rick, *shh!*"

I pouted. *Aren't they happy to see me? I climbed all by myself.*

Raymie asked Daddy what to do. Rick screamed, "She'll die!"

*What is die?*

Daddy told Raymie to keep Ricky under control, so Raymie shoved Ricky's head down again. Daddy held out his hand while he swiveled around. "Stay right there, Babe. I'll get you. Hold on tight to the ladder."

*I AM holding tight.*

Raymie grinned at me and said, "You'll be okay. Dad will get you."

*I AM okay. I want to be here.*

Instead of Daddy sitting me with them so I could watch, he tucked me under his muscular arm, and climbed *down* the ladder. I squirmed. I spent all that time climbing *up* *and* wanted to be with them. He marched into the house and into the kitchen to Mama. "Guess where she was?" Daddy grinned. He always grinned. Or chuckled.

Mama turned from the stove with potholders on her hands. "Where?"

"On the ladder. She made it to the roof..."

Mama yanked off her potholders, frowned with mad eyebrows, and growled all my three names together. *Uh oh. This is bad.*



## 1962: Monkey Falls

Mama removed the dishes from the breakfast table in her new kitchen. “Pumpkin, go brush your teeth, and then you can play on our new patio, okay?”

“Goodie, Mama. Can I play by the creek?” I flipped onto my tummy, slid off the chair, and when my toes hit the floor, I ran to Mama.

Mama shook her head. “No, honey. Remember, Daddy's home today, because he isn't feeling well? I'll check on him, and I'll be out in a few minutes. Stay on the patio next to the house—away from the creek.” Mama raised an eyebrow. “I can see you from the window...”

I squatted next to the wild violets that grew in clumps against the house. They were fuzzy and soft, and made me smile. “White. Purp... purp-ill. Lav... lavin... lavin... doo.”

Scratch. Scratch, scratch. I lifted my gaze toward the sound.

A brown creature with a long tail clung to the wall at the end of the house. It climbed to the overhang, grabbed it, and swung onto the roof.

I stared with my mouth open. We have a monkey. I scooted around the corner and followed its path to the next pitch in the roof.

The monkey lost its grip. It tumbled over and over until it fell. It thumped onto the ground, then lay still.

“Uh, oh. Poor thing!” I took a few steps toward it. The monkey flipped over, swayed, and stumbled. Then it shook its head and scurried into the blackberry bushes.

I sprinted to the kitchen where Mama dried the dishes. “Mama, I found a monkey!”

“What?” Mama scrunched her face. “A monkey?” She grinned. “I see, and what did your monkey do?” Mama lifted a plate and dried it.

“It fell off the roof! It went like this.” I copied the monkey's antics. “It went into the bushes. Come see.” I tugged Mama to the backyard and pointed at the last spot I saw the monkey.

A long skinny tail stuck out from under the thorny blackberry bushes.

“Ray.” Mama banged the bedroom windowsill.  
“Ray, I want three cats. NOW!”

I bit my thumb. I get kitties because I showed Mama a monkey. Maybe I can get a puppy if I show Mama the snakes.



## 1963: Home Spa Days

Two bored sisters created an At-Home-Spa-Day. It wasn't in their budgets to pay hairdressers for cutting, styling, or coloring—my Aunt Jan changed my mama's partly gray hair into a warm Auburn color.

The do-it-yourself project was successful. Their friends and family members wanted to join in on the cost savings projects with the promise of future spa days.

\*Disclaimer to Clairol, L'Oréal, and any other hair product companies—No one in this story remembers which hair products were used, and the ladies accepted personal responsibility for the outcome.

Mama sipped her morning coffee at my aunt's silver dining table with the white Formica top. “What do you want to do today? Play Canasta?” She raised from her chair and looked out the window. “The kids are having fun in the sprinklers.”

Aunt Jan carried her home-made muffins on a tray with her canned blackberry jam and set it next to Mama. "I have an idea. I found a box of Permanent Solution under my bathroom sink. Are you game for an At-Home-Spa-Day, Part Two?" Aunt Jan bit into her fluffy, warm muffin. "We don't have time to invite anyone else, though."

"You want a perm? But your hair is so wavy and silky. Mine's stick straight." Mama tugged on a strand. "I could use the curls. That would be wonderful."

"We colored your hair two weeks ago. It might be too soon to mess with it." Aunt Jan inspected Mama's shoulder-length hair.

Mama shrugged. "I don't think so."

"Okay, then. After breakfast."

The box of solution, a hand mirror, and a comb lay on the table in front of Mama. Aunt Jan cloaked Mama in a plastic poncho, clasped it together with a wood clothespin, and handed Mama another.

Mama opened the clothespin and took a breath. "Here goes." She pinched it over the end of her nose.

Aunt Jan plugged her nose with her own clothespin. She poured the solution over Mama's curlers, saturated each one, and put a plastic cap over her head. "I'll set the timer."

After twenty minutes, Aunt Jan tested one curl. "It's still straight. I'll set it for ten more minutes."

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*Ding!*

Aunt Jan tested a different curler. "It's not curling. Do you want me to leave it on longer?"

"My hair is just stubborn. Five more, then we give up."

At the end of the five minutes, Aunt Jan unwrapped a curler on the crown of Mama's head, and then another.

"So, how did it turn out?" Mama tipped her head forward.

“Hm.” Aunt Jan stopped unwrapping curlers.

“Sis?”

Aunt Jan held her hand in front of Mama. Two curlers lay in her palm, and both contained Auburn locks of hair still wound around them.

“What?” Mama tapped the top of her head. Curlers with hair plopped onto her lap and bounced off the table. Mama snatched a curler and inspected it. “It feels like Barbie doll hair. It’s melted and stuck together.”

Aunt Jan held the mirror up for Mama to see her reflection. It revealed a head of perfect, half inch curls.

They burst into tears, then laughed until they couldn’t breathe.

“You know, I kind of like it, Sis.” Mama patted her carpet of curls. “I’ll get used to it. It’s my husband I’m worried about. What will he say when he comes to pick me up?”

“Your hubby is so good about everything, but will he hate me after this?”

The doorbell rang.

Mama stood. "I'll answer. It was my idea to perm my hair." Mama opened the door.

Dad retreated a step and gasped. "Oh, Babe, what did you do?"

Mama explained, and Dad smooched her on her cheek. "At least your hair isn't green this time."



## 1964: Tippling the Sherry

In the 1960's, my parent's circle of friends included six couples. They rotated hosting dinner parties on Saturday nights. The men wore suits and ties. The women wore party dresses and heels.

This time, it was Al and Jean's first turn with the group.

"Al, you're late. I was counting on your help." Jean rushed around their kitchen.

Al laid his wallet and keys on the green Formica bar. "I know honey, my meeting ran overtime."

Jean tightened her apron strings. "Let me think." She scanned her recipe. "Add Sherry... beef... cook... sour cream last."

"Can I help with anything? Maybe check the bar?" Al kissed Jean on her cheek.

"Please. Do we have Scotch?"

"We're out, but we have Brandy and Vodka." Al wiggled his brows.

“Some of them like Scotch. Go pick some up while I finish, please?” Jean stood next to the stove. “Let’s see, dinner is cooking... dessert! Can you call the girls and check if anyone is bringing dessert? We have about an hour.”

“No time.” Al shook his head. “But I’ll go get the Scotch and be back before they arrive.”

“Fine.” Jean scowled. “I’ll just whip up some chocolate chip cookies. Everyone likes those.”

Al nodded. “My favorite.”

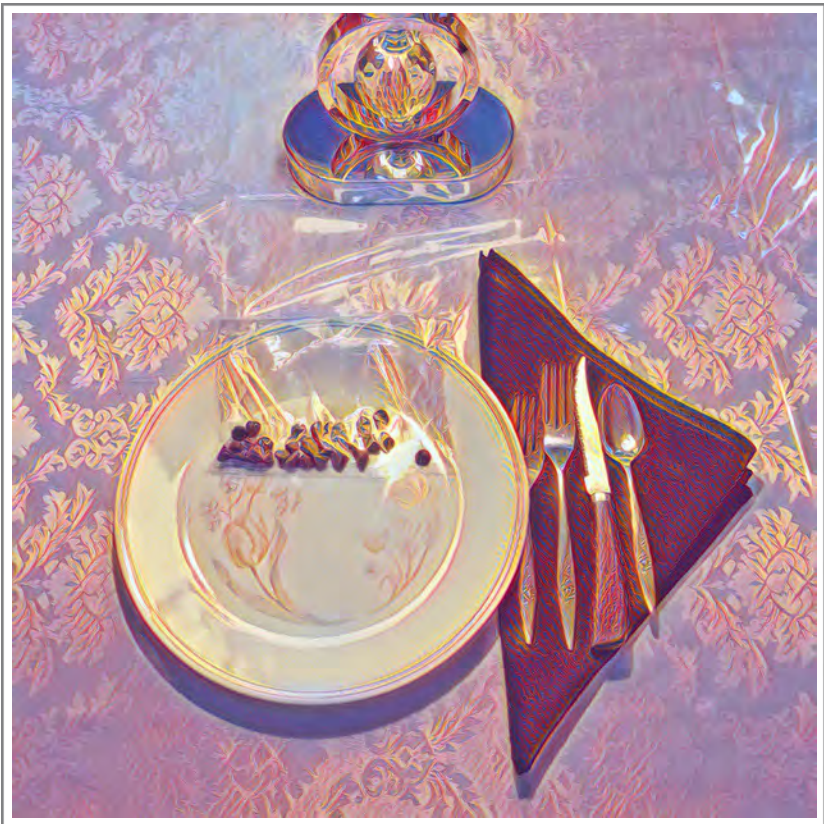
“M hm. Card tables. Cards.” Jean scanned the living room. “Ashtrays. Company can’t use that old soup can. Pick up a new one with the Scotch. Hurry.” She waved Al off.

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“Add sherry.” Jean opened the bottle and sniffed. “How does it taste?” She splashed a few sips into a glass. “Not half bad.” She took a few more swallows. “Pretty good. I never would’ve guessed.”

Jean filled a small glass and drank it while she finished dinner preparations. She had a few more glasses while she mixed up the cookie batter. “Now, where did I put the chocolate chips?” She searched her cupboards and found a half full plastic bag. “That’s enough.” Jean hummed her favorite tune. “Everything is going fine.”

Finished with meal prep and the tables set, Jean changed into her shiny, yellow party dress.



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Keys jingled from the kitchen area, and a bag crinkled. “Honey, I got the Scotch and an ashtray.”

Jean ambled down the hallway, dragged her hand along the wall, and turned off the kitchen timer. “Thash nice.” She bent down with her potholder to pull out the last batch of cookies and almost tipped over. “Oopsie.” Jean giggled.

