

How a Manic-Depressive Artist Survives Being the Primary
Caregiver for Her Father & Ex-Mother-in-Law: A Memoir.

THE BIPOLAR DEMENTIA ART CHRONICLES: How a
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THE BIPOLAR DEMENTIA ART CHRONICLES

**How a Manic-Depressive
Artist Survives Being the
Primary Caregiver for her
Father and Ex-mother-in-law**

A Memoir

CHAPTER 1:

We All Move to Ithaca, New York

I called my Dad one day in April of 2000 to ask him how he was doing, and he answered, "Fair." He didn't say "good" much any more, unless Jackie or the floozy was with him. The floozy was a thirty-something drug addict/hooker Dad let live in the spare room of his house in Melbourne, Florida. Jackie was a dependable woman in her fifties we paid to help out a couple hours a day. The floozy drove Jackie nuts. "I'm not buying your father any more beer," she would say, "so that floozy can drink it. And I'm not cleaning her room, either."

Dad was 92 with a failing short term memory, but he loved his independence and his daily routine in Melbourne. He'd have breakfast at his kitchen table looking out through the sliding glass doors at the birds and squirrels eating out of his back-yard bird feeder. Then he'd take the six-block hike to his low-brow bar to hang out drinking beer, getting into the occasional game of pool or darts. That's where he met the floozy.

Dad would hike back home from the bar in the hottest part of the day, and he'd be ready for a nap after that. A little solitaire, watching thunderstorms from the safety of his screened-in front porch, sitting in the back yard on cooler days – these were Dad's routines. Then, when he felt a thirst for beer or society, he'd head back to the bar where everyone

greeted him as "Mr. Bill" and made a place for him to sit.

Dad had been living alone for three years since Mom died, and we six children were worried about him. But when we asked, he always said he was happy with his life and that he didn't want to live anywhere else, so we meddled as little as possible. Hiring Jackie to take care of the house and feed him at least one good meal a day was about all we'd managed to accomplish.

The night before I called Dad I'd had a nightmare in which he was hit by a car and died. I was yelling over and over that I should have visited him more.

Adrian and I had just moved to Ithaca, a college town in the finger lakes region of up-state New York. For the five previous years we lived in the little town of Morehead, population 8,000, in eastern Kentucky. I taught creative writing in a tenure-track job at the State University while Adrian enjoyed taking free classes, playing tennis with his Physics professor and meeting up with a friend at the Fuzzy Duck coffee shop for games of chess. It was the kind of town where you always ran into people you knew at the supermarket and video store. Life was cozy and I even got tenure, which most people would take as a signal to stay put. I took it as the siren call to move on. Five years was the longest I'd stayed at any one job in my life.

When things stayed the same I got bored, and then I got down. A new job, a new town, a new house – these offered promise and a challenge – something to pump my adrenalin, push me into high gear. I always gave the new project my all, and the manic energy generated allowed me to accomplish amazing things.

It was staying power I lacked, and that's why I had never stuck with the one thing I wanted to do most of

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all – art. As far back as I can remember, I loved to play with paper, chalk, paint, glue, ink – whatever I could get my hands on to make marks, build shapes, create color, line and form.

I never abandoned my art completely, but I never gave it center stage for very long, either. There were always excuses like “I need to make a living” which made me put the art in second place, part-time, when I could get around to it. That was OK because I always knew that one day I’d be doing it full-time and that day would come soon.

Before I knew it I had spent considerable time as a student at six different universities, had half-a-dozen careers under my belt and was 54 years old with a new PhD in creative writing. The gig at Morehead State was perfect for the first two or three years, and I had time to paint as well.

Painting was easy then and fun. It was my escape from the drudgery of reading student manuscripts, preparing for classes, and attending endless academic meetings. I put the best of me into my art.

After the third year at Morehead, I got itchy to get out, as I always did. You can’t just say you want to quit your job and move on without a good reason, though, so I’ve always come up with one each time. Usually it was a combination of finding fault with the place we were in plus a benefit on the horizon. “No one wants to be our friend and the university administration sucks,” I told Adrian. The benefit this time was a calculation that we could afford to retire so I’d be able to paint full time. Adrian was fifteen years older than I was and had been retired since I’d met him practically, but I had been working on and off to hold up my end.

It took us two more years to finally get out of Morehead. We chose to come to Ithaca because it was near my daughter Blixty and her family, and we thought we could afford to live here. We made a minor miscalculation in that. Even though both houses were the same price, the one in Kentucky was 4 years old when we bought it. The one in Ithaca was 17 years old – just about ready for some major repairs. In addition, Kentucky taxes and utilities were low, New York state just the opposite.

It was raining the day we moved to Ithaca and it continued to rain day after day after day. We spent our time unpacking, buying stuff for the house, getting my studio and office set up. The house had a two-bedroom apartment on the lower level which would be my art studio. The ceilings were a little low, but there were lots of windows and a separate entry-way. We were having extra lights put up and a ventilation system installed to suck up the fumes from the acrylic paint. The apartment's living room would be my studio, and the largest bedroom, my office. The kitchen cabinets would hold paint and other supplies. It wasn't my idea of the perfect art studio, but it would work.

The unfinished section of the basement was a disaster – dark and damp with a sump pump in one corner, a single bare bulb for light, and cobwebs hanging from the rafters. We hired a contractor to put up fluorescent lights and install a drop ceiling. That's the only way I could even consider setting foot in it. Adrian picked up some indoor-outdoor carpeting for the floor, which would make that space good for building canvasses.

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My sister Laura called and told me Dad had had a couple of bad days. She said he was worried about his foot, but that Jackie was taking care of him. Dad had been sitting in the back yard with bare feet one day and was attacked by red ants. He didn't feel the stings soon enough to stop them from biting him, and then when he ignored the wound, it became infected.

I spent a whole morning trying to get my computer modem connection working, unsuccessfully. Then Blixxy called and asked me to come to lunch and shopping with her. I bought children's car seats, a booster seat, potty chair, and other stuff for the kids. Back at the house I made supper for them. While we colored Easter eggs with four-year-old Michael, one-year-old Rachel was constantly into trouble, getting at everything that wasn't locked down.

As they left, Adrian said, "Your life will never be the same again."

That was OK with me. I had struggled as a working, single mother for most of Blixxy's childhood, and was too distracted to fully enjoy her. When she gave birth to Michael, I was amazed at how quickly I became attached to him. Now I can "just sit" with a child in my arms and be content. And of course, I get to give them back to their Mom at the end of the day.

I spent a whole day working on the computer and still couldn't get it to work. When I complained to Adrian that I was depressed because of the computer and a spider in the basement that kept me from opening a box of paintings, he said, "You got what you wanted."

"Are you going to memorize that line and bring it up to me each time I complain about something?"

"Yes."

A couple days later the sun finally came out. I went to Staples and bought Windows 98 and installed it, and the computer worked fine.

Before Rachel's next visit, I went through the house collecting all the fancy vases and knick-knacks and putting them away on the highest shelves. I cleared out the bottom shelves of a bookcase to put the toys Blixy had brought over from her house. I wanted the kids to feel welcome and comfortable, and the house to be safe from Rachel's onslaught.

April 27 was Dad's birthday and I felt guilty that I wasn't with him. Luckily one of my nephews was going to be in the area on business and would take Dad out to dinner.

Adrian complained about the local gym he had just joined. He compared it to the wellness center in Morehead where everyone smiled or said hello when they saw you. "Here people act as if they don't see each other," he said. Adrian missed Morehead much more than I did because he had a life there. He went places and saw people and did things. I am a hermit so it's irrelevant where I live.

I picked up Rachel and Mike at daycare for the first time. Mike was glad to see me, but Rachel acted like I was kidnapping her. She screamed when I picked her up and didn't stop for the whole twenty-minute ride home. Then when we got here she screamed some more. I finally stuck her in her booster seat at the table and gave her some juice and food. After she calmed down, she played with Mike and me in the living room.

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At the beginning of May we went to an art opening downtown, a solo show of large colorful abstract paintings by a local artist. I felt a strong connection because my own work is large, colorful, and abstract. It also felt great just to get out of the house and do something.

We came home pooped, ate tacos and watched *Out of Africa*. The strongest impression I was left with from the movie was that Masai sense of living in the moment—a state I aspire to but have little experience with.

Laura and I finalized our plans to meet in Melbourne for Father's Day. Laura and I were very close, but had not been when we were young. I had much more in common with my sister Mary who was into art and poetry and anti-establishment behavior, like me. We were the social misfits. Laura, on the other hand, always looked good, dressed well, and had money in her pocket.

I got a lot closer to Laura after she split with her first husband, Victor, who used to call our family "The Taetzsch-billies." Laura and I lived in the same apartment complex in New Jersey for a couple of years in the 70s. I was a single parent and Laura was like a second mother to Blix. So it would be great to spend a sisters' weekend in Melbourne and see Dad at the same time.

