

# Agingcare.com<sup>®</sup>

Connecting Caregivers

## Amy Grant

### ON CARING FOR HER PARENTS WITH DEMENTIA

#### INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

*"An hour from now, I may not remember writing this..."*

**5** Key Factors when Searching for SENIOR HOUSING

CLEARING *Up* CATARACTS

Symptoms and Surgical Options



**LOOK INSIDE**

on how to get your **FREE** copy of the caregiver's survival guide (page 15)

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ERIK KELLAR

## Caregiver's CORNER

*Joe's mom Rita Deaton, Joe Buckheit and Joe's mother-in-law Chris Barnett.*

**G**rowing up, my grandparents were very present in my life. In fact, my earliest memories are of sharing a multifamily home with my grandparents.

A babysitter, a home-cooked meal and a few quarters for the candy store were always available, right next door. Even today, Sunday dinners are still multigenerational, with my own children now joining the table.

Living in the same community as my parents and grandparents—as well as my wife's parents and grandparents—has been a blessing. The experiences and stories that are shared with my children around the dinner table are priceless. But, aging has taken

its toll on my family, and, with the passing of time, those conversations have changed.

At a 2008 family gathering, a discussion between my mother and mother-in-law led to the mutual revelation that they were transitioning into caregiving roles for their parents.

It was clear to both women that their respective situations would become more stressful as their parents' health deteriorated. Each of them lamented that, as their parents became more and more dependent on them for care, they, as the primary caregivers, were increasingly in need of answers and support. For both my mother and my

mother-in-law, sharing their experiences with each other was not only informative, but also very comforting.

It is from this casual exchange that AgingCare.com was born.

The Internet had resources for caregivers, but was missing a meeting place where caregivers could go to gain knowledge, comfort and strength by connecting with others who were sharing similar experiences.

A member of AgingCare.com's community of caregivers recently sent me this note of thanks:

"AgingCare.com is a wonderful site to vent, to learn and to share! It constantly reminds me that I am doing the best that I can and that I have made the right decisions for my dad."

Making a real connection with other caregivers can be a very powerful support tool—it certainly was for my family. I am proud that AgingCare.com can serve as the path to that strength for so many caregivers, and I am excited that we are now also able to connect with you through the AgingCare.com magazine.

*Sincerely,*

**Joe Buckheit**  
*CEO and Founder,*  
[AgingCare.com](http://AgingCare.com)

**“FOR BOTH MY MOTHER AND MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH EACH OTHER WAS NOT ONLY INFORMATIVE, BUT ALSO VERY COMFORTING.”**



# Searching for

## Consider these 5 key factors first

The term “senior living” encompasses many different senior care and housing options, including assisted living, independent living, nursing homes and Alzheimer’s care. With the myriad of senior housing options available, knowing what questions to ask and what to look for will enhance your experience.

**M**arlis Powers had been avoiding the dreaded drive—the one that would take her and her husband, Charlie, to visit a local assisted living facility—for months.

The couple wasn’t visiting an aging friend or family member, but conducting a reconnaissance mission—scoping out the facility to see whether it would be a viable living option for them in the future.

A series of strokes has left Charlie with ever-declining cognitive capacities, while Marlis, a cancer survivor who recently had knee replacement surgery, gamely endeavors to look after him. The pair faces a two-pronged dilemma that plagues many aging couples:

“Charlie is thinking that it’s time for us to consider such a move. I’m not so sure, at least not for me—yet,” says Marlis. “But, we are a couple, and how do you justify one going one way and one the other if it can be avoided?”

The facility Marlis and Charlie visited cost \$10,000 per month; \$12,000 for memory care, with an expected rate increase of around three percent per year. Given the high level of financial investment involved in committing to an assisted living facility, it is vital to know what to look for and what kinds of questions to ask.

### CONSIDER THESE FIVE KEY FACTORS:

- 1 CAREGIVERS:** Staff that has been well-vetted (background checks) and trained to deal with your loved one’s specific care needs.
- 2 SAFETY:** A finely-tuned emergency plan, complete with multiple evacuation procedures. Safety locks on doors and windows. Fire and security alarms that are visible and well-maintained.
- 3 FOOD:** A variety of food options that cater to different dietary needs. An on-staff dietician that can tweak an adult’s eating plan to accommodate changes in health.
- 4 ACTIVITIES:** A range of recreational and social activities—exercise classes, games, outings to local places and events, educational courses, etc. An outdoor area with easy-to-travel paths.
- 5 PRICING:** A transparent pricing system that outlines what each service and amenity costs, and what kinds of financing options are accepted.