“Uh, Honey?” Al gripped Jean’s arm and guided her to a dining chair. “Have you been drinking?”

“No, shilly.” Jean held onto Al’s arm.

“I definitely smell alcohol.”

“Drank shome sherry. Ish for cooking. No big deal.”

“It’s still alcohol, and you don’t drink much. I’m fixing some coffee. Stay in the chair, okay?”

Twenty minutes later, after Jean drank a cup of coffee and started on another one, the five other couples arrived.

Al explained about Jean tipping the sherry. Everyone joked about it until they ate the cookies.

They choked, they spit, and they pulled out fuzzy black things from the cookies. Whatever they couldn't rescue, they forced down with gulps of water.

"Honey, what in the world did you put in the cookies?" Al scraped out a piece from his mouth with his finger and inspected it. "Felt pieces?"

Jean's face heated. "They sure looked like chocolate chips. I guess if I'm unsure what's in a bag, I shouldn't cook with it. That cooking sherry is wicked stuff."



## Hunting Lists

My childhood was in the country, in a small-town setting. We lived fifteen feet from a year-round creak, and on a narrow logging road running through a canyon.

On my walk home from the bus stop every day, I'd search for animals. Many times, abandoned domestic cats and dogs wandered along our road, left to fend for themselves.

Mama admonished me that I couldn't bring home one more cat or dog. So, I brought home tadpoles, salamanders, and snakes. She screamed at the snakes wrapped around my fingers. She ordered me to put the salamanders back in the creek.

It surprised me when Mama conceded with tadpoles. She gave me a chipped and cracked ceramic bowl. I poured creek water into it every day to allow them to swim and grow and for me to feed. Until they all lost their tails, grew legs, and arms as frogs, and disappeared. I cried my heart out, and Mama made the rule—no more tadpoles.

I determined cats were back on my hunting list. They were the only animals Mama allowed me to sometimes keep. I thought she'd feel lucky, really. My cousin hunted scorpions. Even I didn't like those.



## 1968: The Hat Lady

Visions of swimming in the pond, tadpoles, and trail rides filled my daydreams as I rode the bus home from school. One more week, and it was time for summer vacation.

The bus hit a pothole and my head knocked against the window. "Ow!" I leaned away from it and bumped into a girl sharing my seat. "Sorry. It's so crowded with three of us smashed in here."

"It's not MY fault." The older girl, Brandy, flipped her shiny black hair and stuck up her chin. "The bus driver told us to grab a seat anywhere."

I turned my back to her and swung my legs. Maybe if I lean against the window, I won't bonk into it. Hills which held scattered pine and oak trees streamed by. The movement mesmerized me, and the dirt and gravel shoulder of the road blurred. The bus down shifted when the figure of a woman dressed in white, with a white hat, flashed past. Mama! I straightened for a better look. The bus pulled to a stop for the first of only two stoplights in our town.

Carolyn, my friend sitting behind me, tapped my shoulder. “Hey, isn't that your mama walking out there?” Kids raised up and looked out the windows.

“Yea, that’s Mama.” I pushed my face against the glass, the better to see her with. “She always walks. She doesn’t drive.”

Murmurs increased, with lots of oohs. Someone asked, “Your mama is the hat lady?”

Somebody else said, “I always see her. I wondered who she was.”

For the first time, I realized how my mother appeared to people. I heard, “She’s beautiful,” and “She always dresses so pretty.”

Our bus shimmied on and picked up speed. Mama disappeared from my sight.

Brandy tapped me. She had admiration in her eyes. “That’s your mama? I wish mine looked like that.”

Our town’s “hat lady” was MY mama. But what they didn’t know, was my Mama’s inside beauty

exceeded her outside beauty. That beautiful, movie star look-alike loved me to the moon.







## Trash Collector

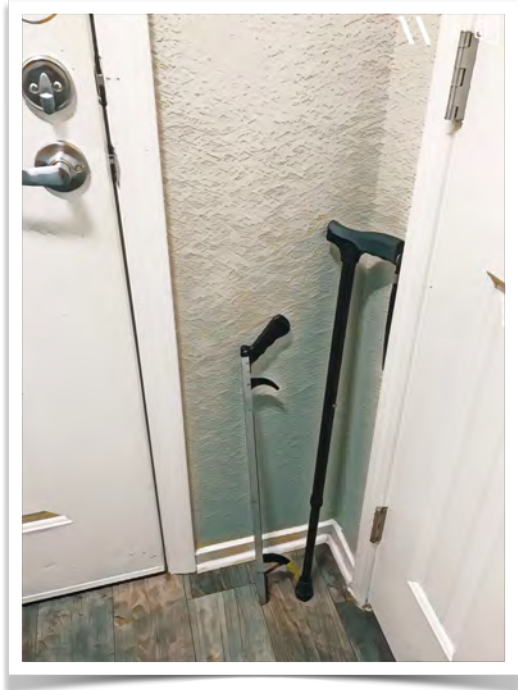
For about a year, Mama was the neighborhood trash collector. She donned her hat, cane, and armed with her metal Reacher—she executed her clean up mission within our apartment complex. Mama trekked as far as her legs and walker allowed. She eventually ventured into surrounding neighborhoods. I finally convinced her to stay near our complex only.

The community thanked her with notes left on bushes and often with a garbage bag tied to it.

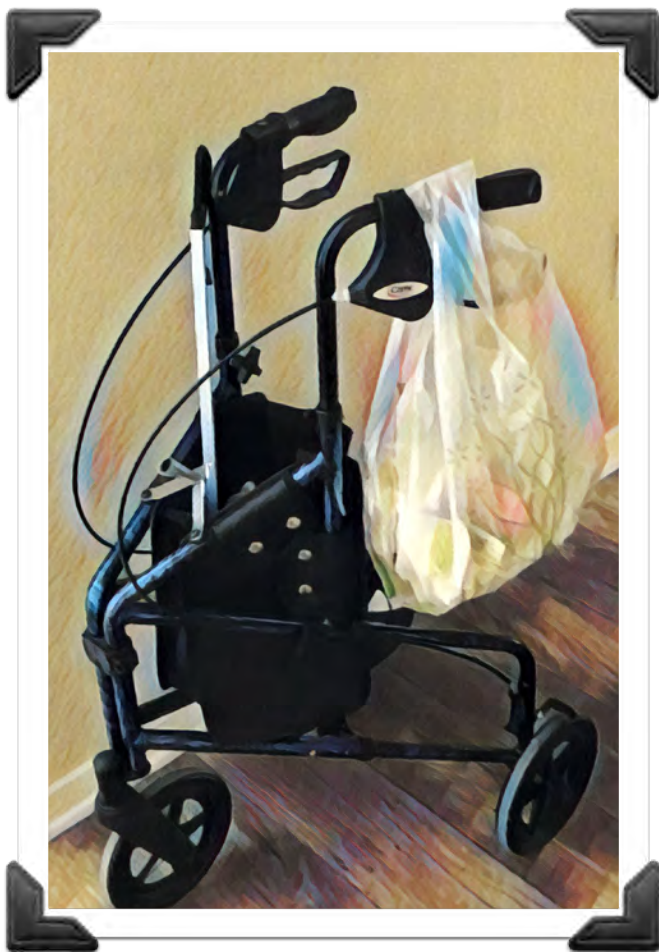
Neighbors even yelled out the windows of their cars, “Thank you!”

With thanks, neighbors purchased cold slushes or coffees for Mama from the Human Bean coffee shop on the corner and brought them to her. Sometimes, when she walked near the shop, customers would hand her a drink.

Don’t overrate appreciation. These strangers in our midst applaud Mama, giving her confirmation of deeds well done and a purpose for living.



Mama needed more stability after a few falls, and we traded her cane for a walker. She continued her mission.



## On Jar lids, Doorknobs, Buttons

What do these daily life tools have in common? They require fine motor skills that can be difficult for elders. Other daily life activities are called ADLs.

If we can't use these simple little items with ease, they grow into a huge wrench of despair and frustration, when we battle arthritis or other difficulties.

Jar lid—we tap it with a knife handle to break the seal, right? Glass jar with metal lid + knife handle + tap + slip= shattered shards. We purchased a jar lid opener. Ours is a rubber gripper and Mama happily uses it. She often states that she doesn't like feeling helpless.

Buttons—grip + slide into hole + pull= voila! Not if you have arthritis + limited eyesight. We purchase pull-on shirts now. Mama wears her favorite blouses from years ago as lightweight jackets. She is “stylin” and always receives compliments on her outfits. She enjoys dressing snazzy and still applies her own makeup using her gooseneck magnifying mirror.

Doorknob—grip + turn, right? Not with lotion on, or arthritic hands. Emergency + slip + stuck door= accidents. We can replace knobs with latch type handles requiring no gripping or twisting.

One of the many ways we can help our older loved ones is to provide them with useful tools or fixes for their daily struggles.



## Mama's Award

If you've read my other posts about my battle with Mama regarding her walker, Reacher, and trash collection... you'll appreciate this update— The management at our apartment complex noticed Mama's dedication to garbage collection and keeping the grounds clean. They honored her with a signed Certificate of Recognition and flowers.

How can I fight with appreciation? I lost this particular battle with Mama, and I am happy about it.

Thank you, apartment management—Mama is proud of her contribution to garbage elimination.



## Mama Reads Signs

Mama, a non-driver for her entire life, enjoys reading signs out loud to us—one of her favorite pastimes while riding in our car’s backseat next to her walker. (My sweet mama’s hearing is a little decreased, too).

Here’s a portion of our conversation on the way home from the restaurant tonight—

Mama said, “That sign says, ‘Pick and Pull.’ What’s a pick and pull. What do they pull?”

I called out, “Car parts. People pull car parts from a damaged car and put it on another one.”

“Oh. People do that? Hm. ‘Cook’s Collusion’ is that a restaurant?”

I twist in my seat belt and barely catch a view of the passing sign. “No... that’s a car repair shop.”

“What did you say?”