Dad wasn't the only old person I was worried about. My ex-mother-in-law, Elsie, was 91 and living on her own in Livingston, New Jersey. Her son John and I were beatniks when we got married in 1964. "You two just might make it," Elsie said at the time, but the prognosis was not good. John spent the first year of

our marriage on heroin, then kicked it just before we took off with his Norton motorcycle and my bountiful optimism for California.

I found an office job in LA in two weeks, but John remained unemployed for the four years we lived there. He looked for work, but blamed his failure to find it on his prison record and lack of a high school diploma. We were barely making it on my small salary, but after Blixxy was born, we fell into deeper debt. I wanted to go back East so our folks could help us out, but John refused to go. Blixxy was a naturally happy baby, which was a good thing, because I was always stressed out and depressed, and didn't have the energy to take care of a difficult child.

Nine months after Blixxy was born, I arrived at Newark airport with my baby in my arms and one suitcase. Dad and Laura picked me up, but they were so excited about Blixxy they forgot to put the suitcase in the car. John and I exchanged some letters for a while, but two months after a drug bust, he took off to Canada with an Englishwoman and her baby girl.

John's mother Elsie took my side. Throughout the years she was always there for Blixxy and me. Elsie got to see John again in Canada years later after he fathered three more children, but then he split with their mother and moved to Alaska. No one had heard from him in years.

Elsie's other son Chuck lived fifteen minutes away from her, but he married a shrew who hated Elsie. That meant Chuck's three children were not very attentive to Elsie either because if they were, they'd catch hell from their mother. That made Elsie's life sad and hard, and made it even more important for Blixxy and me to watch out for her.

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Elsie had been in the hospital with pneumonia and was recuperating at home when I called her. In her 90s she still changed her own storm windows each season, chauffeured friends who couldn't drive, and visited shut-ins regularly. But she wouldn't be able to do any of that unless she got stronger.

On a Saturday morning Blixxy dropped the kids off at our house early and went to work. Rachel had a bad ten minutes right after her mother left, and then she was fine. Later we all went to Stewart Park on the edge of Cayuga Lake. Adrian and I watched the kids on the playground and then we had a picnic lunch by the lake. It was all quite idyllic with ducks and geese, sailboats and sun.

In the afternoon there was a Zen moment when I was sitting on the couch with Michael's head in my lap, watching Rachel play. I don't remember ever being in that state when I was raising Blixxy.

I got my first haircut in Ithaca at J.C. Penney's. I hate finding a new person to cut my hair, and it's rare that I find one I'm comfortable with. I was appalled when I looked in the mirror later and saw that an actual gap had been cut in one spot.

Everything seemed to be going wrong all the time and taking two or three times as long to accomplish as it should have. I looked for a message in the mess and thought it might have been about patience until I peed on my shirt-tail one morning. Then I thought it might be about something else, about setting priorities. I had been flailing away without purpose, hitting away furiously at everything that came in my path.

Blixxy said that for Mother's Day she thought we should have a picnic in the park, but that sounded like

so much work. That Saturday she asked me to pick up the kids so she could mow her lawn. It wasn't how I'd planned to spend my day, but I decided not to be rigid and agreed. When I got to their house, Mike said he wanted to spend the day with his dad, so I just got Rachel. Then Blixxy told me Rachel had had a 103 degree fever the night before.

"We're giving you the sick kid and keeping the healthy one," said Gene. But Rachel was easy for a change. She slept most of the day.

That night I called Dad. He had some woman there he said he was trying to talk into "spending the night." Was it Jackie? He seemed a little confused or drunk and kept forgetting who I was or that he had already told me about the woman. Then at the end he said, "I love you."

Sunday morning I told Blixxy I wanted to watch the women's tennis final on TV instead of doing something for Mother's Day. Then I didn't enjoy it very much, feeling guilty for not going to the park with her.

Adrian spent the day on a group mountain bike ride. He said it was pretty rough, but the guy who led it was very nice and gave him a ride home afterwards. It was hard to tell from the information he gave me whether or not he had a good time.

I called Elsie and she said she was driving again, even to the supermarket, but that she couldn't stay long because she got tired. She also complained about her mental abilities. She was having trouble subtracting numbers. That didn't sound so bad to me. I was having trouble adding them.

On June 14, Laura and I met at Orlando Airport and drove to Melbourne. I loved the first shock of that

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thick humid air that greets you in Southern Florida. We drove with the windows open, catching each other up on everything in our lives.

Dad looked good. His ankle was just about healed. He bruised so easily and didn't realize it.

We took Dad out for ribs and beer at his favorite restaurant, Fat Boys. He was thrilled to have two of his daughters with him. He had always loved showing us off and had to tell the waitress about us. We'd have to go through that at his bar one day, too. Going with him to the bar was a ritual I hated, but as long as we played pool it wasn't so bad. Dad was still great at pool and shuffleboard.

The next morning I dropped Dad off at the bar after we played an hour's worth of gin rummy. When I got back Laura was up, doing exercises in the living room. I made a cup of coffee and sat in the kitchen looking out at the bird bath and feeder in the scrubby back yard. Dad's outdoor thermometer showed it was ninety degrees in the shade.

On our last night in Melbourne, I didn't sleep at all. I had anxiety attacks throughout the night. When Laura got up she said she woke up at 4 a.m. and didn't sleep after that. "I think we're worried about Dad," she said.

Laura suggested we gather up the floozy's belongings. The woman didn't seem to be around, but her stuff was in the spare bedroom. That room had the bath with the walk-in shower, and Laura thought Dad might have been avoiding taking a shower because he thought someone else was using that room.

Laura was always thinking about all the things that might make life better for Dad. She thought we were

worried and anxious over him now that we were leaving. Maybe, but I thought my anxieties were less altruistic – more about driving from the Syracuse airport to Ithaca, going to our neighbors for dinner, or hanging the art show I was going to have the following month.

We did worry about Dad. We worried about him walking to the bar in the heat, especially after he'd had a few beers. The year before he still had his car, but then we worried about him having an accident. On one visit when he had been driving Adrian and me around, he pulled out right into an oncoming van. Luckily the van driver was quick and avoided us. Fortunately one day Dad "lost" the car and everyone conspired to keep it lost so that he wouldn't drive it any more.

Laura and I packed up the floozy's belongings, and Laura brought them to a house across the street where she was supposedly living with her brother. Evidently the woman was trying to "go straight" and there were no hard feelings about returning her things.

I played gin rummy with Dad while Laura washed the towels and bedding and straightened our rooms out. We would have to leave in an hour.

Mom's presence was still in the house. Maybe she was watching out for Dad.

My studio and office were finally finished, and I built fifteen canvasses so I could start painting again. I wondered how my painting would change now that I was in a new environment.

My work is always influenced by the places I live—what my eyes see in the landscape as well as what my psyche feels in the atmosphere. In Tallahassee, Florida, my paintings were spare and muted. One

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series was painted in dark browns and blacks, another in the palest shades of off-white and lavender. In Morehead, my colors went bright and my edges crisp. One painting in particular, *Kentucky Spring*, reflected the lush spring growth around me at that time.

It was good to be working again, but the first painting I did felt tight and too controlled. I named it *Ithaca One*. I loosened up on the next one, playfully combining shapes, colors, and curlicue lines on a rusty-red background. I named it *Ithaca Two* and eventually sold it to a woman in California.

When I talked to Elsie at the end of July, she said her doctor told her that she absolutely needed to move to an assisted living facility. There was no way she could continue to live on her own in that old two-story house. After talking it over, Blixxy and I figured that if we didn't do something, no one else would, so I did some research and found two places in Ithaca that might work. One weekend Blixxy and I drove to New Jersey with the kids and brought Elsie back with us to look at them.

The first place, Alterra, was a national chain which included separate housing for people with advanced dementia. The brand new Ithaca facility consisted of two one-story buildings with a connecting walkway and lovely grounds on a hill overlooking Cayuga Lake. Each of the forty residents at the assisted living facility had a very small studio or one-bedroom apartment. There were no full-size kitchens, but simply an alcove with a sink and cupboards and a tiny refrigerator. All meals were served in the main dining room, so there was no need for residents to cook.

When Elsie saw the Alterra set-up, she didn't like it. She wanted more space of her own and a real kitchen

to cook in if she felt like it. But the advantage of Alterra was its size—only forty residents, all on one floor in a circular pattern so that no matter which way you walked, you'd eventually get where you wanted to go. Alterra also gave off a lovely aura of cleanliness and light. The halls were wide and well lit, with handrails on both sides. The buildings were new, fresh, and comfortingly bright.

Our other choice, Longview, was a local institution on a large hill at the other end of town. Its halls were not as wide and bright or the furnishings as lovely as Alterra's. Longview was three stories high with 120 residents, and offered larger apartments with full kitchens and walk-out patios or decks. Elsie loved those apartments, but we worried about her being able to find her way around.