Finding the right senior housing fit is difficult, regardless of whether you’re an adult child caring for a parent, a spouse looking after an ailing partner, or a sibling taking care of an aging brother or sister.

Know what your loved one wants and needs out of a senior living situation before starting your search. Price, level of care provided and proximity to other family often top the list of considerations.

The number one piece of advice given to newbies by veteran caregivers is: talk to the residents. Many residents are more than willing to share their experiences, and their assessments of the facility may be less biased than the pitch offered by the staff members responsible for giving the tours.

Marlis and Charlie aren’t yet ready to make their move—her biggest fear is that they will run out of money. “I think Charlie and I will be marching in place for as long as possible.” ✨

➔ Marlis shares her wit and wisdom with her fellow caregivers as a regular blogger on [AgingCare.com](#).

# Senior Housing?



## Caregiver to Caregiver: THE SEARCH FOR SENIOR LIVING

Millions of family caregivers find comfort and counsel from each other on the [AgingCare.com](http://AgingCare.com) Caregiver Forum. Here are some highlights from their conversations on searching for senior housing:

“My biggest fear was that mom and dad’s needs would be met by people who only did their jobs because they were paid to do them. But they are tended to several times a day by people who seem to honestly care about them. You should try to find a place like that.”

“Watch how the staff relates to the residents. Look for residents that look (or smell) dirty.”

“Examine the staff-to-resident ratio. Assisted living residents often don’t get the care they need and deserve because the staff is too busy.”

“Keep your eyes and ears open while visiting. One place we looked at had peeling paint and bad carpets. I remember thinking, ‘What are they spending all their money on?’ But it turned out that the residents wouldn’t stop raving about the food. Apparently they were spending less on upkeep and more on the menu. It’s important to sit and visit with the people living there and hear what they have to say.”

“Find a place that offers multiple care levels, even if your loved one doesn’t need them yet. That way you won’t have to move them if their condition worsens and they require extra care.”

“There is a big difference in the quality of assisted living places. My suggestion is to pick a facility close by so you can visit your family member often and check on their care.”

### Start Your Search Today

Get free information on housing services and costs. Call now and speak with a senior living advisor.

**866-344-4997**

# C LEA RING UP CATARACTS:



## SYMPTOMS AND SURGICAL OPTIONS

CATARACTS ARE THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF REVERSIBLE BLINDNESS IN THE WORLD,  
ACCOUNTING FOR AN ESTIMATED 22.5 MILLION BLIND INDIVIDUALS.

*By Richard Gans, M.D., FACS*  
Ophthalmologist, Cleveland Clinic Cole Eye Institute

A cataract is the progressive loss of clarity in the area of our eyes (called the lens) that focuses what we see. To someone with cataracts, the world appears cloudy, almost as though they are looking through a foggy window. As the lens loses its clearness, a person will begin to have difficulty doing things that require sharper vision, such as reading a book or driving a car.

The risk of developing a cataract does increase with age, but there are numerous other factors that influence the eye condition's rate of progression. Some external elements that can hasten cataract development include: smoking, UV light exposure, diabetes, previous trauma, previous eye surgery, radiation and family history.

## PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Currently, there is no prescription or medical treatment that can prevent or slow the development of cataracts. However, certain lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation and avoiding UV light exposure, can lessen the impact of those particular risk factors.

If a person develops severe cataracts that reduce their vision to the point where they can no longer perform day-to-day tasks—and if removing the cataracts has a reasonable chance of allowing that individual to regain the ability to function normally—then cataract surgery may be performed.

## A SIMPLE SURGICAL SOLUTION

Restoring a person's visual function by removing cataracts is associated with improved quality of life, decreased risk of falling, fewer hip fractures and fewer driver-fault motor vehicle accidents.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately three million cataract operations are performed each year in the United States. The outpatient surgery is brief and performed in a sterile operating room.