“I said—”

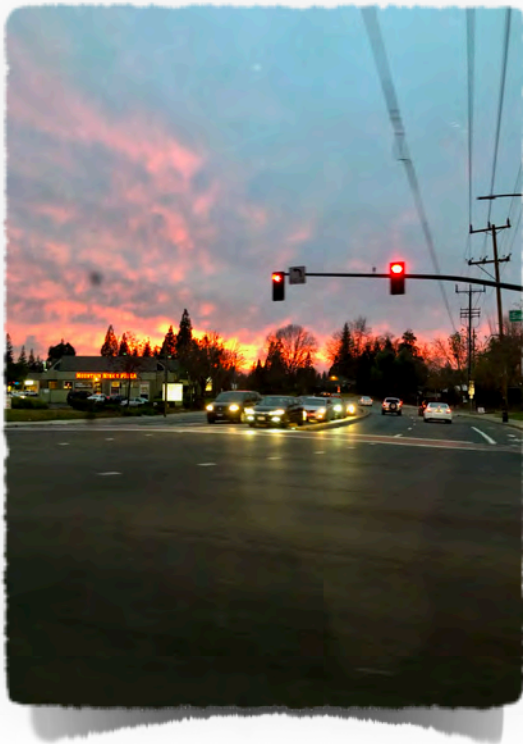
“And why would cooks collude?”

My husband clamped his hand over his mouth.  
Laughing at your mother-in-law is risky behavior.

I grinned, then spoke louder, “It’s called ‘Cook’s  
COLLISION’ for car accident repairs.”

“Oh, collision, not collusion. And Cook must be  
someone’s name? That makes more sense.”

This wraps up our evening adventure.



## Mama Sees Clouds

Mama and I have a comfort-custom of purchasing a milkshake and breakfast sandwich post doctor or dentist appointments. Did I mention yet that she treats me for transportation costs?

This particular dental visit came in the midst of a 50% possibility of rain showers. Mama loves it when our reservoirs are filled for the summer.

We sat in a parking lot inside my car eating our lunch from the drive-through. I unpacked her fries, and handed her a vanilla milkshake, then stuffed fries in my mouth.

Mama stared out her window without sipping her shake. “Honey, look at those precious clouds. I've never seen them grouped like that.”

“Do you mean spread around?”

“Floating so low.”

I leaned over to peek, then spoke around my bite of fries. “Oh, that's due to being rain clouds.”

Mama lowered her shake, swallowed her sip, and said, “I guess so, but I like that they have their own personalities. Some lead, and some follow. Some are big, or some are small. But they all just float around together.”

There you have it. Mama's commentary on the personalities of clouds.



## Mama Finds Tips

Mama returned from her afternoon walk in the complex and trash collecting with her Reacher, then glided into my kitchen.

“Look what I found. They were just laying around next to the sidewalk—.59 cents.”

Next to me at the sink, my hubby's eyes widened, he tucked in his lips and his shoulders shook.

I turned off the faucet. “Well, how nice.”

Mama turned over the coins in her palm. “I'd like to donate these coins to a children's charity. Do you know of any?”

“You want to donate the coins? Not keep them?”

Mama nodded. “I have lots of other pennies to add them to.” She left and brought me her old pill containers which she pulled from her walker's bin.

I really had no idea what all is stashed in her room. I'd better check.

My hubby said, “Consider those coins as your tips for collecting people’s trash.”

Mama pursed her lips. “Okay. There wasn't much trash today.”

Hubby grinned. “From Trash to Cash.”

“Yeah, so that’s how much my job is worth?”  
Mama shook her head. “A volunteer trash-collector’s salary.”



## Mama's Eyebrow

Mama had an effective form of correction in our family—her Eyebrow. When we witnessed the Eyebrow... we knew what came next. Punishment or discipline (whatever word you choose to use), loss of privileges, no dessert, etc.

My sister and I still discuss the Eyebrow, and we are both over-the-hill.

Mama leaned forward as I delivered her lunch on her tray. “When you were two years-old you used to try and charm me by asking, ‘Mommy, why are your eyebrows mad?’ You’d touch my face. I’d tell you that they weren’t mad, I was upset with you.”

Sis cringed in the seat next to Mama’s bed. “The Eyebrow. Remember the Eyebrow? I stopped my sass when I saw it. We all stopped whatever we were doing for the Eyebrow.”

I lifted Mama’s water bottle. “Oh yea, and you guys would even warn me. The Eyebrow, you'd say, or one of our brothers, ‘Ooo, The Eyebrow, you'd better watch out.’ You’re in trouble.”

Mama’s Eyebrow had impact.



I tried it with my kids—epic fail. They still reminisce and laugh about my Eyebrow attempts.

My son would say, “Mom, what are you doing? Why are you making that weird face?”

My daughter added, “Wow. You can raise one eyebrow at a time? Show me how.” (She has Mom's Eyebrow).

I frowned harder and lowered my voice. “I am angry! I am making this face to warn you to STOP.”

My kids would laugh, and say, “You don't look angry. You just look funny. Bwahaha!”

I did not inherit Mama’s Eyebrow.



## Mama Sees Jewels

In our apartment's kitchen, Mama stood in front of the granite counter, near the sink. She poured her morning coffee. "When you get the chance, come see something. I just found a jewel. I've never seen it before. It's really pretty, and it looks like a diamond."

"A diamond?" Did my wedding ring lose a diamond? At my computer I struggled with balancing my checkbook. With my limited math skills. "Okay... just a minute."

Mama patiently waited.

I laid down my check register, left my desk, and entered the kitchen. "Where is it?"

"It's in the darnedest place." Mama pointed with her long pointer-finger nail. "Right there."

Squinting didn't help. "Um, I don't see anything..." I stood next to her.

"You need the right kind of light. Lean closer. See it now?"

I studied the spot. “Oh, yea. It's part of the granite counter top.”

Mama frowned. “Why would granite have jewels in it?”

Blank mind. I don't have enough time for this conversation. I'm due at an appointment.  
“Granite glitters when it's cut.”

“Oh. And here's another one.” Mama's unpainted nail poked at something.

I knew to get up close right away, in the right kind of light. “That's a piece of plastic, Mama.”

Mama pushed it around with her fingertip. “Isn't that just plain weird? Diamonds and plastic look the same. I never thought about that before.”

“Me neither.” Why buy an expensive diamond when you can use cheap plastic wrap?



**DIAMOND**

## Mama Finds Doggie Waste Bags

Our apartment complex provides bright green doggie doo clean-up bags for the owner's convenience, and for the neighbors' delight. Not always used by said owners, gag, but more often than not.

The other day, Mama returned from her afternoon walk with a confession ready. She poured a cup of coffee. "I went into the office today."

I sat at my laptop in the dining room. "Oh?"

"Mhm. I talked to a young lady who looked like she's still in school. But she probably isn't."

I continued my search for tax documents. "Why did you need to talk to her?"

"Well, I didn't want her to think that I was doing something that I shouldn't."

"Really?" I typed on my keyboard, then focused on her. "What were you doing?"

Mama tucked in her lips, then said, “I used doggie bags for the cigarettes butts.”

Ew. “Mama, where they full bags?” I glanced at my hubby. His eyes were huge. I turned toward her.

She scowled at me. “Of course not! They were blowing around in the parking lot, on the street, and by the sidewalk. I didn't want them to be wasted.”

“Of course, you wouldn't want that.” Mama is an original EPA volunteer from the 1960's.

Mama pointed at her walker-trash-contraption. “I filled the bags up with my Reacher. Anyway, the girl was just pleased that I like to pick up the trash.”

“There you go, Mama. Confirmation you're doing a good thing.”

Please, repurpose any clean, green doggie bags that you see blowing around with the wind, or Mama might give you The Eyebrow.

**BE KIND & DON'T BE FINED!**



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## Mama's Nose

After locking my apartment door, I fished in my pantry for something to make my bitter nightly medicines go down easier.

My hubby gave me peck on the cheek. "How did critique group go?"

"Fine." I focused on the snack search. I just ate a full dinner, but it's Friday night.

I scooped up a spoonful of peanut butter and stuck a bunch of chocolate chips to it. I get it just right, insert it into my mouth—

"Welcome home." Mama popped out of her room.

"Hmph." I waved, but she busted me. Something looked weird about Mama.

"Like my chin whiskers?" The bright white mask plastered to it contrasted with her black ski cap she wears to keep warm.

"Ack, oh, hm." The peanut butter still glued my tongue to the roof of my mouth.

Mama's nose matched her chin. "And this is what happens when you stick your nose in someone else's business."

Outstanding visual, thanks, Mama.





## The Concrete Gutter

Walking outdoors is Mama's chief love. I encouraged the treadmill idea, but she refused. Her trash collecting mission gets her outside in the green and blue. She is an original environmental protector at eighty-eight-years old. Alzheimer's hasn't erased her love for nature.

Out on a mission one day, Mama fell into the concrete gutter. Headfirst.

A couple driving past saw her and stopped. They helped her up and offered to drive her home. Mama said no. Our address and my phone number are inside her walker but went unnoticed by them and forgotten by Mama.

Mama arrived home with a bump on her head. She said she didn't see any stars or pass out, just felt stupid. I was relieved but upset.

We related the incident to her doctor's office. No damage, except a lump on her forehead. They instructed no more reaching and trash collecting for my mama. She is also supposed to walk only twenty minutes, instead of one hour. I'm

concerned with her safety, but does she understand? She's becoming more childlike.

I took away her beloved trash collecting mission and hid her metal Reacher. Mama tried to sneak the garbage bags out. Today, I found her with one at our front door. She pouted and stamped her foot when I said, "No, no, no. No more. Just look up instead of down, so you won't see the trash." Mama was mostly joking when she had her tantrum.

It's uncomfortable being Mama's mom. I must get a GPS tracker without a cell phone. She can't see well enough and is overwhelmed with using electronics. A Bay Alarm pendant will satisfy us both.

Being a caregiver to an adult is frustrating. What attitude does God want us to have?

Psalms 86:15 (NIV) "But You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Mama Giggles

Poor Mama. Her back is giving her “fits.” She’s been resting in bed this past week. We’ve been doing everything we can think of to help her manage the pain.

I entered her room with supplies, including an ice pack. “Time to freeze yourself.”

Mama lay against her pillows in her queen size bed. “It's that time again?” It's been 28-32 degrees in the mornings. “Hey, the sun's coming through my blinds. How about opening them so my room warms up?” Mama wears sunglasses 24/7 due to “light-sensitive eyes.”

“Sure. And you can warm up with your coffee, too.”

Mama leaned forward and untied her robe’s belt. Mama’s always a little bit cold. She also had a velcro back support on. She tugged apart her velcro, and struggled to pull her arms out of her robe.

