

*Now that my siblings and I have given you a glimpse of the way Mama and Daddy were, it's my turn to tell you more about the way they are. Here goes...*

## **CAREGIVING 101**

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I'm still trying to figure out how I went from being a legal secretary one day to a full time caregiver for my parents the next day. Never in a gazillion years would I have guessed that this would be my reason for taking an early retirement. Instead of rising early to start work at 9:00 a.m. (and those of you who worked with me know that I really got started sometime around 9:15), I now rise early to brew a mug of hot coffee for Daddy and make a cup of herbal tea for Mama. Whereas my morning treat used to be a delicious homestyle burrito from the food truck on Grand Avenue, I now have the pleasure of treating Mama and Daddy to a hearty country breakfast.

Prior to becoming my parents' caregiver, I only knew one person who had been a full-time caregiver for another family member. Little did I know that was the future that lay up ahead for me. Therefore, I had to learn as I went along.

In 2002 I began to help my brother Eric take care of our parents when his travel schedule increased. Gradually, both Mama and Daddy required more and more help. By the time I put in a day's work at the office and arrived to help Mama and Daddy, it was well past 6 p.m. I would try to have their dinner ready before JEOPARDY came on but they usually started eating about halfway through WHEEL OF FORTUNE. After washing the dinner dishes, I was too exhausted to "help" with much more. Sometimes I wouldn't even stick around to do dishes. I would use paper plates and leave as soon as they started eating. Most days I could not even close the lid on the clothes hamper. Needless to say, I was losing my mind. After three months, I knew something needed to change.

It is not my intention to disrespect anyone who is a professional caregiver with my next statement - but we all have heard and seen horror stories about those who have been abused by caregivers. (It's so sad that some folks have no conscience and will do anything for a dollar, and in doing so, tarnish the reputation of their profession.) I knew my parents would not be comfortable with a stranger coming into their home. I weighed my options: I could do a stretch of 25-to-life for murder because someone mistreated my parents, or, I could leave my job - and the benefits associated with it - and take care of them myself. Since I don't like wearing the same clothes every day and living in a 4x6 cell, it made sense for me to become my parents' full-time caregiver.