During the procedure, the cloudy cataractous lens is removed and replaced with an artificial lens. Standard lens implants come in a variety of powers and designs, and can be selected to correct nearsightedness or farsightedness. Premium lens implants can also alleviate astigmatism, or provide both distance and near vision.

The newest adjunct to cataract surgery involves the use of a computer-guided laser—the femtosecond laser—which corrects astigmatism and performs elements of the cataract operation with computer precision.

Although the femtosecond laser has only been approved for use in cataract surgery in the United States for two years, it has already been shown to have distinct advantages over conventional surgery, in some situations.

There is no particularly critical point in time when a cataract must be removed. The appropriate point at which to eliminate a cataract will be determined by consulting with a doctor and should be based on the patient's complaint, perception of their visual function and impact on their activities of daily living. 



## CATARACT CONCERNS

Cataract surgery is a common topic on the AgingCare.com Caregiver Forum.

### *How can I convince my mom to get cataract surgery?*

"I would have others who've had it talk to her."  
"The surgery is easy and not painful, but there can be consequences if the eyes are already fragile."

### *Has anyone had an older relative have cataract surgery?*

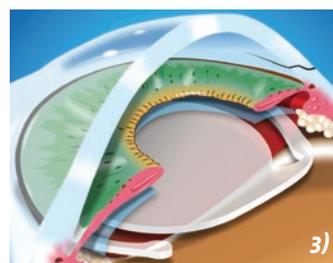
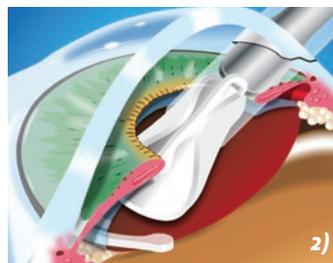
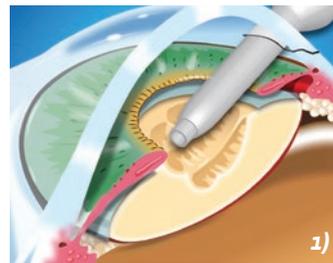
"My father in law had it done at 98 and it was the best thing. The procedure was so simple."

"Since they don't use a general anesthetic for cataract surgery, they should be okay if they're healthy. There are always some risks, but there are risks to not having cataracts removed too."

### *Should I make my mom have cataract surgery?*

"Your first question should be whether she could tolerate the procedure, then how bad is her vision now, and how much better could it be if she gets it."

Join an online community of millions of men and women facing the challenges of caring for an elderly loved one. Visit [AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum](http://AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum) to exchange insights and receive support from your fellow family caregivers.



- 1) Natural lens damaged by cataracts is broken up.
- 2) Damaged lens is removed.
- 3) Artificial lens is implanted to replace the damaged lens.



# Amy Grant

**STRENGTHENS  
FAITH,  
CONFRONTS  
FEAR AS  
*Family  
Care  
Giver***

One ordinary school night, a 16-year-old Amy Grant was in her room, putting the finishing touches on her first original song, which she would later sing for the first time in front of an audience of one—her mother, Gloria.

“I PICKED HER because she was always there for me—she made me feel comfortable,” Amy recalls.

But a few decades later, the same woman who put Amy so at ease would no longer remember that her daughter sang at all, let alone recall the details of a storied career that encompassed six Grammy wins, multiple platinum-selling albums and the title of best-selling contemporary Christian music performer in history.

It was during a visit home in 2008 that Amy first recognized things weren’t quite right with her parents.

Gloria was exhibiting extreme confusion, which would later reveal itself to be a symptom of Lewy Body dementia, while Amy’s father, Burton, was making uncharacteristically bad financial decisions.

The singer cancelled her 2009 plans to help her father and three sisters—Carol, Mimi and Cathy—take care of Gloria. Two years later, once she had resumed performing, Amy and her mother had an especially profound exchange.

Amy was saying goodbye to her parents before embarking on a tour when her mother asked where she was going. When she heard her daughter was leaving to perform, Gloria replied with a simple, heart-wrenching question: “Oh, you sing?”

The memories of all the songs she’d played for her mother over the years coursing through her mind, Amy responded: “Yes ma’am, I do.”

“Would you sing something for me?”