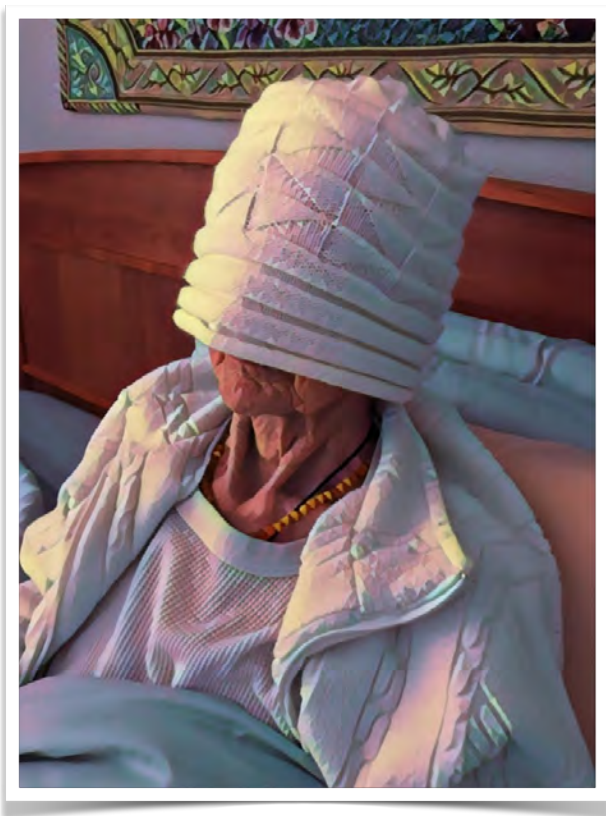
I lay down the ice pack, the tray table with her coffee, and placed it on her bed. I leaned over her and grabbed a third pillow. My arm bumped her

head when I straightened with the pillow. “Sorry, Mama!”

“I collided with your arm.”

I glanced down. Mama's face was covered by the ski cap she wears. A definite nose bump poked out underneath the knitted fabric. “Forget your sunglasses. Just wear the cap over your face.”

Mama giggled. “Thanks for another option.”



## Mama's Bread and Marmalade

Three days ago, Mama started using the walker in the house. Her pain and sciatica remind her not to forget her walker off in a corner. She is also more confined to her bed. We added an ice pack every two hours and a Motrin a few times a day.

This morning, I checked to see if she was awake. She was. "Stay in bed and I'll get you the ice pack."

"Brrr. It's frosty outside. I'm tired of laying down. I was hoping I could get up more often today."

"Your back will tell you about its limits by how much pain it gives you."

Mama pouted and frowned. "Grrr... okay."

"Will coffee cheer you up?"

Mama grinned wide. "And my breads."

After serving her hot coffee and cooking our veggie omelet, I slathered her dark rye with orange marmalade and found her blueberry streusel. I presented the tray to Mama.

“Oh, yummy! You remembered the peach jam.”

“Orange marmalade.”

“That's what I meant... thanks, Peaches... Hey, aren't you glad I didn't name you Peaches?”

Visions of my life, as Peaches, splashed across my mind. “That's for sure... thanks for that, Mama.” And thanks be to God we dodged that one.

(No offense intended to anyone named Peaches).



## Mama's MRI Questions

Mama's two-hour trash-pickup-walks had trickled to treks to the bathroom or kitchen. She hunched over her walker and said it was painful to be more upright.

Her Physician's Assistant listened to my concerns. "Do you think she fell?"

"That's possible. Her memory is sketchy and confused at times, so it's difficult to get accurate info from her. Plus, she doesn't tell me things because she's afraid of being a burden."

"I'd like to schedule an MRI for her to make certain that there aren't any fractures. Okay? We can also compare it to the last one."

Sis and I arrived with Mama at the Radiology Department and checked her in.

The Radiology MA—a tall, handsome, young man, entered the waiting area. "Hello, ladies. I have a series of pre-MRI questions to ask you."

"I may need to answer some of those for Mama."

He nodded. “Not a problem. Do you have a pacemaker?”

Mama shook her head. “No.” She glanced at me. “But I have some friends that do.”

Radiology MA dimpled. “Do you have any implants?”

Mama’s eyebrows disappeared into her hairline. “Implants?”

Sis and I chuckled. I said, “No.”

He grinned. “Dental implants?”

Mama turned to us, still wide-eyed.

“No.” I shook my head.

Radiology MA then asked, “Do you have metal stints?”

“What’s a stint?” Mama frowned.

Sis said, “Sometimes for your heart, Mom.”

“No, she doesn't have stints.” I patted Mama’s hand.

“Good. Have you ever had brain surgery?”  
Radiology MA paused his pen.

Mama’s face lit up. “Oh, maybe that’s what’s missing. I need that.”



## Mama's Coffee

My hubby fixed his much-anticipated morning coffee. "On that new FODMAP diet, can I drink creamer in my coffee? I like my coffee robust, but it's gotta have creamer."

"Check the yes list in your phone." I sipped my coffee with stevia and no flavored creamer. "Oh, and, read the creamer label for high fructose corn syrup."

My hubby pulled out his phone to check the FODMAP lists.

I miss my Chocolate Carmel creamer. "You know, I think I like the aroma of coffee better than the taste of coffee."

Mama collected her cup, insisting she must walk a little. "I like my coffee black. I like the smell. I like how it warms me up. In fact, there's nothing about coffee that I don't like." This from a person who drinks four cups of coffee a day and weighs 92 pounds fully clothed.

I lift the coffee pot from the stove. It's Mama's metal one. "Isn't that funny how we all drink coffee fixed completely different?"

Mama nodded. "That would be boring if everyone always liked the same things. Or what about when it would go on sale, and everyone wants the same one? The crowds would be terrible."

My hubby grinned. "Well, I don't know. We all like her, me. What would happen to her?"

We all thought a moment.

Actual memories of me in the center of a rioting mob in Cairo enveloped me, and I shuddered. "I'd fight to not go on sale."





## Mama's Pilfer Permission

Mama's health is vastly more fragile since her last year's 89th birthday. She's still a little sweetie, and she's as easy to enjoy as a pint of mint chip ice cream.

Her pain level and mobility keep her in bed and a wheelchair more often. We needed some equipment to improve daily function. Like a bedside table and an adjustable twin bed.

Mama's small room held hidden treasures she'd not seen in years, plus a queen size bed squeezed in tight.

Mama pointed to a chain hanging on a hanger. "Take that sparkly necklace to Hannah. Oh. And I think Camille will like that silver earring set."

My sister, a niece, and I plundered Mama's bedroom. We purged the boxes in her closet, containers stashed in corners, and accordion files of documents.

I reached deeper into the closet. "Is that a jewelry box back there?"

Mama lifted herself on the bed to get a better view inside. “Where? I have a jewelry box?”

“It’s more of a jewelry chest. Like a miniature dresser. I found it hidden behind that other box.” It was a vertical chest of polished mahogany wood—six drawers, with two glass side-doors.

“I forgot about that.” Mama crossed her arms. “Haven't seen it for years.”

Jangles and chinks sounded from the chest when I lifted it from the floor.

Sis said, “Sounds like a lot of jewelry in it, Mom.”

Mama waved at it. “Go ahead. Open it up.”

I set the chest before me on Mama’s bed. “I remember this.” I opened the doors first. Memories flashed and twinkled with the metal... the silver necklace from her cruise to Mexico... a wooden cross from Italy... even her wedding rings she and her husband purchased in Ireland. Her history of days gone by hung or lay inside the box.

Mama’s eyes softened when she studied me removing the objects.

I squirmed under her scrutiny. “It feels like we’re pilfering. Plundering and pilfering.” Kind of trespassing.

Mama laughed. “It's time to pilfer girls. And I’m enjoying it.”

Permission to pilfer granted.



## Mama's Beauty

Gold sunlight poured through my open slider door and across my desk. I shuffled through the stack of papers and receipts in search of the doctor's notes, leaflets, costs of Durable Medical Equipment for Mama. Found the folder at last.

Let's see... over-bed table, no. Transport chair, no. I tapped my teeth with my pen and a receipt fluttered to the floor. Where's the shower transfer bench information?

Years ago, Mama broke her neck and seven ribs when she fainted in her apartment bathroom. She's terrified of the bathtub. Until we get a bench, my sis gives Mama a sponge bath. Sis is good at this sort of personal detail, thank God.

Happy chatter floated down the hallway and drew me to Mama's room. I peeked through her doorway.

"Wow, Mama. You sure look pretty."

Mama blinked. Her expression frozen.



I looked further down and noticed her size Small Depends dangling above her knees. I'd interrupted her in the midst of dressing. "Oh, I meant your make-up. That's what I saw first."

Should I just bow and back out the door? "Um, but really, Mama. You're the most beautiful woman I know. And it doesn't depend on how you're dressed."

Mama and Sis giggled. Whew, redeemed.

## Mama's New Bed

My hubby, Mama and I live in a two-bedroom apartment. One of the reasons we chose this apartment is the floor plan is perfect for us.

Mama's bedroom and bathroom are separated by a wall between the living room. We all have more privacy this way.

The other reason this apartment is perfect is Mama has a picturesque view from her bedroom window. It's the prettiest one in the entire complex.

Mama currently has a queen size bed in her 10x10. It pretty much fills up her room, but she purchased it when we lived in my house.

Recently, she is in much more pain, and we've been adding equipment—an over bed table and a walker that she uses to move around her room. Space is tight and a trip hazard. We shimmy between the bed, the closet, and the wall.

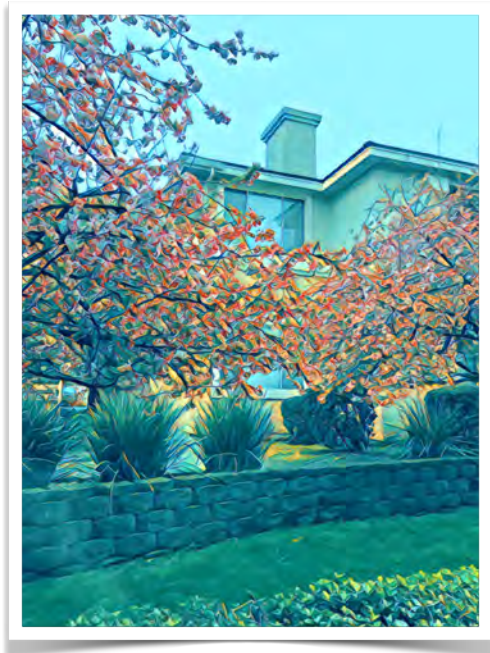
Today, we're setting up my hubby's previous twin size, faux Tempurpedic bed. Both head and feet

elevate with a remote. It even has a vibration feature, with which I plan to surprise Mama.

I purchased a new bed cover ensemble in all white per Mama's request. "Hey, Mama. Are you happy you get a new bed, new bedspread, and new sheets? Nice, huh?"

"Yup, an old lady in a new bed. That ought to perk things up a bit. Something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue. The blue part is tricky... Oh, I know, I can see the beautiful blue sky from my bed."

That saying isn't just for weddings anymore.