At Alterra, Elsie would be encouraged to come to meals, participate in activities, and go on outings. At Longview there were many more activities and trips available, but it would be up to the resident to sign up for them and to show up on time. Elsie was probably capable of managing her life at Longview, but Blix and I worried that she'd end up staying in her room reading rather than making an active effort to get involved.

When Elsie got home and talked to her doctor about her options, he said she should go to Alterra. But she wanted her son Chuck to come up with her and see both places before making up her mind. He said he'd do that just as soon as he retired from his job at the end of October.

One of the things that caught my attention at Alterra was the pool table in the game room. Wouldn't that be great for Dad? I thought. So I asked the management a few more questions about Dad and discovered he'd

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be able to keep beer in his apartment and even bring it to meals if he wanted to. Dad had been a beer-drinker all his life and we couldn't imagine taking that pleasure away from him at this point.

I'm not sure exactly how it came about that Dad should come to live at Alterra near me. After all, there was a facility in Kansas City near Laura as well. But she worked full time. So did my sister Mary. Don was retired, but he was the hedonist in the family and traveled all the time. Bob was retired also, but he'd had symptoms of a heart attack after visiting Dad once, and since then, a real heart attack. He'd recovered fully, but we didn't want to put any more pressure on him. That left my brother Bill in Albany and me in Ithaca. When I asked Bill about the possibility of Dad moving near one of us, he said Dad should come to Ithaca. "I'm not a caregiver," he said.

But no one forced me to bring Dad and Elsie to Ithaca. I put the wheels in motion myself, eager to set about yet again to "save" someone—two people, in this case. It was a heroic gesture I attempted every now and again in my life—often with disappointing results—but at the beginning of these adventures I was always filled with abundant optimism and energy.

I put in an application for Dad at Alterra, but first we had to convince him to move there. Whenever any of us talked to him on the phone about moving, he always ended up saying he wanted to stay where he was. Yet there were more and more signs that it wasn't safe for him to live alone. Some guy he met at the bar had convinced Dad to write checks to him and cash them. Laura had to close out Dad's bank account.

One day he forgot to turn off the water in the bathroom and the sink overflowed, flooding the house.

Lynne Taetzsch

Jackie told us stories of burnt pots that had to be thrown out because Dad didn't pay attention when he used the stove. We were lucky there hadn't been a fire.

Finally, I wrote him a letter:

August 10, 2000

Dear Dad,

Bill and I would like to come to Melbourne and help you get packed to move to Ithaca. Laura will meet us there too.

We've found a great spot for you where you will have your own apartment in a place that's like a boarding house. Meals are served in a main dining-room, cleaning and laundry are done for you once a week. Adrian and I live ten minutes from this place, so you can come over for dinner at my house any time you like. I'm retired now, so I'm also available to drive you places you need to go. Adrian says he knows a bar with a pool table he wants to take you to when you come live near us.

Blixy and her two children, Mike (5) and Rachel (1), live fifteen minutes away, so you'll see a lot more of them, too. The other good thing is that your sons Bob and Bill and some of their children live near enough to drive here in a couple of hours instead of having to take a plane to visit you.

Dad, we picked this boarding house for you very carefully. There's a pool table there and people who like to play. You'll have neighbors who enjoy playing poker and gin rummy, also. And we'll stock your refrigerator with your favorite beer.

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You don't have to worry about your house in Melbourne because Jim and Laura own it now. They bought it from you and Mom a number of years ago to give you extra spending money. So when you move out, they'll take care of putting it up for sale and packing things up.

Dad, all of your children and grandchildren love you and want you to make this move to Ithaca. We worry about you and want you to be closer to family. This is what Mom would want for you too, I'm sure.

Bill and Laura and I want to come down the end of this month (August) to help you pack and bring you to Ithaca.

Love, Lynne

On August 17, I called him. "Hi Dad," I said, "this is Lynne."

"I got a letter today I'm reading," he said, "from Lynne."

"I sent the letter. This is Lynne."

"Oh, you sent it. I read it twice now, I guess, and if I read it again that will make three times."

"What do you think?"

"So you found me a boarding house and all?"

"That's right."

"What would I do with all my furniture and stuff here? I'd have to sell it to see what I could get for it."

"We will help you with that. Laura and Bill and I."

"I hate to leave such a nice place as Florida."

"I know it's hard to leave, but I think it will be for the best."

"When were you thinking of doing this?"

"The end of this month."

"What day is it?"

"Today is the 17th. We're planning to come the 25th, in about a week."

"Who all is coming down?"

"Me and Bill and Laura."

"Do you really think I'll like it there?"

"Yes, I do. It will be hard at first, I know, to make a move, but once you get here I think you'll like it."

"Does everyone agree this is for the best?"

"Yes, Dad, the whole family agrees."

"That's the trouble with getting old, you youngsters like to tell us what to do."

"I know, Dad."

"Well, I guess it would be the best thing for me to do, then."

"I agree, Dad."

"Well, OK then. I'm looking forward to seeing you all."

"So are we, Dad. I love you."

"I love you, too."

By writing that letter, I had successfully engineered Dad's agreement. The plan was a "go." I signed the lease at Alterra and Blixby and I went shopping for furniture, bedding and towels. Dad didn't own anything that was worth shipping up from Florida. It was cheaper to buy new.

By the time the furniture was delivered and we finished setting everything up, the apartment looked homey and inviting. I hung a couple of paintings, too, since Dad was used to looking at my art on his walls. But most important, we put up some photos of Mom. Dad had never stopped talking about Mom after she died. "Your mother was a wonderful woman," he

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always told us. I wanted her presence to be alive for him in his new digs.

At the end of August, Bill and I flew together from Syracuse to Florida so that we could fly back together with Dad and get him settled in at Alterra. Laura and her husband Jim flew in from Kansas City and met us at Dad's.

Our tasks were pretty straightforward—pack Dad's clothes and personal items, buy him new underwear and socks, and go through the house to see what was worth salvaging. There wouldn't be much.

In their later years, Mom and Dad had tried to give us as many of their prized possessions as possible—a favorite bread knife to Laura, a cut glass vase to me. When we'd look through the albums of old photos, they'd say, "take what you want." After Mom died, Dad asked us to take her jewelry and the rest of her knick-knack collection. So there wasn't anything much left that any of us wanted.

Maybe if Mary were there she would have felt differently. Mary is more sentimental than Laura and I.

One thing we expected to do was to take Dad to his bar so he could say good-bye to his friends, but he didn't want to go. In a few hours of our arrival, he could tell his life was being overhauled and he became more and more distraught as we buzzed busily around him.

One thing that upset him was the idea that Laura and Jim owned his house. He forgot they had bought it from him and Mom years ago.

"This is my house," he said. "It always has been. Mom and I would never sell it."

"Dad," I said, "Laura and Jim bought the house to help you and Mom out financially, to give you some

extra cash." This is exactly what they had done, and Mom and Dad had been grateful at the time.

"I think you're trying to pull a fast one on me," he insisted.

"I can show you the deed," said Laura.

The fact that Jim was meeting with realtors to get the house on the market didn't help. All the activity, the strangers, us pouring over Dad's possessions, was upsetting him. Did we expect that he would simply sit back and say, "have at it folks," because our intentions were honorable?

We were invading his autonomous life, tearing him away from everything that was familiar. During the three days we were in Melbourne, Dad was alternately passive and belligerent. "Do I really have to do this?" he would almost plead. "I'd really rather live here on my own."

"It will be OK," we'd reassure him. "Lynne and Bill are going to help you get settled in the new place."

"But what if I don't like it?"

"We're sure you're going to like it, Dad, once you get used to it."

We weren't so sure ourselves, but what else could we say?

Dad's doctor gave Bill some Valium for Dad and we gave him one before the plane trip. Laura and Jim came to the airport with us in order to give extra support in case we needed it to get Dad on the plane. Once we managed that, we thought the rest would be easy by comparison.

On the plane Bill and I had Dad sit between us so that he would feel safe. It wasn't that long a flight, but it took forever.

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Every few minutes Dad would ask, "Where are we going?"

"It was like taking a trip with a little kid," Bill said later. He was exasperated by Dad's continual and repetitive questions.

The repetitive questions shouldn't have been a surprise, given Dad's severe short-term memory loss. In the months ahead I would get used to answering them patiently over and over again.

If you've seen the film *Memento*, you know what I mean. Like the main character in the movie, Dad would write notes to himself to help him remember things. That's why my letter worked so well to convince him to come to Ithaca—he could read it over and over and over. In Melbourne, we stuck that letter in front of his face every time he forgot what was going on.

Curiously, as the plane left the south and started flying over more northern scenery, Dad stopped talking about Florida and started talking about Newark, New Jersey. This is where he had grown up, worked all his life, and raised his own family early on. The plane ride seemed to zap him into an earlier time frame in his life.

We arrived in Syracuse and I drove us to Ithaca, an hour and fifteen minute ride.

"This is beautiful country," Dad said once we left the city for the serene countryside. "It's a far cry from Newark."