Amy lifted her voice, singing “Revive Us Again,” a hymn beloved

with—we’ve always felt compelled to tell stories, or find a story in something. What you’re really hoping for from a song is that someone is going to feel moved by it. You don’t have to make up much when you’re writing—there’s so much inspiration in life.”

### CONQUERING CAREGIVING’S GREAT WHITE ELEPHANT

Faith and family keep Amy and her sisters together as they continue to look after their father, whose dementia has rapidly worsened in the wake of his wife’s death.

Burton took the financial burden off his daughters by purchasing long term care insurance years ago. They can hire in-home caregivers to help out with day-to-day tasks, but

prayed a lot. We let our guards down, and we tried to be respectful and caring, not just to our parents, but to each other as well.”

Share your experiences with others—that’s Amy’s main message to family caregivers in search of support. “There are always going to be things we’re afraid of. Sometimes we need to have someone tell us not to be afraid—we’re going to handle it together. Our family made it a point to talk through these situations ahead of time, we didn’t just wait for the white elephant to appear.”

## Share YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS— THAT’S AMY’S MAIN MESSAGE TO FAMILY CAREGIVERS IN SEARCH OF SUPPORT.

by Gloria. The older woman couldn’t remember the song, but she enjoyed Amy’s singing and asked to come with her. When Gloria realized she couldn’t accompany her daughter, she offered one simple directive: “When you get on that stage, sing something that matters.”

Gloria died two months later, in April of 2011.

Amy’s recent album, “How Mercy Looks From Here,” is dedicated to the mother who continued to guide her, despite dementia. “At some point in life you realize that some things really matter and some things don’t. Living matters. Celebrating life matters. Seeing the value in hard times matters. Relationships and people matter. Faith matters.”

Like her songs, Amy’s insights echo the unexpressed emotions of millions of men and women on caregiving journeys. “I think it goes back to why people become songwriters to begin



Above: Amy performing “Tennessee Christmas” on the Katie Couric Show. Left: Amy with her parents, Burton and Gloria Grant.

nothing can alleviate the emotional pain of watching a loved one in the throes of dementia. “It goes in cycles,” says Amy. “My sisters and I have each done some of the dirty work.”

Caregiving challenges have caused both conflict and growth in Amy’s family. “In the beginning, my sisters and I were a therapist’s dream—the important thing was that we didn’t walk away from each other. We

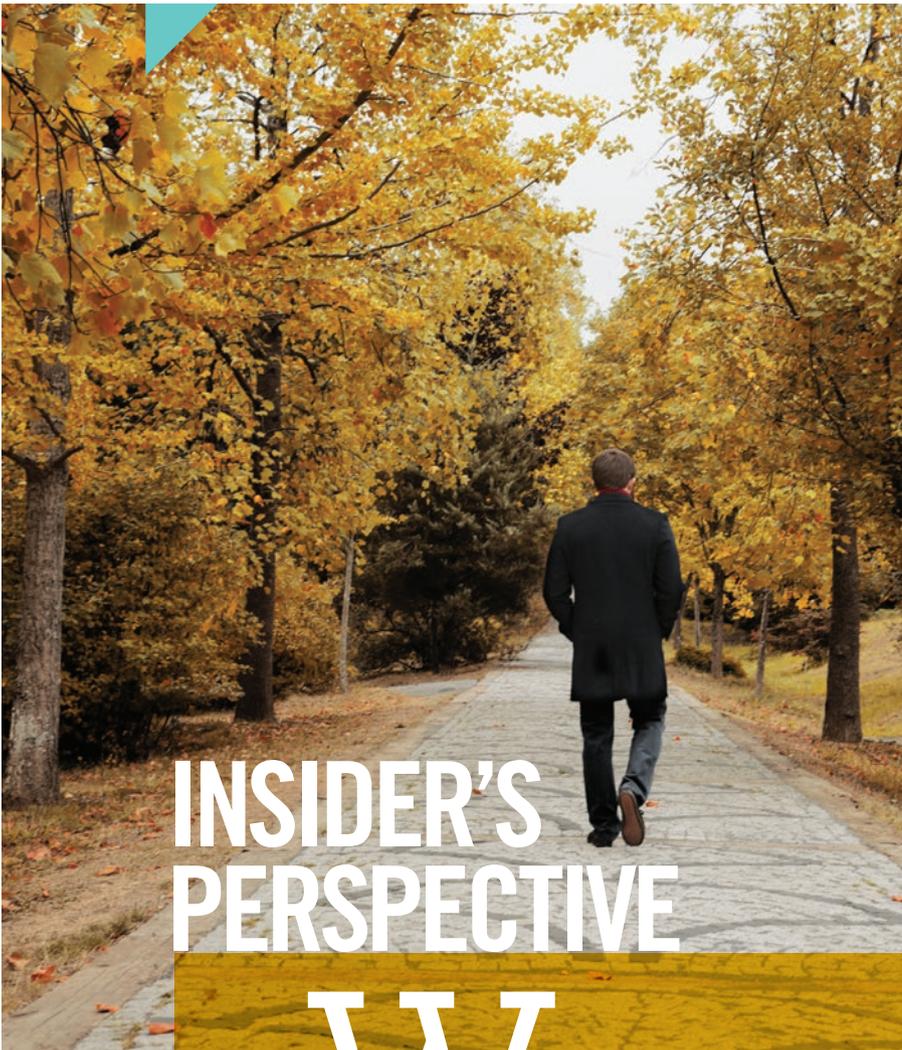
Communication and creativity are the two tools Amy brings to the caregiving table. “We’ve come a long way. Because of this whole process, we’ve left pettiness in the dust. I guess that’s my take on all of the craziness that surrounds dementia and dying. There’s so much to be gained by sharing things with other people who are as invested in caregiving as you are.”