## Mama's Roller Coaster

My hubby and I took Mama for a walk to a nearby locally owned coffee stand. It sits next to a wetland preserve, so the views are beautifully “springy” right now.

Our challenge was rolling Mama in her wheelchair over those yellow lego-thingies to get to the order window. In the past, we made fun of

those thingies that make you go ah-hh-hh-hh-hh when you roll over them with shopping carts.

Now, we understand the importance of those lego thingies. We have a legally blind neighbor who relies on them to navigate our sidewalks and apartment parking lot.

After we rolled Mama over those thingies, we pushed her over the white speed bumps. Have you ever noticed they're a lot higher than you sense when you're inside your car? Mama's head bounced no matter how slow we pushed her.

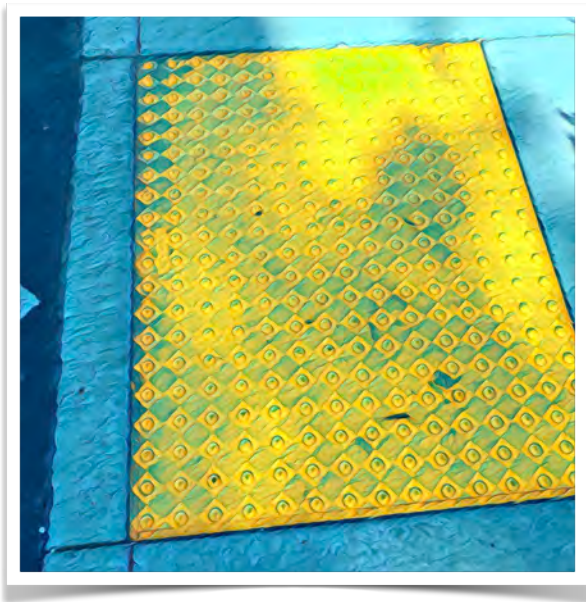
Hubby patted her shoulder. "Sorry, Mom. Hope you're not getting motion sickness. Is it like being on a rollercoaster?"

I grinned at him. "Glad you're driving, honey. We're on an obstacle course."

Mama bit her lip. "You know, I remember going on a rollercoaster in Santa Cruz once."

"You did? You never told me about it."

"Yup. Just once. It didn't thrill me like they promised, AT ALL." She flitted her fingertips.



Hubby said, “I went on that, too. I don’t like rollercoasters. Makes me dizzy.”

My jaw dropped. “I’m the only one who hasn’t ridden that thing. But I get headaches on rollercoasters.”

Mama nodded. “And I was always dizzy without any help.”

Hubby bent down closer. “So, Mom, were you what they call a dizzy blonde?”

I smiled. “Yeah, honey. She was a blonde, then other colors.”

Mama smiled up at him. “Blonde, brunette, redhead. Whatever color grabbed my attention. I was the Clairol lover. An advertisement for their entire line of colors.”

Her uncolored, white hair is glorious. God’s design does it best.



## Mama's Jeans

Mama wiggled her little fanny and did a little dance. She could not get her jeans to cooperate and yanked on them again.

“Mama, what's the problem?” I stood by her bedside table with her steamy cup of coffee. How could this be difficult? She weighed 89 pounds—one pound for each year of life.

“Oh... I can't seem to get them on.” She couldn't zip them up.

“Something's strange here. They can't be too tight for you.” I lifted the back of her tee shirt and patted her fanny. “Mama, you're trying to pull jeans over your back brace stuffed with an ice pack. No wonder you can't get them to fit.”

Mama turned around and faced me.

“Mama, there's a hole in one knee. How did you get that? Did you fall and not tell me?” This has happened before. Mama doesn't want to be a bother or a burden, even at her own expense.

She shrugged. “I don't know how it got there.”

“Where are your yoga pants?”

Blank expression. “What's that?”

I searched her closet. “Those black stretchy pants I bought for you. Wear those.” God knows that those are the only pants that fit over my tummy anymore. I held up a pair.

She frowned. “Those are my dress pants.”

“No... Mama, those are the comfy pants that fit over your back brace and ice pack. The ice helps your pain, right?”

“I guess so. I do like the ice. But it makes me cold.”

I offered the steamy cup of coffee. “Cold on the outside and warm on the inside.”

Mama pouted. “Oh, alright. But I want you to know that I'm upset that you took away my exercise. That's the only dancing I've done in years.”



## Grouchy Caregiver

Yesterday, was my Grouchy Day.

It was one of those times where I wanted to be invisible, or at the very least, hide in my quiet room with a cup of coffee or nap. I didn't want to hear any other voice, except my own whiny one. My grating voice was quite enough to deal with, thank you.

But we'd been waiting to get Mama into the Pain Clinic for three weeks. By golly, nothing was going to stop me... even myself.

With a headache behind my eyes, and imaginary draggy feet, I loaded Mama into her featherweight transport wheelchair. I have a herniated disc in my back. Lifting under 15 pounds matters. We rolled it down the ramp by my car.

Mama slid onto the passenger seat. "Ooo, it's nice and warm from the sun." Always cold at 84 pounds. She raised her face. "Can we get a milkshake when we're on the way home?"

She'll be colder. "Uh, okay." That's what I deserve for giving her a milkshake after dental appointments. Now she expects a treat after ALL unpleasant experiences.



I parked the wheelchair next to the car and opened the hatch to load it. Better get the GPS going first. Whipped out my phone... strands of hair blew across my eyes. A little windy out. Should I lock the brake? The wind calmed. Nah.

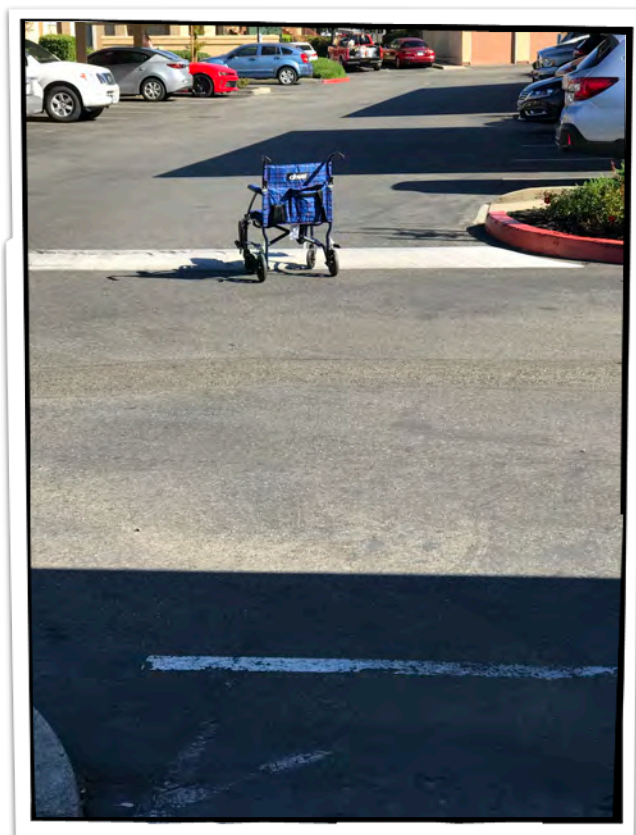
My car engine kicked in, I set the GPS, and buckled up Mama. I rounded the rear of the car. The wheelchair was missing. A white sedan drifted slowly past us around the curve of the sidewalk, and a man carrying a trash bag skipped and dodged something. Uh, oh.

There are other reasons for speed bumps in the middle of parking lots—wheelchair stops.

Also, wheelchair brakes are not suggestions. They're important safety features, unless you need a funny event to get rid of your grouch.



“Milkshake coming up, Mama.”



## When Sis Helped

In my family, I have two older brothers and one sister. Sis is almost nine-years my senior. She's the OLDER sister, as I remind her often.

Mama has been living with me since 2014, when her beloved husband passed away from cancer. She never drove a car, has Alzheimer's now, and can no longer use a walker due to arthritis and other spinal issues.

Wheelchair attending is a new experience for us. It took several weeks to figure out the brakes. At first, we either leaned against it, or made sure it was on level ground.

I confessed last time. This time, I'm telling on Sis...

Sis greeted me with a hug. "Can you believe the wind yesterday?"

"It was bad. It blew Mama's wheelchair across the parking lot. A car swerved and a guy jumped out of its way. Thankfully, no one hit it."

Sis's eyes widened. "Was Mom in it?"

“No, thank God. Although the clinic showed us how to lock the brakes yesterday. I was in a hurry.”

Sis scrunched her face. “At least Mom wasn't in it.”

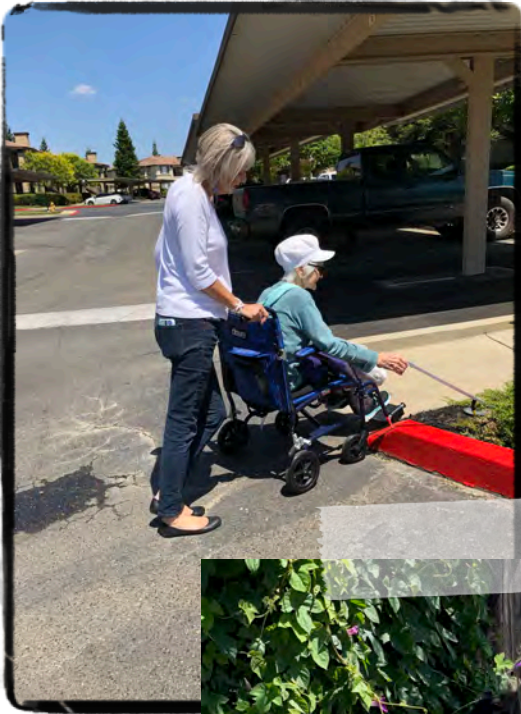
“Exactly.” I pointed to the center of the parking lot. “It blew over to that speed bump.”

Sis stared at it. “That happened to me, but Mom was in the chair.”

“When?”

“Last week. Right here, on the ramp.” Sis tucked in her lips. “I was loading her into my car, and she rolled down backwards. But I caught her before she drifted past the trunk.”

I'm sure there are other loving caregivers out there in desperate need of wheelchair instruction.





## Mama Registers

Doctor appointment day dawned, bright and clear. Sis and I got Mama ready and loaded her into the car with her wheelchair.

Mama has “White Coat Syndrome” where her blood pressure goes up when she sees a doctor, but this time, Mama was flat out cheerful.

We pushed her down the hallway and registered Mama at the check-in desk.

Mama lifted her face to me. “Honey, do they have a water fountain here?”

Sis and I scanned the waiting room. “I don't see one. I'll ask the receptionist.”