When we got home, Adrian welcomed us. The three men sat on the deck drinking beer while I made dinner.

"This is a lovely place you've got here," said Dad. After dinner we played four-handed pinochle and Dad managed without any trouble. This was how we

checked on the state of his mind—by how well he handled card games.

As the evening wore on, Dad became more and more agitated. He said he wanted to “go home.”

“Which one of you will be able to give me a ride?” he asked.

“Where do you want to go, Dad?”

“I’d like to go home if you don’t mind.”

We tried to reassure him. “You’re going to sleep here tonight, Dad, and tomorrow we’re moving you to your new home.”

Nothing worked.

“My mother is waiting for me,” he said. “And my Dad needs me in the store tomorrow.” Dad’s father had owned a grocery store in Newark where Dad worked after school. It was a shock to see how far back in his past he had traveled. I don’t know who was more upset by this, him or us.

Bill tried to explain the facts to him. “Who am I?” he asked.

“You’re my brother, aren’t you?” said Dad.

“No, I’m your son.”

But Dad wouldn’t believe him. “Buddy, if I give you ten dollars,” he said to Adrian, “will you give me a ride home?”

We were at a loss how to comfort him.

“Can I use your phone to call my mother?” he asked later. “She’ll be worried.”

“There’s no one to call,” said Bill. “Your mother and father died a long time ago.”

What had we done? Dad’s mind seemed to have snapped completely. And it was all our fault for meddling in his life. Only the fear of upsetting him more kept me from bursting into tears.

The only one who seemed in control of himself that night was Adrian. Not that he wasn't sympathetic, but he wasn't watching *his* father regress to childhood.

Finally it was time to go to bed. We had planned to let Dad have the big guestroom with its own bathroom and let Bill sleep in the little room next to Adrian and me. But now I figured we'd better put Dad next to us, since he was likely to get up during the night and would not know where he was.

"Why don't you sleep in the big guestroom, Bill, so at least one of us will get a night's sleep?"

Bill agreed. I got him settled and then showed Dad where he would sleep.

"I'll be right in the next room, Dad, if you need anything."

He said he was tired and got into bed, but twenty minutes later he was up. I had to reassure him all over again and get him back to bed. We went through several sessions of this throughout the night.

The next morning Dad was himself again, which was a big relief. To say he was "himself" meant that he recognized who we all were, that he was living in the present again, not the past. I made a big breakfast for him, and then he and Bill went off to Alterra while I went shopping for things Dad would need.

The day went by quickly and Dad seemed fine as we helped him settle in and learn his way around. Bill had agreed to spend the first night in Dad's room sleeping on the loveseat that opened up into a single bed. Thankfully, I got to go home.

Dad got through his first night OK with Bill there. He was still agitated at night, but at least Bill was there to calm him down. The next day Bills's wife Nita came

to help and said she'd spend the night with Dad so Bill could come back to our house and get some rest.

We should have realized that only a son or a daughter would work as a companion for Dad when he was agitated. He knew we were family, even if he forgot the exact connection.

When we saw Nita the next morning at Alterra, she said Dad had made a pass at her in the middle of the night and she had to move to another room. Her report to the nurse worried the staff about Dad's possible future behavior. In addition, after Nita had left him alone he wandered the halls looking for a bathroom, and ended up urinating in a wastebasket he found.

The Alterra director and head nurse called me to a meeting. "We're going to have to put your father under 24-hour observation," they said.

My first thought was that they might want to put Dad in the house next door for Alzheimer's patients. It would have been awful for him and for us, and we would never forgive ourselves then for moving him out of his house in Florida.

I bought a half-dozen nightlights and put them all over Dad's room to help him find his bathroom and anything else he might need in the middle of the night. I put up signs marked "BATHROOM" in bold letters, with arrows pointing in the right direction. Bill gave him a piece of paper to put in his wallet that had his room number written on it, to help him figure out where he was and where he lived. On the outside of his door, we put a plaque with his name on it that one of my nephews had made.

After three days, Bill and Nita went home exhausted.

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I was exhausted, too, but my job as Dad's primary caregiver had just begun.

I wrote another letter to Dad and left it on his card-table. In it I explained his move from Florida to Ithaca and reassured him that he was in a wonderful place. I told him where all his nearby family lived and gave him my telephone number so he could call me any time. I ended it, "We all hope you will be happy here, Dad. Love, Lynne."

Thankfully, Dad gradually learned where his bathroom was and settled down at night. After a week the director told me that Dad didn't need nursing supervision any more. He was getting along just fine.

It was amazing how quickly he adjusted to Alterra and forgot about Florida.

"I'm very happy here," he said. And, "The food is good."

Once he left his room he couldn't find it again, of course, but there was always someone around to point him in the right direction. He tried to pay for meals and tip the staff, and brought open cans of beer with him everywhere, but he was polite and sociable and soon made friends with the staff. He seemed to know instinctively what behavior was expected in this environment, just as he had known what was expected in his local bar.

One down, one to go.

In early September the Alterra director told me they were filling up fast in case Elsie wanted a room. There were only two one-bedroom units left. I looked at them both and picked the one with a great view of a farm next door. This apartment was larger and more

expensive than Dad's, but Elsie could afford it. "Hold this one," I told the director.

Then I called Elsie. "We need to move you by the end of September or there won't be any rooms left."

"That's awfully soon," she said. "I don't think I could get ready in time."

"Adrian and I will drive down to help you."

Blixxy could not go to New Jersey with us because it was her busy season at work. That left the project up to me and Adrian.

"Chuck is not happy about me moving so soon," Elsie said in another phone call. "He wants me to wait until he retires at the end of October so he can check out the place and help me move."

"If you wait, there probably won't be any openings."

"I know, I told him that. I don't know why he can't take off a few days."

"We can do it without him. I'll arrange for movers to pick up the furniture you want. Adrian and I can help you pack and deal with all the other details. Our station wagon will hold all your clothes and personal things."

"I don't know where to start."

"Try to sort through your stuff and pick out what you want to bring. But I'll pack it for you." Elsie always tried to do more than she should. "Don't do any heavy work," I insisted.

I always loved to move. Of course it was a lot of backbreaking work, but the prospect of cleaning out the old and starting off fresh in a new place always pushed me into a wonderful manic state where I had the energy to accomplish anything. Unfortunately, that attitude kept me from understanding other people's reluctance and fear of moving. For a woman in her

nineties who had lived most of her life in one house, the prospect would be frightening, painful and disorienting to Elsie.

I also liked to do things fast. Once a decision had been made to move, why wait? Waiting, in fact is what I was least good at. I tended to get moody, paranoid and depressed when I had to wait too long for anything.

Thus, on a Friday near the end of September Adrian and I made the four-hour drive to Livingston, New Jersey. The movers I had hired sight-unseen from the yellow pages were scheduled for the coming Tuesday morning. That gave us Friday evening and three full days to work.

One thing I was worried about was that too many people would try to help us—Chuck and his sons, perhaps neighbors or friends from Elsie's church. I knew from experience that too many people packing and talking and getting in the way (*my way*) could result in poorly packed boxes, extra confusion, and much distraction. Well, I needn't have worried.

On arrival in Livingston, I was appalled at the clutter and piles of half-sorted memorabilia spread throughout the house. Elsie was picking through items one by one, setting aside an antique teapot for the upcoming church bazaar, a barely-used handbag and scarf for the Veteran's Association (VA) bag.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Why are you picking out stuff for the church bazaar and the VA? You need to be choosing what you want to bring to Alterra so I can pack it for you."

"I want the church to get anything decent for the bazaar," she said. "And the rest should go to the VA. Someone might be able to use it."

"How will they get it?"

"There's a pick-up the day after we leave. They'll come to the front porch and pick it up there."

After the pleasantries and a cup of tea, Adrian asked me to make up our bed so he could rest. He was feeling lousy with a cold virus.

Then I found out there was going to be a party for Elsie at church on Sunday and she wanted me to come to that. Just what I wanted to be doing, I thought—meeting a bunch of strangers and eating cake when I had so little time to prepare for Elsie's move.

We met Roy, a neighbor who would take care of Elsie's house until it could be sold. He would also make sure the church got the stuff for the bazaar. Roy was a thoughtful guy who had often brought soup to Elsie when she was shut in, helped with odd jobs and errands. But he liked to talk. One thing you could not do when you were packing for a move in three days was stand around talking.

We had to decide which furniture Elsie should take. Blixxy thought she should take a practical table, but Elsie didn't like that one. Instead she chose a large round coffee table that her husband had made years ago. It turned out to be very impractical at Alterra, and eventually we discarded it.

As for clothes, I found I had to be right alongside Elsie throughout the process or she would simply linger in indecision. Or mix up the piles.

"Sort through these socks," I said. "Put the pile you want here, and the pile you don't want there."

As soon as she sorted things, I'd snap them up, packing what we'd bring and stuffing the rest in the appropriate boxes and bags for the church bazaar and the VA.