PHOTO: DISNEY-ABC



## Blogger's JOURNEY



# INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

# W

hat can I do?

That's the question everyone has about their loved one: What can I do?

### What is the One Thing Every Caregiver Can Do to Help Their Loved One?

By Rick Phelps

With dementia, everything changes all the time. What works today may not tomorrow—or ever again. This only adds to the stress of a caregiver.

I think the most important thing to remember is how your loved one was, not how they are now. Chances are, they belonged to the generation that was a proud, patriotic and private generation. Hardly ever complaining. Used to doing things themselves. Hate asking anyone for help and certainly didn't want to be a burden on anyone. But, all of this goes out the window when you reach the mid-to-late stages of this disease.

As an emergency responder, I used to make life and death decisions, sometimes in seconds. Now I stand in front of my sock drawer for minutes, thinking: "Which pair?" I cannot stress enough how everything changes with this disease.

Most family members and caregivers see this change, yet treat their loved one as things once were. It's natural. But, in the end, it won't work. So the answer to "What can I do?" is always: nothing.

Nothing—meaning you can be there for them, you can assist them with daily things, you can be their caregiver, but you can't change what is happening. Try to learn all you can about what is happening to them, but understand that you can't fix it. As bad as things are today, today may very well be the best day they ever have again.

I myself have had to come to grips with this disease. Long ago, I made peace with what is happening, and what is going to happen. That doesn't mean I like it, or that I don't long for some drug that could make my life more manageable. I wake up every morning and go to bed every night knowing what is going on inside my mind.

That realization, I believe, is the hardest part: losing your mind and knowing it is happening.

As patients, we try hard to keep our feelings in check. As caregivers, you

## MORE BLOGGERS SHARE THEIR *personal stories*



**MICHELE**



**CONNIE**



**JOHN**



**MARLIS**



**COY**



RICK IS PART of a cast of insightful bloggers who share their experiences on AgingCare.com. Touching on everything from what it's like to live with Parkinson's disease, to the plight of young children who are caregivers, to taking care of a husband with dementia, these men and women come at the issues of caregiving from a variety of unique perspectives:

**MICHELE**, who knows that Alzheimer's can't steal love, even as she cares for her mother, Jean, who is in the late stages of the disease.

**CONNIE**, whose childhood experiences of looking after her grandfather inspired her to help school-

aged children who suddenly find themselves taking care of an aging loved one.

**JOHN**, who blogs about aging, exercise, diets, pills, supplements and his life with Parkinson's disease and prostate cancer.

**MARLIS**, who injects love and humor into the caregiving situation as she looks after Charlie, her dementia-stricken husband.