There wasn't a water cooler or fountain, so the receptionist retrieved an icy water bottle from a door behind her counter. “Here you are.” She handed the frosty bottle to Mama with a smile.

Mama grinned back. “Thank you, so much. It will be nice to not have my lips stuck together. Unless I want to kiss someone.”

The receptionist raised her eyebrows and flushed. She blinked a few times and looked at me and my sis. “Uh, okay.”

I whispered to my sis, “Mama looks like a movie star and sounds like a lady of the evening.”



## Mama Visits Radiology

Mama's doctor ordered X-rays for her hip. It was painful, and with her track record of not divulging her falls, we wanted confirmation that there weren't any fractures.

Sis and I transported her to the Medical Building, unloaded her in the Valet Zone, and entered the Radiology Department.

After registration, they escorted us to a changing room, which was large enough for all three of us to fit into.

"Do they want me to take off everything? I mean, I have on long johns, pants, a turtleneck, and a sweater. My feet will get cold if I take off my boots." Mama pointed to a stack of lockers with keys. "And will everything fit into that tiny locker?"

"Sorry, Mama. I think you must disrobe. But leave your purse, cap, and gloves with us." I stuffed them into the pocket on the back of her ultra-light wheelchair, and Sis took Mama's purse.

“Okay, I guess it’s necessary.” Mama stared at Sis, who nodded.

Mama pulled off her sweater and broke into song. “Take it off, take it off, said a voice from the rear.”

I blinked hard.

“Take it off, take it off, that’s all I can hear.” Mama removed her arms from her turtleneck.

“Mom! What?” Sis cupped Mama’s shoulder.  
“What are you singing?”

I tucked my lips in to stifle a giggle and stared at Sis. “Yeah, is that an actual song? I’ve never heard you sing that before.” I mouthed the words, what is that?

Sis frowned, her eyes were wide and confused.

“Yes, it’s an actual song. It’s from a long time ago.” Mama pulled the turtleneck over her head.

“Um, where did you hear that song?” Is Mama more confused than we thought?

Mama's muffled voice issued from inside her turtleneck. "Oh, I don't know. Somewhere. It just came to mind."

"At a cabaret show? Or a musical?" I clutched Mama's clothes. She loves musicals.

Sis handed Mama the hospital gown, and asked, "At a strip club?"

Ooh, brave. She asked THE question.

"No, no. I wasn't that wild."

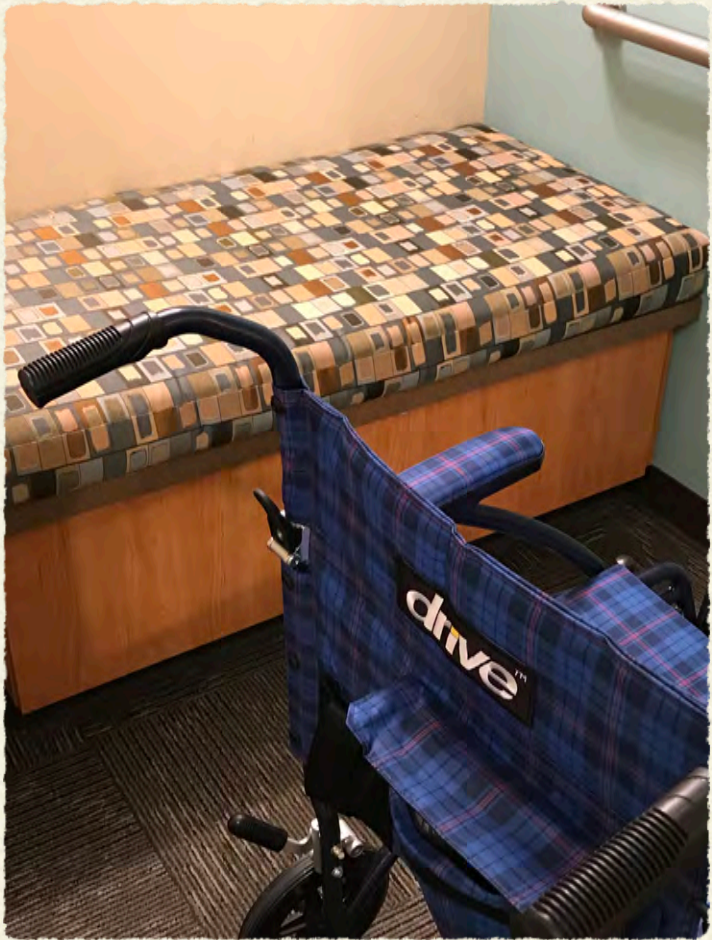
We froze. There's a story here somewhere.

Mama tucked the gown around her body. "Now, I remember. It was a song on the radio in the late 40s."

"On the radio?" We exclaimed in unison. "That's pretty edgy for the 40's, isn't it?"

"Not from what I remember."

Note to self—ask more questions about Mama's life in the 40s.



## Mama's Water and Tonic

Laundry, almost done. Check. Finish up with Mama's sheets.

After scanning my list at the kitchen counter, I glanced out the patio slider. Several wildfires were burning in our state, and one was near enough to cast a peachy light. Triple digits again today. Will fires and this heatwave never end?

The birdbath on our patio was dry, and I've seen birds use it on hot days. Better fill it up. I selected my largest glass jar and filled it from the kitchen faucet.

Out of the corner of my eye, Mama emerged from her room. Her walker seat held her water glass. Not again. I can't count the times I've told her NOT to carry dishes on the seat. If something falls, she'll let go of a handle and automatically jerk down to get it and...

"I'm just bringing my water cup to fill up." Mama smiled.

Hhh. “Let me do it for you, Mama. Do you want me to add some Tonic Water, too?” I lifted her empty cup.

“Sure. I've been having some leg strings.” She means cramps. The quinine in the Tonic Water alleviates them.

I pulled out the bottle from the refrigerator door, turned toward her glass, and poured a bit into the water jar next to it. “Oh great.” I stared at the tall jar I'd added tonic water to. “Here's your drink, Mama.”

“That's funny.” Mama giggled.

“That was for the birdbath. Now what?” Should I pour it on the plants instead?

Mama tilted her head sideways. “Maybe it will help the birds. I'm sure they must get wing cramps from time to time.”

“There's a thought.” From my wacky, wise, and wonderful Mama. I might Google “bird cramps.”





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## Mama's MRI Questions

Mama's two-hour trash-pickup-walks had trickled to treks to the bathroom or kitchen. She hunched over her walker and said it was painful to be more upright.

Her Physician's Assistant listened to my concerns. "Do you think she fell?"

"That's possible. Her memory is sketchy and confused at times, so it's difficult to get accurate info from her. Plus, she doesn't tell me things because she's afraid of being a burden."

"I'd like to schedule an MRI for her to make certain that there aren't any fractures. Okay? We can also compare it to the last one."

Sis and I arrived with Mama at the Radiology Department and checked her in.

The Radiology MA—a tall, handsome, young man, entered the waiting area. "Hello, ladies. I have a series of pre-MRI questions to ask you."

"I may need to answer some of those for Mama."

He nodded. “Not a problem. Do you have a pacemaker?”

Mama shook her head. “No.” She glanced at me. “But I have some friends that do.”

Radiology MA dimpled. “Do you have any implants?”

Mama’s eyebrows disappeared into her hairline. “Implants?”

Sis and I chuckled. I said, “No.”

He grinned. “Dental implants?”

Mama turned to us, still wide-eyed.

“No.” I shook my head.

Radiology MA then asked, “Do you have metal stints?”

“What’s a stint?” Mama frowned.

Sis said, “Sometimes for your heart, Mom.”

“No, she doesn't have stints.” I patted Mama’s hand.

“Good. Have you ever had brain surgery?”  
Radiology MA paused his pen.

Mama’s face lit up. “Oh, maybe that’s what’s missing. I need that.”



## Mama's Balloon Pets

Years ago, Mama had a pet balloon. I gave it to her for Mother's Day. It was a shiny, silver, mylar balloon with a gigantic pink rose on it.

One afternoon, I stopped by Mama and John's apartment at afternoon teatime. I sat at their round dining table, ate a cookie, and drank my Earl Grey.

"Hey darlin', have you seen Rosie today?" John scanned the living room.

Mama called out from the kitchen, "Not since this morning."

"I wonder what she's up to?" John sipped his tea. "Where is she?"

I said, "Who is Rosie? Never heard you talk about anyone named Rosie."

John grinned. "It's our pet."

"Pet? You have a pet?" I scanned the floor and under the table.

Mama carried her coffee cup into the dining room and sat in the chair next to me. “Yes, honey. The one you gave me for Mother’s Day.”

I suspended my cookie near my lips. “I did not.”

“You gave me a balloon. We call her Rosie. Every day we wake up and we never know where we’ll find her. Sometimes she’s in the kitchen, sometimes in the laundry room, we even found her on John’s recliner one morning. It’s lots of fun to see where she travels at night.” Mama smiled.

John nodded. “M hm, and Rosie doesn’t need to be fed, or cleaned up after, and never makes a sound. She’s a perfect pet for us older folks and apartment dwellers.”

Rosie floated gracefully past us on the air conditioner’s breeze, her ribbon tail skimmed the carpet. She headed into John’s office and landed on John's chair.

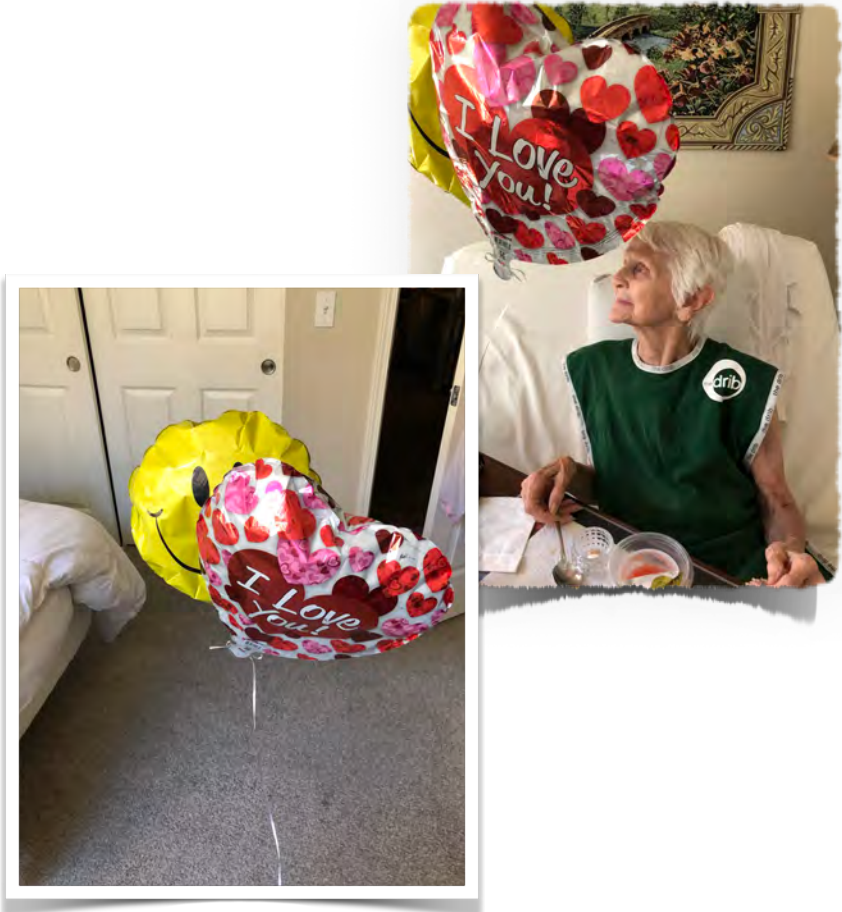
“See what we mean?” Mama and John chuckled.