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In Ithaca we discovered we'd taken some of the bad socks and left some of the good ones. That was easily solved by shopping for socks.

By the second day Adrian was feeling better and helped with the packing and errands. There were a lot of "knick-knacks" to sort through, and before we could choose a pack-or-giveaway pile for anything, Elsie told us the long story of each item's history in her life. These were actually delightful stories, but time was running out.

Adrenaline kept me jumping as I prodded Elsie to make quicker decisions, checked off items on my to-do list, and backed away from chatty visitors so I could get back to work. For a special treat, we had Chinese food delivered on my birthday. The rest of the time, I cooked.

On Sunday Elsie was going to drive herself to church service. "Don't be silly," I said, "I will drive you." She was going to give her car, quite beat up after twenty years, to her youngest grandson. Chuck would take care of that later.

After the service I went to church for the party. Members told me that though they would miss Elsie, they were very happy that Blix and I were moving her near us. The size of the congregation had dwindled over the years as members got old and died. They were a small but close-knit group, and very fond of Elsie. Before we left, the Women's Guild gave her a lovely gift of jewelry. There were hugs all around.

It was then that I realized how this move would wrench Elsie from her extended "family" in Livingston. They provided her social life and her support group, making up somewhat for Chuck and his family's lack of attention. I had researched and found another Trinity

Lutheran Church for Elsie to join in Ithaca, but it had a large congregation and was unlikely to supply the friendship and support she had enjoyed in Livingston.

Blixy had agreed to check on Dad while we were away so I called her to find out how he was doing.

"He's fine," she said. "But he thought I was you."

"That's good, I guess."

On Monday we made visits to the utility companies and to the post office to ship items Elsie's sister wanted, and to fill out change of address forms. The real estate agent met with us and voiced his concerns about the in-ground oil tank. We needed to find out if Elsie had insurance to cover any spillage, or this might be a jinx on the house sale.

That night Elsie's oldest grandson came to visit and say good-bye to her. He brought a present—a gift of fancy bedding—another thing to pack. Elsie was very pleased that he had come and sat chatting with him happily. My thought at the time was, how about asking if there's anything you can do to help? Surely *once* over the three days we might hear that question?

Later that night Adrian and I hauled out a humongous pile of garbage and a bag broke. We cursed and cleaned it up.

Tuesday morning Chuck showed up about an hour before the movers arrived. While having a cup of coffee he suggested we bring several more items than we were planning to. He also went up in the attic and got down a couple of winter coats Elsie wanted. Then he gave us directions for an alternate route that would get us to Ithaca faster.

When the movers came, the driver gave me a copy of their contract, which stated that I should give the men a twenty-percent tip at the end. This little item

would gnaw at me the entire trip. But they got their truck packed, we put the last items in our car, and we all took off.

The route Chuck had suggested took us on back roads, and when we caught up with the movers at a truck stop, they asked if there wasn't a bigger highway they could take. "When we get here," I pointed at the map, "you'll be hooking up with 81, which is a good highway until you get half an hour from Ithaca."

When we finally arrived at Alterra, Elsie was pleased with the bright, spacious, brand-new feel of the place. Until we got to her apartment.

"It's so small," she said. "Where will I put all my things?"

"Whatever doesn't fit, you can put in my basement."

We were waiting for the movers to come and unload. I was dreading that part. I hated dealing with movers. I just wanted them to do their job and go. I did not want to check to see if there was anything missing, or if anything had been damaged. I wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible.

I found Dad in the pool room practicing.

"Hi, Honey, it's so good to see you. Do you want to go to my room?"

"No, Dad, I'm helping Elsie Stoessel move in here today."

"Do I know her?"

"You may not remember, but she's John Stoessel's mother—you know, John, my first husband? You've met Elsie a number of times."

"Oh."

"She's going to be living here just down the hall from you. Come with me and you can meet her."

Dad hung out with us in Elsie's room a bit, and when he saw Adrian and me carrying Elsie's stuff in from the station wagon, he asked to help.

When we finished emptying the car, Adrian went home. He had had more than enough of this adventure.

Elsie's room was way in the back, and when the movers got there, they were annoyed that they had to drag all the furniture through the front door and long hallways to get to Elsie's room. But they managed, and then it was time for me to settle up with them. I am a coward and since it was Elsie's money, not mine, I gave them the twenty-percent tip.

Later we discovered a couple pieces of Elsie's bedroom set were scratched. She'd had this furniture for thirty years and it had been in perfect condition until I got charge of it. Guilt, guilt, guilt.

Bixy met us after work to help Elsie unpack and get settled in. Dad would hang around and then take off and come back again.

"Can I do something to help?" he asked.

"You know," said Elsie after rummaging through her purse and some boxes, "I can't find that gift the Women's Guild gave me."

"It will turn up somewhere," Bixy said.

"I hardly even looked at it," said Elsie. "I hope you didn't put it in the box for the Church bazaar," she said to me. "I'd be mortified if they thought I would do that."

"It's probably here," I said. "But if it's not, they'll understand. You can blame it on me."

"I will."

That's what happens when you pack and move in three days—some things get screwed up.

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Unlike Dad, Elsie did not settle in happily at Alterra. She missed her house. She missed her freedom. "I used to be able to get up and drive wherever I wanted to," she said.

Over the years it had gotten so difficult for Elsie to maneuver through the Livingston traffic that there were very few places she drove to, and she often went roundabout ways in order to avoid making left turns into traffic. She had agreed with us that she should stop driving, but still, she missed that independence. Who wouldn't?

Recently Adrian and I decided that I would do all the driving when we're in the car together. He drives himself locally, but I don't feel safe in the car with him behind the wheel. He is OK with this plan because he knows he is not always alert, especially on long trips.

I don't have any trouble taking other people's driving privileges away from them. Just don't mess with mine.

Another of Elsie's complaints dealt with the meals at Alterra. "The food is awful here," she told us often. "They never give you a green salad. All you get is dried-out chicken breast. Tasteless."

Dad always said, "The food is good here," but I think Elsie's opinion was probably closer to the truth. She had been an excellent cook, and when I was first married I learned a lot from her and still use her recipes.

My hope at the beginning was that Dad and Elsie would become friends. I hoped that she would learn how to play gin rummy and pinochle, and that she would keep an eye on him for me and let me know how he was doing. It would make it nice for Blixey and me if

we could visit them both together, have them both over to dinner, and take them both on outings.

This plan did not work—the opposite happened, in fact. Each was jealous of the time we spent with the other. Elsie refused to learn any new card games. She wanted to hang out with people who “had all their marbles,” and Dad wanted no part of her. When they visited my house, he wanted to go home early and she wanted to stay late. Instead of making things easier, they became more difficult.

One thing they had in common, though, was their bigotry. “You don’t see many blacks here like you do in Newark,” Dad commented often. “The Jews have taken over Livingston,” said Elsie. Their comments about people a few feet away from us at parks or restaurants mortified me.

“Give them the benefit of the doubt,” said Adrian. “Maybe they are just being observant.”

Blix took care of Elsie’s finances, her legal affairs, health insurance, and medications. Getting it all organized in the beginning was a major hassle. Then periodically Prudential would cancel Elsie’s health insurance for no apparent reason and Blix would have to badger them to get it straightened out.

I took Elsie to all her doctor’s appointments, bought whatever she needed for her apartment, and sometimes took her shopping for clothes and gifts. Between the two of us, we had her covered.

We also visited as much as we could and took her out to parks or to my house for dinner. She always complained that we didn’t do enough of this, though. There seemed to be no way to satisfy her.

Yet Elsie and Dad were basically doing fine at Alterra. It was working for both of them, even if they

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didn't enjoy each other's company. Elsie found the residents who "had all their marbles" to talk to and play Uno with. Dad hung out with a few guys who liked to play pool and watch sports on TV.

We could feel good about bringing Dad and Elsie to Ithaca. We'd done the right thing.

CHAPTER 2:

I Learn the Ups and Downs of Being a Primary Caregiver

One day early in November my project for the day was to get Dad to change the slacks he'd been wearing for three weeks. When I got to his room he was glad to see me as usual, but resisted my mission.

"I changed my clothes when I took a shower today," he said. "I'm not going to change them again."

Why would he want to change his clothes in that cold room? Residents had a combination heater/air-conditioner in their room with a thermostat to control it. But Dad had forgotten how to use a thermostat or how to find the thermostat. It was hard to pin down where his knowledge was deficient, but he certainly didn't *use* the thermostat. I plugged in the heater for him knowing he would unplug it later. Maybe the noise bothered him?

"Dad, you've been wearing those slacks for three weeks," I said. I took clean slacks and a shirt out of his closet and laid them on the bed.

"You can put those back because I'm not changing."

His stubbornness made me royally pissed. "If you want to come to my house for dinner," I said, "you'll change your clothes."