**COY**, whose journey with his wife, Carol, as she battled cancer for years, tested his faith and helped him discover what being a male caregiver truly means.

See their sagas unfold at [AgingCare.com/Blog](http://AgingCare.com/Blog).

try hard not to look at a loss. Both of us are kidding each other. All we have, in the end, is each other.

I don't like what is happening, but I have learned to cope with it. An hour from now, I may not be able to say that because, an hour from now, I will not remember writing this. That's what can't be fixed.

Live in the moment. Don't worry about what tomorrow or next week will bring. For me, there is no tomorrow. There is only right now. My yesterdays have long been gone. One day at a time. Sometimes one hour at a time. It's all we can do. ✨



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

*Rick Phelps became an advocate for dementia awareness after being*

*diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer's Disease in June of 2010, at the age of 57. He blogs about his day-to-day experiences in order to educate caregivers and patients alike on the realities of life with Alzheimer's.*

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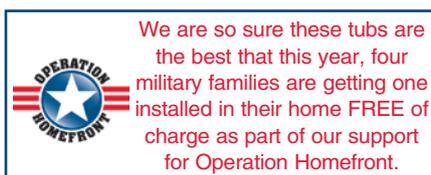
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The Caregiver Forum on AgingCare.com is where you'll find answers to your questions, one-on-one support and practical information. More importantly, you'll join a community of millions of men and women who are also on a caregiving journey—all sharing the experiences, insights, frustrations and hidden joys of caring for elderly family members.

### INCONTINENCE

Incontinence is a distressing and isolating condition. It crosses all age groups and can have a major impact on social and work-related aspects of life. Because it is a topic that many people find hard to talk about, the following questions and answers have been provided by AgingCare.com's community of caregivers.

#### Q: Is incontinence curable?

**A:** It depends on the cause. The best approach would be to consult a doctor about the issue. If it's treatable, hooray...if it's not, learn to deal with it with dignity.

#### Q: How do I get my mom to wear adult diapers?

**A:** First, don't call them diapers in front of her. They are "disposable undies" or "special undies."

**A:** Remove all of her regular underwear from the drawer and replace them with adult diapers.

#### Q: Why does dad wait until the last minute to go to the bathroom? How can I make him stop?

**A:** Develop a bathroom schedule. I set a timer to alert me every two hours, then hide it so dad can't turn it off.

**A:** Remember that he isn't purposefully waiting until the last minute—his brain isn't telling him he needs to go

until the last minute. Acknowledging that can help preserve his dignity.

#### Q: How do you handle nighttime bedwetting?

**A:** Adult diapers help, even if they don't need them during the day. A toileting schedule could also work.

#### Q: Is there a medication to help incontinence?

**A:** I don't think there is anything for true incontinence. But I do see drugs advertised for an "overactive bladder."

### EMOTIONAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES

Caring for an aging loved one can bring up a host of emotional and relationship challenges for family members, depending on how involved they are with day-to-day caregiving. Here are a few of the most common questions and answers regarding these issues from AgingCare.com's community of caregivers.

#### Q: How do I get over the guilt of placing Mom in a nursing home?

**A:** Nothing completely takes the guilty feeling away. But, I do believe that the best thing to do is to remind ourselves that we're all just doing the best we can.

**A:** You're not alone. Maybe the guilt is there to help us weigh pros and cons.

We are imperfect human beings trying to make perfect decisions in an imperfect world.

**A:** Think about it this way, now your relationship with her can be more about spending quality time together, and not about the stress and worry of day-to-day caregiving.

#### Q: How do I get "Me" back while caring for dad?

**A:** I don't know of any way to take back life, except an hour at a time. I think one of the most important words that caregivers can learn is "No." Your own plans and your own life should not always have to take a back seat to his.

**A:** Look for some outside help—respite care from professional caregivers, perhaps. Your Dad might resist it at first, but you aren't responsible for his feelings, you're responsible for his care.

#### Q: Can you ever be happy while caregiving?

**A:** Happiness is certainly possible for a caregiver...maybe not as an overall state of mind, but in dribs and drabs and bursts. How could I be happy that my beloved husband was declining in front of my eyes? But, we had many happy moments together in the 10 years I cared for him.

**A:** My knee-jerk response to this question is: "Of course you can!" But, it's not quite that simple. I think that you can be as happy as a caregiver as you can be as a person.