“I do. Never underestimate the entertainment factor of a balloon.”

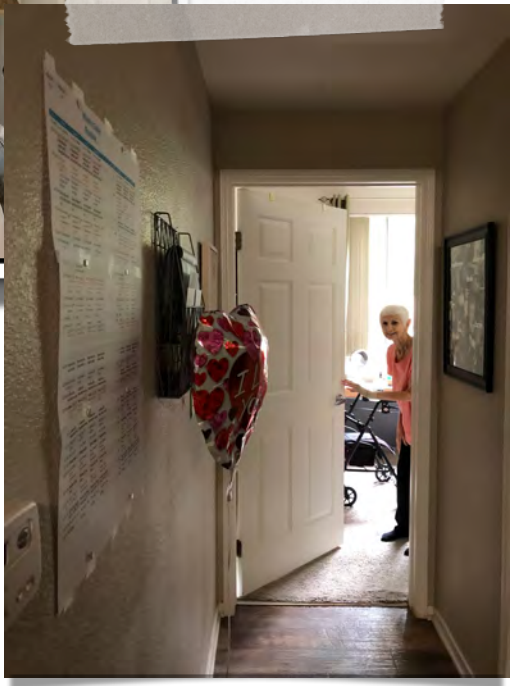
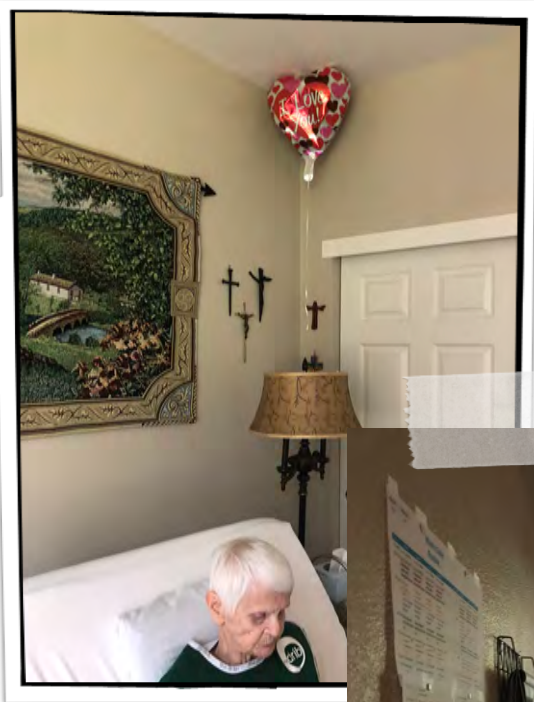


This past St. Valentine's Day, Sis gave Mama an, I Love You mylar balloon.

It's September, and it still travels. Just like Rosie, Mama enjoys Heart a lot. A balloon is an easy-to-care-for-pet for older folks. Never underestimate the power of companionship.







## Steamy Family

My reusable plastic shopping bags crinkled when I set them on my kitchen counter. I leaned over it and peeked into the living room. Yep, hubby is napping in his recliner.

Voices echoed inside Mama's room. I opened the door and discovered Sis bent over Mama laying a wet towel on her chest.

Sis straightened. "Hey sis, I'm putting hot compresses on Mom to loosen her congestion. It's helping her voice."

"It's not a whisper anymore," Mama croaked out.

"That's great! I wanted to put her in a steamy shower, but she hasn't felt strong enough. I forgot all about hot compresses. Mama gave all of us those."

Sis grimaced, "Mom put them on me when I had pleurisy, remember that? That was the worst thing. I was in so much pain."

Mama frowned and crunched up her face. "I did?"

"Yeah, you guys were at the kitchen table." I nodded. "I'd come home from school and know Sis was sick. And Rick! Remember the hot compresses on his back for acne? Nasty." I shuddered.

Mama swung her face with a blank expression between us during our discussion. "I don't remember any of that."

Sis patted Mama's shoulder. "It's okay."

"What about the pot of boiling water sitting in front of me at the kitchen table?" I grinned at Mama. "I'd have bronchitis or something, and Mama put a towel over my head to catch the steam. When it got too hot, I'd lift the towel and ask, 'Am I done now?' She'd say, 'Put that towel back down. You can stop when the timer goes off. Now, breathe deep.' I hated it, but it worked."

We laughed.

"I do remember that." Mama smiled. "We must have been a real steamy family."



## When Things Change

Last week was a difficult one. Not a complete surprise, but it still overwhelmed me. It was time for changes in our circumstances.

My alarm alerted me it was time to get Mama's morning started. I always open her blinds and administer her medicines, then bring her a cup of black coffee.

I strolled down the hallway, opened her door, and my hand froze on the doorknob. "Mama! What's going on? Are you okay?"

Mama sat on her bed, bent over, with her head against her arm. She lifted her face toward me. "I don't know," she croaked. "My chest hurts."

"Where?" I leaned her back against the raised head of her bed. "Point to where it hurts."

"Here." Mama touched her right chest. "Mostly when I breathe deep. Or cough."

Mama's cough started during all the wildfire smoke which hung around us for months.

A phone call later, Sis, Mama and I headed for the emergency room. After several tests, and six hours spent in the full and hustling waiting room, the doctor read the results of a CT scan, “There's a mass in her right lung, just about where she pointed earlier. Plus nodules on her lungs. It could just be pneumonia, but we aren't certain without a biopsy. We could keep her overnight and do the biopsy if she wishes. Do you know what she wants?”

If clocks still hung on walls and ticked the seconds, I'd say there were ten clicks. My thoughts scattered, I held my breath, and then I prayed. Help me accept what Mama wants to do. I think I know. “Yes, she has an Advanced Health Care Directive.”

Because Mama's hearing isn't pristine, and sounds echoed all around us, I repeated her options.

“I don't want any more tests. I'm going to be ninety years old.” Mama pleaded in her gentle way, “I want to go home. I just want to go home.”

Sis and I stared at each other and nodded. “Okay. We understand.”

The ER doctor counseled us about filling out a POLST form for any providers that we encountered. She referred Mama to a case worker who encouraged us to get care at home because of Mama’s wishes.

We chose hospice care when her GP offered it. I’ve always heard how wonderful hospice is. Now, we experience it firsthand.

That old circular timepiece ticks and hourglass pours away in my mind. We take one day at a time on this voyage of life. God knew when we’d be at this eleventh hour, and I must trust Him to guide us along to midnight.



## Persistent Heart

We decided Mama's pet balloon, Heart, must go into the trash bin. After eight months, the heart's helium disappeared and left it deflated.

Mama reminisced about her favorite balloon antics. "Heart drifted over me and touched my face with her ribbon. Remember when she hid behind my bed? I'd wake up from a nap and she would be in front of the TV or sitting on the chair. She sure was funny."

I raised a brow and glanced at my sis. "A balloon with humor? Well, sure."

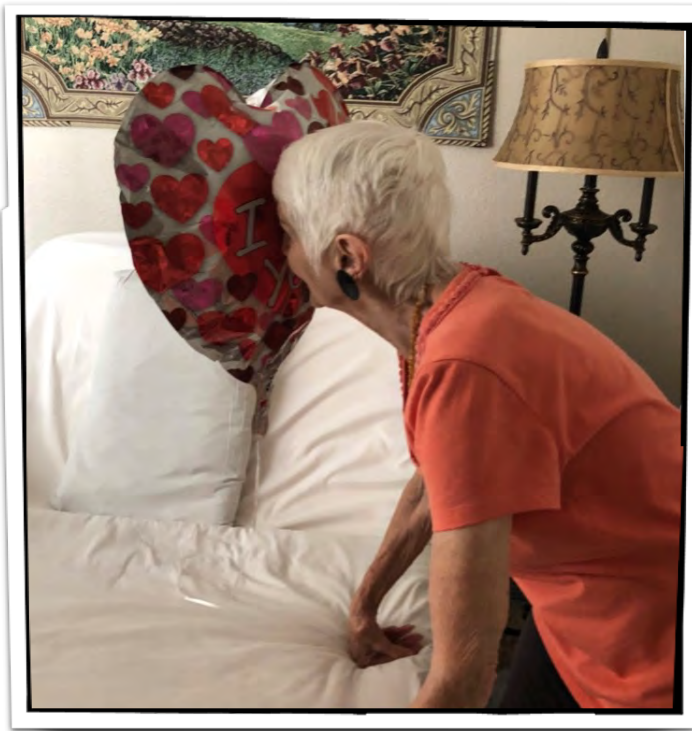
Mama cocked her head and frowned. "Heart followed you around my room and out the door to my bathroom. Then she ended up in the kitchen. She's a curious balloon."

I lifted the trailing balloon ribbon from the carpet. "Remember when heart disappeared for two days? When I set the laundry basket on the washer, I found her stuck between the wall and the dryer?" Sis and I laughed.

“See what I mean?” Mama nodded and turned to Sis. “That was quite a Valentine gift you gave me. Lasted forever.”

Sis gently took the balloon from my hands, and said, “Are you ready to trash her?”

Mama grimaced. “I guess it’s time. Go ahead. Bye Heart, you gave me a lot of love and laughs.”  
Mama kissed the balloon goodbye.



Three days later, I stared out our sliding door at something shiny on the lawn behind the fence and our patio. “Heart? No way.” Same silver “I Love You heart” —her markings were unique. She was lying on her side twisting and turning in the wind.

Hurrying to Mama’s room, I opened her blinds. “Mama, look what’s on the lawn.”

Mama sat forward from her doze and gasped. “Is it... it is! It’s Heart. How did she get out there?”