To show him that I meant what I said, I was about to walk out the door. But then I remembered that I

didn't have a car. Adrian had dropped me off and was going to pick us up later.

Might as well play gin rummy, I thought. I cleared off Dad's card table so we would have some room.

"If I lived at your house," Dad said, "you could tell me what to do. But this is my place."

"You're right."

He quickly won two bucks off me and I gradually calmed down. What the hell difference did it make if he changed his slacks? Bill told me that men don't change their clothes every day like women do. That was his excuse for doing nothing about it when he visited Dad.

A couple days later I dropped in on Dad again and found him in bed under the covers wearing only his underwear. When I saw his slacks and shirt thrown on a chair, I scooped them up into the laundry hamper and quickly set out clean clothes for him. I would finally get him to change those dirty slacks.

Each time I arrived at Dad's I would go on a search and destroy mission to find all the dirty socks, handkerchiefs and underwear lying around and put them in the laundry hamper. I threw away old newspapers, beer cans, and notes that said, "Lynne is coming tomorrow at three." I checked his bathroom floor for dampness, always happy when there were signs that he had taken a shower.

I turned into a snoop, hunting for evidence throughout Dad's place. I checked the empty cans to see how much beer and soda he'd consumed. I moved the summer socks to the back of his drawer and the winter ones to the front. I removed the dirty tissues and cans from the laundry hamper and transferred them to the wastebasket. I checked his mini-

refrigerator to find a sandwich he must have brought back from the dining room. How old might it be?

Sometimes Dad didn't shave for days. His electric shaver ended up in various places in his room, and I'm not sure he knew where to plug it in. I adamantly kept the nightlight in the top electrical outlet in his bathroom. There was no way I was going to take a chance that he wouldn't be able to find his bathroom one night. His not shaving didn't bother me. I liked men with bristly chins.

But not shaving evidently did bother Bill on one of his visits. "When did you last shave?" he asked Dad.

"Why? Do you want me to shave?"

"Yes, I do."

So Dad shaved for his son. Sometimes Dad would do things to please us, and sometimes he would stand firm and insist that we not boss him around.

We expected Dad to have trouble with the Ithaca winters after having lived in southern Florida for so long. In Melbourne he rarely used the air-conditioning, even when the temperature hit ninety. But somehow his Florida experience had been wiped clean from his mind. He compared the rural scenery he saw in Ithaca to Newark, New Jersey, appreciating its cleanliness and the beauty of the lake and hills. As soon as the temperature would get near seventy in his room, he complained about the heat. He did the same thing if I didn't turn my car heater off soon enough. It was as if his body, as well as his mind, thought he had lived in the northeast all his life.

I had to be an interpreter of signs because Dad couldn't remember the near past beyond a few minutes. I couldn't ask him what he had had for lunch

or whether he enjoyed his son's visit the past weekend because that information wasn't available to him.

Patterns helped. I visited three or four times a week, and he often called me on the phone when he was lonely or bored. "Can you bring me over to your house?" he would ask. "This place is dead today. No one's around." I left my phone number plastered in large print on the wall near his phone.

"I can't come now Dad, but I'll be there later this afternoon."

"What time? I'll make sure I'm here."

One time I found him sitting in a chair in the hall outside his door with his coat in hand, waiting for me.

In early December I dreamt I was about to call my brothers and sisters to tell them that Mom and Dad were dead. In another part of the dream, Mom was sitting at the kitchen table playing solitaire. I hugged her and savored the solid feel of her and told her how glad I was that she had come. I needed her so much. Why couldn't she have been the one that survived?

I felt very sorry for myself the next morning, overwhelmed by the huge needs of Dad and Elsie, and the feeling I had every time I was with Elsie that I should be spending that time with Dad. Yet I was the one who had brought Elsie here, so I was responsible for her.

No good deed goes unpunished.

At the doctor's office with Elsie, while I watched a technician give her an echocardiogram, I saw how enlarged her left ventricle was. This was a sign of atrial fibrillation—a very fast, uncontrolled heart rhythm caused when the upper chambers of the heart quiver instead of beating. The technician also pointed

out the colorful sparks indicating mitral valve prolapse—tiny leaks in the heart valves. Elsie's pumping action was good for her age, though, at forty-five percent. That's what we needed to find out. In order to prescribe a channel-blocker to control the atrial fibrillation, Dr. M needed to know that her heart's pumping action was strong enough because a channel-blocker slows this down.

The technician told us there was nothing to get excited about, that Elsie's heart was aging normally. He said sometimes an extra cup of coffee or chocolate will cause atrial fibrillation because the aging body becomes more sensitive. Later at lunch Elsie had a big cup of coffee and we each ate a Lindner's Tort for desert.

When I had picked up Elsie earlier to take her to the doctor, it was lunchtime at Alterra and everyone was in the dining room. I snuck out so Dad wouldn't see me because I didn't want to confuse him or to have to explain that I wasn't there to see him this time. Then I worried that he might have seen me through the dining room windows as Elsie and I walked to the parking lot. Maybe he even said to the people at his table, "That's my daughter."

What wonderful paranoid places my mind took me to.

There should have been enough time to get the echocardiogram of Elsie's heart, have a relaxed lunch, and then do some shopping at J.C. Penney's. Elsie brought her shopping list along and I had promised to take her. But the night before my glasses had broken so we stopped at the opticians to get them repaired. Naturally they couldn't be as the frame was no longer manufactured, so I had to order new glasses.

I wanted a second opinion on the frames, and had asked Adrian to go with me, but he was going to a spin class in the middle of the morning. He went to these classes ten times a week and I didn't see the big deal in missing one, but it seemed important to him so I didn't push it. Maybe that's why I was feeling sorry for myself. I went to the doctor with Adrian, with Elsie, and with Dad, but nobody ever went with me. My days were all split apart, fragmented, ruined with these trips to doctors and drugstores and endless errands.

Elsie helped me pick out a pair of frames at the opticians, but this delay meant it was one o'clock by the time we had lunch. We went to Collegetown Bagels, which had great food but was always crowded at lunchtime and you had to stand in line to order. We were lucky to find a small table to sit at. Elsie ordered a roast beef sandwich, but she didn't seem particularly happy with her food or the place I had picked for lunch. I suppose she would have preferred a more upscale restaurant with white tablecloths and an atmosphere that said *relax and stay awhile*.

While I was waiting for her to finish eating, I bought a loaf of sourdough bread for home. She still had a full cup of coffee in front of her.

"I'm ready to go whenever you are," I said. "Do you want to take the coffee with you?"

"Do you ever stop and just relax?"

"No, I guess I'm always thinking about the next thing I have to do."

Elsie sat calmly drinking her coffee. She was not going to let me bully her. "I'd rather go shopping with Blixey," she said. "You rush me too much."

How else was I going to keep everybody's lives on track?

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At this point I realized we didn't have enough time to go to J.C. Penny's since I needed some time to spend with Dad when we got back. Elsie agreed.

"We'll shop one day next week when I have more time," I promised.

When I got to Dad's room later, he was glad to see me as always.

"You're the only one who comes to see me," he said. "Is that because of where we live?"

"Right, Dad. I live ten minutes away, but the others are a few hours at least."

"I see."

"Bobby was here two weeks ago, and Adrian comes by often."

"Not that often."

"He comes a couple times a week to play pool with you."

"I guess he does, and I appreciate it, too."

As I walked away from Alterra after dropping Dad off at the dining room, I realized that both Dad and Elsie wanted more from me than I could possibly give them.

Later that night Dad called me at 9:15. "I was asleep," he said, "but woke up and realized that gal who was supposed to come today never came."

"Dad, I saw you this afternoon."

"I must be confused. I don't have any gal. I'm sorry I woke you up."

"You didn't wake me, Dad. You must have had a dream. Call me any time."

"Will you see me or call me tomorrow?"

"Yes, Dad."

"I feel better."

"OK, go back to sleep."

That Sunday I picked Dad up around four o'clock to have supper with us. First I talked Adrian out of going to his six-o'clock spin class so we wouldn't have to eat too late. When Adrian was missing at mealtimes, Dad would ask where my hubby was, as if we shouldn't be eating dinner without him.

On the way over in the car we talked about the snow we saw and the difference between downtown, which is in the valley and had little snow, to the hills at his place and mine, which presented vistas of white.

"This is a beautiful place you have here," Dad said as he walked into the living room. "And you keep it so clean, too."

"Adrian helps," I said.

"Of course he does."

After putting away our coats, I said, "Laura and Jim might come for Christmas."

He didn't respond at first. "Is Laura one of my daughters?" he asked tentatively.

"Yes, Dad. Her name used to be *Sue*. Remember Mary and Sue?"

"Oh yeah, of course. Did she change her name?"

"Yup, after you gave her that lovely name of *Sue*, she went and changed it to *Laura*."

"She did?"

"What an ingrate, huh?"

This pleased me no end that he didn't remember who Laura was. Usually it was just the opposite—he thought I was Laura and that anything good that happened to him was because of her. Adrian told me one day after he came back from Alterra that Dad had told him Laura did the paintings on his walls.