**A:** Everyone wants to be happy, I think. Some of us have more upbeat personalities than others and see the glass as half full, instead of half empty. But, happiness can seem elusive when dealing with chronic health problems all the time—most days you wake up expecting the worst.

**A:** Being a caregiver is stressful and I find I often have to look for or create my own personal pockets of peace. I can't hold my breath waiting for this to end; I have to live in the now.

**Q:** *How do I handle it when my sister criticizes me for how I take care of Mom?*

**A:** The Algonquin's said, "Never judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins." So send your sister a pair and invite her to sit in your teepee for two months. Only then will her comments mean anything.

**A:** Is she really criticizing you, or is she expressing concern for your welfare? Is she feeling inadequate that she couldn't take care of Mom and so it would make her feel better to think that you can't either? If you can figure out where she is coming from on this topic, then that could guide how you

respond to her.

**Q:** *How do I tell Dad he can't live with us anymore?*

**A:** This is a tough one, but if your marriage or other family relationships are at stake, it's probably a good call. Just keep in mind, you can explain the logic of the decision until you're blue in the face, you can write it down and pin it to the wall, you can take out a full-page advertisement or hire a skywriter to write, "We don't hate you, we just haven't got the space or the skills to care for you anymore," and your Dad still may not believe you. It'll be okay, just tell the truth.

**Q:** *Mom has Alzheimer's and she gets angry and lashes out at my wife. What can I do?*

**A:** Your wife deserves to be treated better and it is time for your Mom to live elsewhere. Her behavior will take

a toll on your marriage—if it hasn't already.

**A:** Since you're being driven to choose, you have to put your wife first. You can provide loving care for your Mom without necessarily living with her—the same doesn't apply to your wife. Make sure your wife knows the situation is not her fault and that you're not blaming her.

**A:** You have to place your Mom now—the guilt you will feel is self-imposed. My family and I went through the same thing two years ago and all our lives have improved since Mom went to assisted living. ✨

➔ For more information on these and other caregiving topics, visit [AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum](http://AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum).

## Help a Caregiver and Keep a Patient at Home

The SafePresence® 200 is a two-way voice communication system that also helps with wandering and fall prevention.

The base station works with either an open or push-to-talk mic at the bedside and a handheld remote for the caregiver. A sensor pad under the sheets initiates an alert when the user leaves a bed or chair.

Our users say they "could not do without it." The SafePresence® 200 lets you know you are needed when you are not at the bedside. It reduces hovering and worry. It is added peace of mind.

Caregiver well being is essential to keep a family member in his or her home.

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**\$159.95**  
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# Meet Alice.

## *She's a Caregiver.*

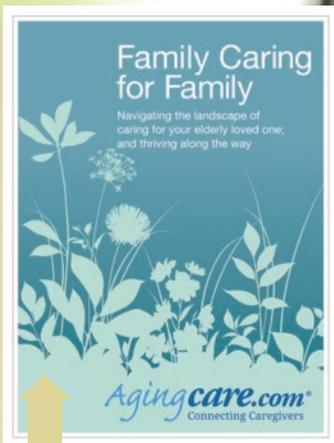
I've been a high school teacher for 28 years now. But for the last year I've been the primary caregiver for my mom. It's been challenging, but also very rewarding. When I think of all that mom did for me, I am grateful to give back to her.

When she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, I searched online for all of the information I could find and discovered [AgingCare.com](http://AgingCare.com). The support I receive there is priceless. I have met some wonderful, caring people to talk with and share common experiences.

The role reversal from daughter to caregiver has not been easy, but hearing that others are having similar challenges is comforting. There's a lot of information out there on caregiving and Alzheimer's, but the real-life tips I get from caregivers in this on-line community have been real life-savers.

Hope to connect with you on [AgingCare.com](http://AgingCare.com).

Take Care,  
Alice



**A FREE GIFT FOR YOU!**  
Download your Caregivers' Guide  
at [AgingCare.com/FreeGuide](http://AgingCare.com/FreeGuide)

This 60-page Caregiver Survival Guide will help you:

- Communicate with family
- Navigate the healthcare system
- Understand senior housing and care options
- Care for yourself while caring for others

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