“I don't know, maybe someone found her in the trash?”

Mama raised her teary green eyes to mine. “She’s looking for me. I think she misses me. I miss her.”

I bit my lip. “She's definitely a real loyal pet, but I can't reach her, Mama. She's behind the fence in someone else's yard. Not only that, she's probably dirty from the garbage bin.”

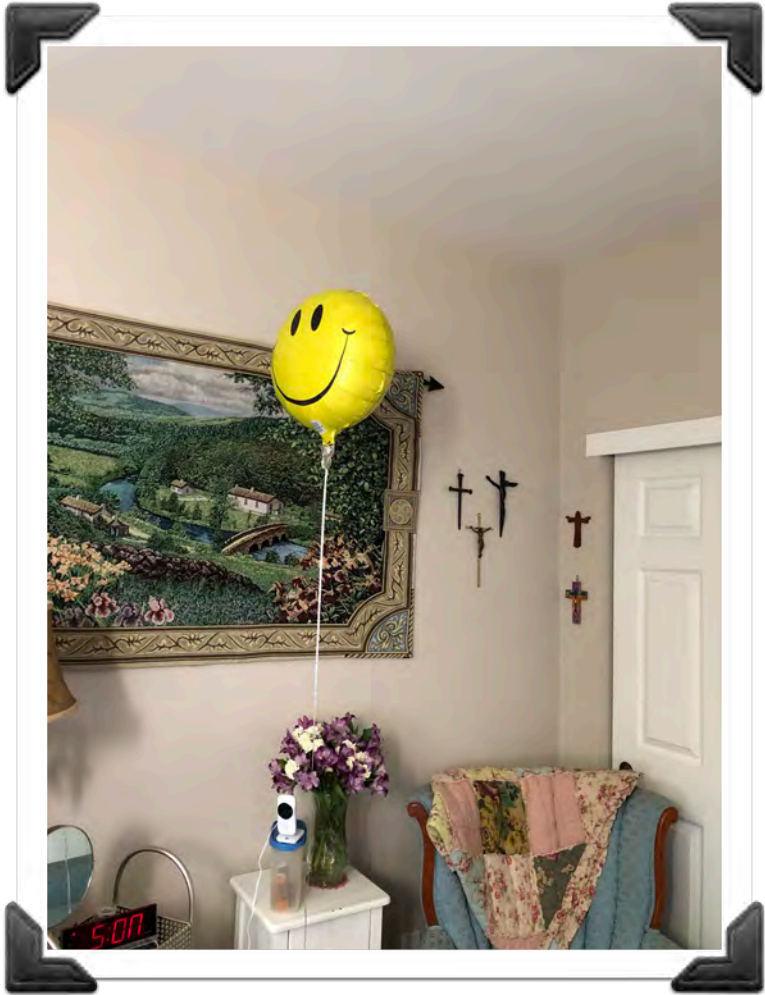


Mama observed Heart for about thirty-minutes. She turned away to get a box of tissue. When Mama looked again, Heart was gone.

“I promise we’ll get you a new pet balloon for your birthday, Mama.”

I told the family the story of Heart and they gave Mama balloon pets for her birthday—“Silvie Star,” and “Goldie,” who replaced “Happy Face.” Two new pets were better than a deflated one.





## Christmas Angel Wings

Christmas is my favorite holiday and season. I love everything about it, especially since it's Jesus' birthday celebration. When my kids were young, I always baked Him a birthday cake, and we sang the birthday tune.

This year, mourning influences my Christmas thoughts and mood. Not only because the cake is now a gluten-free, and sugar-free pie or cookie. They placed Mama on hospice, and I wait for the inevitable. I'm not good at waiting. It's exhausting. I constantly watch the monitor, listen, and peek into her room. Her cough often wakes me and I give her medicine. She doesn't remember that in the morning.

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"Hi Mama, do you need anything?" I scanned her bedside tray table and stood next to her bed. I stroke her downy soft, white hair. "Are you warm enough?"

Mama sat in bed dressed in her flannel pajamas, shrugged, and smiled. "I can't think of anything. I'm fine." But I'm not. She's unaware of her

illness, mostly. She forgets why she is in bed, and why she coughs. Explaining details repeatedly doesn't help her remember. Mama raised her hands. "I feel great!" But I know the clock ticks.

Hubby and I cleaned out our storage to help our budget by saving the rental fee. I found the table-top Christmas tree, previously assembled with lights, and set it up without Christmas spirit. My mood rose, until I remembered Mama couldn't see it, and my lighter mood evaporated.

More tubs to purge. I crinkled tissue here, and rustled packaging there, to unwrap all the Christmas ornaments Mama and I created or purchased in the past decades. I separated them into boxes for give away, donate, or keep. The memories of what age and who I was with when I purchased it—the craft time with a friend, or which child I made it for lifted my mood again— Oh, my tree-topper star. I forgot about it. It's for a regular-sized tree, but I had an idea.

"Hey, Mama. How would you like a star on your floor lamp? A tree-lamp." I pushed the iridescent, plastic star's spring over the metal finial atop her lamp shade, then plugged in the cord.



“Oh, that’s pretty. I like that. Even when it's not lit, it sparkles.”

My mood soared. I hung a small wooden sled, and a snowman on her metal, floor lamp’s arms. Mama smiled and thanked me again while I stuck festive window clings on her large window for her to enjoy.

The last few ornaments I unwrapped were the perfect size for our little tree. What’s in this white tissue paper? Light as a feather. I teared up. White angel wings. Mama and I found them years ago on a shopping trip with Sis, when we would spend Saturdays together to shop and have lunch. Those memories played in my thoughts for a while. I stroked the light and downy wings before I hung them on the tree and gulped down tears. Angels.

Angels we have heard on high, singing sweetly through the night, and the mountains in reply, echoing their brave delight... from Angels We Have Heard on High.

Mama will be grateful and joyful when she sings with genuine angels.







## Morphine or Milkshake?

My left hand shook as I grasped the bottle of liquid morphine. It's come down to this. The king of pain meds. "Mama, I must squirt this between your teeth and your cheek. It's pretty bitter, but I'll give you some lime yogurt after, okay?" The dropper jiggled between my right-hand fingers suspended with a loaded dose near her face.

"I don't like it." Mama stared at me with her lovely green, but glazed eyes.

I grimaced. "I know. What's your pain number? You said it was a ten a few hours ago, then it went to a five. Is it back to a ten?"

"Hm." Mama's jaw clenched around her words. "I don't know what to say." I glanced at my Sis sitting in the corner chair. She wrinkled her nose and raised her brows.

"What is your pain number from one to ten?"

Mama gingerly shook her head.

"Mama, what number?" I asked that question two more times.

Sis scrunched up in the chair, squinting her eyes, with pursed lips. Almost containing her amusement at my lack of success.

I attempted to get information out of Mama, but she was reluctant to speak. “Mama, I know you don’t want to say, but tell me the truth. I need to know how much to give you.”

Mama raised her pointer finger. “I want to say this. I do know that I want a milkshake.”

Milkshakes made the top of her list for comfort reasons. This was an excellent reason.

“Sis will go get you one. How’s that?” I smiled at Sis, who nodded and left us. “Mama, now, will you tell me your pain number?”

“Nine. It’s a nine.” Mama whispered. It’s tragic to hear this number, and I thank God we live in the age of morphine and milkshakes.





## Goodbye, Mama

Last night, Mama's heart stopped its race against cancer, and she passed into Heaven. We knew she was ready to go home. But she was my best friend, and confidante. I stand by your empty bed and bless you with pain in my heart. Time will drag until I see you again. Goodbye for now, Mama.







Today, was Mama's birthday. She loved the autumn season, but celebrated her life everyday with thankfulness and joy. She often told me she didn't want to live to her 91st. Mama's comment was odd, until I realized she was in pain and bed bound.

In my thoughts today, we had a conversation that went like this—

“Hi Mama, you'd be 91 today. I know you don't need birthdays in Heaven, but it was fun to celebrate them on earth.”

“Why would I want to be 91?” She tipped her head and scrunched up her nose. “I wondered what my purpose was, just sitting around in that bed.”

“Your purpose was to give wisdom and counsel to your family. We needed your love and acceptance. You were a shining light for us.”

Mama giggled. “If you say so. I know myself better.”

“One thing you would've loved to see, Mama— your ninth great-grandchild was born a few days

ago. She's beautiful. I can imagine your smile, and hear you say that she looks just like her daddy when he was a newborn. I agree with you, Mama."

The sun glimmered and the birds chirped among the trees releasing their leaves. I waited. The leaves tripped after themselves along the sidewalk with the breeze. I waited.

"Well, give Daddy a hug for me, Mama. Happy birthday."



## Watch for Me, Mama

Yesterday, was one year since I said goodbye to you, Mama. I wanted to write about our goodbye and decided I didn't have the words. I understood your struggle better with Alzheimer's.

But I thought of you all day. Thought of what I should write about you. Thought of your kind and gentle ways. Thought of how to do your memory justice and decided I couldn't.

Today, I will attempt it again. You'd be embarrassed to know I'm sharing you on the internet with strangers—that I do know. But you are worth it, Mama.

If only everyone could be like you. If only everyone had a mother like you. If only you could have adopted those that I loved who were abused or neglected. If only, Mama, and they would've learned their value and enjoyed terrific self-esteem. If only they had you as their own.

When you left us, I waited for you to take another breath—you didn't. I studied your peaceful face, and thought, is this it? Is that all?

You labored with my birth, and I was privileged to nurse you at your death. I felt your joy at being freed from frailness and struggles with your memory. I suspected you took every ounce of love you ever gave or was given you to Heaven, and more love greeted you in that place.

We wanted to celebrate your freedom, although I believed I should cry at the loss of you. So, I kissed your cheek, and touched your hair. My husband took your hairbrush and straightened your wisps. I said, "Goodbye, Mama. I'll join you one day. Please, watch for me."





To all caregivers and lovers of their parents, while the daily tasks overwhelm, and grouchiness overtakes you or them, cherish the golden nuggets of their dwindling time with you.

My mama was an absolute delight and easy to care for with her joyful and positive personality. Her faith in God, her Savior, carried her through the darkest times.

Not every caregiver has my same experience, I understand, but God grants us similar assignments when we say yes to the tasks.

One day, someone will take care of us. As I age, I've gained more insight into Mama's viewpoint. I think I'm slower and more frail. I don't wish to burden others, and worry about how younger people view me.

Remember the hourglass, and how time isn't something we control? What we control is how we treat others, especially our loved-ones, and what we do with our time with them.

Compiled By E.V. Sparrow, blog posts on

<https://sparrow.world>

July 29, 2022