Both Mom and Dad's favorite child was Laura. My only consolation was that *my* daughter, Blixxy, was their

favorite grandchild out of twelve. That's probably because Laura never had any children.

Dad and I played gin rummy until Adrian came home and took over for me

so I could make supper. Dad always got too antsy if we were not playing a game with him. By the time we sat down for dinner, he was on his second can of beer.

"I guess you're all enjoying the food," I said, "since no one is saying anything."

"What's that?" asked Dad.

"No one said anything about the food."

"Why should I? I expect a good meal when I come here."

"I'm just fishing for compliments."

"I already gave you one."

"Yes, you did."

At dusk Dad pointed out that it was getting dark, and wondered about a star or planet he saw low in the sky.

"Maybe Adrian will know what it is," I said. "He's studying Astronomy."

As we neared the end of the meal Dad stood up and asked, "Did I bring a coat?"

"Yes, Dad, it's in the closet. Why, do you want to go home?"

"No," he said, and abruptly sat back down. Then a few minutes later he said, "I'm ready to go if you are."

When I stood up to get our coats he said, "You don't have to take me home. I can sleep here on the floor."

"It's no problem, Dad. You live ten minutes away."

In the car he said, "I don't like to drive home in the dark."

"I know, Dad, but your place is only ten minutes away and I know the roads."

"I know you do, and you're a good driver, too."

He endured and told me not to rush. I tried to slow down some, though my need was to get there as quickly as possible in order to get the ride over with. I pointed out some Christmas lights, but I had to be careful not to give the impression I was looking at the scenery instead of the road.

I wanted to drop him off at the front door and take off, but I parked the car and walked him inside. "I'll walk you to your room, Dad."

He started to take off his coat. "You want this back, don't you?"

"No, Dad, it's your coat. Bob and his family bought it for you. Bobby, your son."

"Oh, OK."

When we got to his room, he was ready for me to leave. He worried about me driving in the dark and wanted me to get home safely.

When I got in the car I blasted the radio and the heat.

Dad had always been able to enjoy the small pleasures—drinking a can of beer, taking a walk, watching the birds and squirrels. He appreciated life while it was happening, whereas my mind was continually racing to the next activity, the next goal, the next thing to check off my "to do" list. In my efforts to *improve* my life and make it more joyous and spontaneous, I was simply adding the additional pressure of must-do activities: fifteen minutes of meditation (as if I could ever stop my thoughts from racing!), half an hour for somatic exercises, an hour of yoga, and twenty minutes on the treadmill. When I

finally got time to paint, I could only manage an hour or two because I knew my "to do" list was waiting.

When Adrian got home from visiting Dad later that week, he said Dad had had an accident in the middle of the hallway because he couldn't make it to his bathroom in time. Adrian got paper towels and plastic bags from the game room and cleaned it up. Then he found an aide and told her what had happened.

"Don't worry," she said. "It happens all the time here. I'll go clean him up."

"I was worried," Adrian told me, "about your Dad getting into trouble.

While Adrian had been with Dad, I was picking up Elsie to take her to the mall and the hearing specialist.

While we were walking through the mall, two young women stopped in front of us and one of them said, "Hi, ladies," like we were long-lost relatives. Then she gave Elsie a big hug and kiss, and then did the same to me, saying, "Happy Christmas." At first I thought they must work at Alterra and knew Elsie from there, but then I realized that she didn't know them either. As my hug was in process, I thought, "pick-pockets," but the girl's eyes were moist with emotion.

I checked my pockets. Nothing was missing. Elsie had her purse, flap closed, firmly under her arm. The hug was "for real," whatever that meant. Was the girl high on Ecstasy?

My next thought was, "Do I look like someone who needs to be hugged?"

By the time I brought Elsie back to Alterra it was almost five o'clock. Dad was already sitting in the dining room. I got Elsie back to her room, filled her humidifier with water, put the batteries and film in her new camera, and walked her to the dining room. I

stopped at Dad's table to say hello and promised to see him the next day.

Half an hour after I got home, he called me. "Lynne, I'm glad you made it home OK. After you left, I realized I should have gotten up and talked to you to find out why you came to see me tonight."

I explained the bit about taking Elsie to the doctor. "I'll come see you tomorrow."

"Oh, that will be great."

Ten minutes later he called me again and we repeated the same conversation.

When I looked out the window that Friday morning, everything was covered in white. There wasn't enough snow to stop anyone from traveling, but enough to make wearing boots a good idea.

At Dad's I tried to get him to put on his boots for our scheduled trip to the podiatrist, but he refused. He was finishing a can of beer at 10 a.m. and was ornery as hell.

"You're not wearing boots," he said.

"Yes I am." I was wearing hiking boots, which looked very different from the ones I was trying to get Dad to put on. I tried to appeal to reason. "Look outside," I said. "Do you see the snow?"

"We're going in your car, aren't we?"

Then I noticed that instead of putting on his winter parka, he was taking his light spring jacket out of the closet. "Dad," I said, "it's two degrees out there. You have to wear a winter coat."

"It isn't that cold."

"I'm not taking you anywhere without your winter coat," I yelled at him.

"Well, let me go see how cold it is first."

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"Go ahead, I'll wait here."

I knew he wouldn't make it to the great outdoors, which required two right turns and two left turns down hallways to the front door. While he was gone I did the room check.

He came back a few minutes later. "I didn't get outside," he said. "I just walked down the hall."

"Well, believe me, it's cold out there."

"We shouldn't go out on a day like this anyway. Why don't you make it another day?"

"Dad, you called me and said you needed your toenails cut. You can't always get an appointment when you want it, you know."

He picked up the parka. "All right, I'll bring it along and if it's cold, I'll put it on."

We headed toward the front door with him carrying the parka and me carrying his boots. When we got there, I opened the door wide to show him. "Is this cold enough for you, Dad?"

He struggled to put the parka on over his spring jacket, and I helped him zip it up. "You'd better hang on to me," I said.

"Why? Are you planning to fall and take me with you?"

"You have no tread on your shoes, Dad. See the bottom of my boots?" I showed him, but he refused to take my arm and headed out to the car by himself.

"How do you think I delivered bread all those years if I couldn't manage in weather like this by myself?" The far past was much more accessible to Dad than the near. He had worked for years for Fischer's Bakery in Newark, delivering bread to grocery stores.

As he struggled to get into the car, he asked, "Do I need to shake the snow off my shoes first?"

"Don't worry about it."

"I don't have anything to worry with."

"Put on your seatbelt."

He used to argue about the seatbelt each time, and each time I would tell him the story about Adrian getting an \$85.00 ticket for not wearing his, and it finally seemed to have sunk in. He even let me help him with it.

"Pretty soon I'll be gone," he said, "and then you won't have any more trouble."

It took me a couple minutes to think of an answer to that one. "I don't want you to be *gone*, Dad, I just want you to cooperate."

"I've always been cooperative. Your mother wanted five children, and I cooperated."

I figured I was the child he decided to cut from the six.

When we had to walk through several inches of snow to get from the car to the doctor's office, I was pleased to be proven correct about the boots.

Later Dr. S told us about an older patient who had come in recently wearing no socks. "I told her that with her poor circulation, it was very important to dress warm and certainly to wear socks. The woman ignored me but looked at her daughter and said, 'What did I come in here for? Wasn't it to get my toenails cut?'"

It was some relief to know that other children of aging parents were suffering like I was suffering, with parents who refused to do what was in their best interest and who stubbornly persisted in folly.

Back in the car, Dad asked, "Where are we going now?"

"To your place."

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"Don't you want to go out to lunch or over to your place?"

"Nope, I have errands to run."

I dropped him off at the front entrance without helping him negotiate the slippery sidewalk.

Bad daughter.

"Thanks for taking me," he said, and then when he safely made it to the front door, he waved at me.

A week later Adrian told me that when he stopped by Alterra to play pool with Dad, he was dressed funny. "He was wearing a pajama top and a thin summer sweater over it."

"I wonder why he didn't wear a shirt? Did you look in his closet?"

"No, but his laundry hamper was over-full."

I called Alterra and told an administrator what Adrian had reported. She told me they would make sure his laundry was done.

The next day Adrian stopped by Dad's again and called me from his room. "They did his laundry, but it's all folded in the hamper."

"Will you put it away for him?"

"Where?"

Where did he think? "In his closet." Sometimes Adrian seemed as thick as my father. "Hang up the shirts and put the other stuff on the shelves."

Two minutes later, Dad called. "What did you want to tell me?" he asked.

"Adrian is there to put your clean laundry away, Dad."

"You mean this guy that's here?"

"Yes, let him put it away. I'll come see you tomorrow."

Ten minutes later Adrian called me. "He wouldn't let me do anything. He says the clothes belong in the hamper. And he says the wastebasket in his bathroom is for dirty clothes.

I could tell they must have had a big argument over it. "It's hard not to get mad at him," I said.

"But it's better this way. He's asserting his independence, letting us know that he's still Bill Taetzsch."

"Master of his universe."

"Right."

I called Alterra again, this time getting Luanne, the director, and told her that Dad's clothes were not put away and that they needed to be.

"Housekeeping doesn't usually put the residents' clothes away," she said. "If he were on home health care (an extra expensive service they offer), then the aide would do his laundry and put it away for him. We have a new housekeeper. I'll talk to her."

Then I brought up the problem Dad had finding his room all the time. "Could arrows or something be put on the walls to help him?"

"If we do something obvious like that to help him find his room, then that's an indication he might not belong here," she said. "Right now we're mainstreaming him with those who have no memory problems."

"Oh."

"Besides, he has friends who help him find his room. Helen helps him every morning after breakfast, for example."

After that phone call, I got depressed. Would I have to start doing Dad's laundry? If I had to do one more iota than I was already doing, I thought I'd crack up.

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Two weeks earlier Adrian had suggested we get Christmas gifts for the Alterra staff. "A little gift can go a long way toward generating good will," he said. Luanne suggested candy would be appropriate, and Laura ordered it for all three shifts.

In the afternoon I went to Alterra to put Dad's clothes away. He let me do it, but he kept rushing me to come to the table and begin our card game.

After an hour and a half of gin rummy, I said goodbye to Dad and looked for Luanne on my way out. "Oh Lynne," she gushed when I saw her, "your candy arrived today. Thank you so much, the staff is really appreciating it."

I brought up Dad's laundry problem and the possible need for a meeting to reevaluate his needs.

"Oh no, that's not necessary. He's doing great. We had a meeting today and they'll just put his laundry away while he's at lunch. They pick it up in the morning when he's on his daily walk to the building next door for coffee, because it's best to do it when he's not in his room. If we think he needs more assistance, we'll tell you, but he's doing great, really."

I walked away much relieved. Later Adrian, Blixxy and I discussed how much of an influence the candy had had on this outcome. Adrian saw it cynically, calling it a "bribe." Blixxy said, "People just want to be appreciated, to know that someone notices all the work they're doing."

A few days later we had some miserable weather—freezing rain and sleet, high winds. I called Elsie since I hadn't talked to her in almost a week.

"It's too nasty to go out," she said. "The rain is turning to ice when it touches my window. Don't come over today."

Then I listened to her tell me everything that was wrong with Alterra. She told me about a new resident who was driving everyone crazy. "She goes into rooms without being asked and then won't leave. She doesn't belong here. She makes a big fuss and cries to get people's sympathy. Poor Jeannie felt sorry for her and invited her in and then couldn't get her to leave. I marched Jeannie up to the front desk to put in a complaint. This has got to stop. She (the new resident) came to my door complaining that she was all alone and I told her, 'Listen, we're *all* alone here. Now I need my peace and quiet. Go back to your room.'"

"They don't have enough staff," Elsie continued. "And there's no one here at night."

"There's someone on duty twenty-four hours a day," I countered.

"They don't have a nurse here at night," she argued.

"Maybe not a nurse, but there's someone who can call a nurse."

"They have too many people who don't belong here. They should be in the other building (for Alzheimer's patients). If I don't get to talk to people who have all their marbles, I'll end up just like them."

"I don't think it's catching," I said, but she didn't hear me. That was the next thing she complained about, her hearing aids.

"When I sit at the table at mealtimes," she said, "I can hear the conversation behind me, but not the one at my table. I do as well with these hearing aids as I do without them."

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"We'll go back to the hearing specialist," I suggested.

"After the holidays."

"OK."

After she got out all the venom, she admitted that she was actually doing quite well. "I'm fine, really," she said, "though I miss my independence."

"And by the way," she added, "I only have one roll of toilet paper left."

"I'll get you some more."

"Don't get me too much, just one or two rolls, I don't have room for more."

"I'm not going to get you just one or two rolls," I insisted. "We'll find a place for it. Is there anything else you need while I'm shopping?"

She would have me going every day to pick up a jot of this and a dollop of that, always at the last minute as she was about to run out of it. Every week I gained more sympathy for her son Chuck.

That Sunday I went to see Dad. Elsie was at Blix's for the day. There was a party and concert going on when I arrived—a jazz quartet playing a variety of tunes including old time and Christmas favorites. I ran into Luanne, who reminded me again how much the staff enjoyed the candy, and how she herself had eaten too much of it.

Dad was watching a football game in the main TV area. We walked to his room to drop off my coat, and on the way back to the party we heard someone calling for help. A disabled resident was sitting in her chair, unable to ring the "help" cord which was on the wall over her bed. I rang it for her and Dad stood outside the door as if he was not supposed to enter. He had a

real sense of privacy then and didn't enter anyone else's

room unless he was clearly invited to.

After the woman got help, Dad and I continued our trek back to the party. We picked up punch and cookies and then sat down to listen to the band.

"She's pretty good, don't you think?" Dad said about the singer. "This is the biggest party they've had at this place, and I've been coming here a good number of years."

We stayed until the end, and then sat in the TV room with Ed, who had had a stroke and required assistance getting in and out of his wheelchair. I often saw Dad sitting with him watching sports on TV.

Luanne told me that one day Dad tried to help Ed get out of his wheelchair and they both fell together, but neither was hurt.

As I was leaving later, Dad walked me to the front door just as Elsie was returning with Blix. I gave Elsie a quick kiss, but we couldn't talk, really, because Dad wanted to walk me out that instant.

Elsie looked good. She still dressed with style and you would never have guessed she was 92.

"It's cold out here," Dad said, deciding not to walk me to my car after all.

I started going occasionally to an Alzheimer's support group for anyone dealing with a family member who had some form of dementia. It was good to be with people who shared the same problems and frustrations, and I usually went away feeling that I had it easier than most. It was the full-time caregivers, caring for a live-in parent or spouse, that I had the most sympathy for. They rarely got time off-duty.

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The saddest cases to me were the women married to men who had been successful, well-respected, and active in the community. As the men slowly deteriorated, their wives were the first to realize what was happening, while the rest of the family often denied the truth. A wife would react with frustration to her husband's bungling of some simple job, or try to protect him from embarrassment in the community. And whatever they were going through at the moment, I realized, would only get worse.

A few days before Christmas, I gave Dad the homemade cookies Mary had sent. They were the crescent butter cookies Mom always made every holiday. Mary had attached a card with a photo of her family.

Dad held the photo up to the light. "I don't know these people, do I?"

"That's Mary and her family." I pointed out the names of her husband, her son and daughter.

"How long have they been married?"

I didn't answer that one because I wasn't sure what he was asking. Next we tried to get the tin of cookies open. Mary had sealed it tight with scotch tape, and I couldn't get it off with my fingernails. Dad grabbed a fork and tried. I watched him anxiously but then backed off, realizing I should relax and let him do it.

When he opened the tin and we each took a cookie, he said, "Your mother used to make these."

I got him a beer and myself a soda. He took another cookie.

"They're very good," he said.

Then he went into the bedroom to get the other folding chair so we could play cards. "This gets heavier

as I get older," he said. "Of course, the chair is getting older, too."

As we played, I watched him struggle to slide the cards on the textured surface of the card table. I wanted so much to get him a sturdy wooden table with a smooth surface that would enable the cards to slide. Every time I played with him, he struggled to pick them up. My brothers and sisters would think a new table was a waste of money, I thought, but it bothered me every time I visited him.

I said good-bye to Dad at 4:45 and stopped at Elsie's for a quick hello before their 5:00 supper. She was in the middle of sorting her Christmas ornaments.

"A lot of this is just junk that will have to be thrown away," she said. Then she showed me two wooden toys from Germany that she had had all her life—fragile, beautiful, precious. "I'll keep these," she said.

I walked Elsie to the dining room and kissed her at the front door. But I saw Dad sitting in a position where he might be able to see me through the window, so I went into the dining room and kissed him goodbye again.

I think I only confused him.

I was feeling down and anxious about the approaching holidays. Christmas Eve and our Chanukah celebration would fall on the same day that year. Adrian is Jewish and although he isn't religious, I always made an effort to celebrate Chanukah and Passover each year. This time Elsie, Blixxy, Mike and Rachel would be celebrating with us. We didn't think Dad would have the patience for it, and we would see him the next day.

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The previous two years Adrian and I had flown to Melbourne to celebrate Christmas with Dad since no one else would do it. Once I moved to Ithaca, I'd hoped to spend Christmas day with Blixy and the kids. Instead, they would come to our house for Chanukah and on Christmas they would go to Blixy's in-laws with Elsie while we had Dad over our house.

The holidays are a hard time, anyway, for me. I can never duplicate the absolute joy and excitement I felt when I was a kid, so they are always disappointing. Plus, I felt an obligation to make the day special for Dad, and that would not be easy.

I went to Alterra on the 23rd and the place seemed dead, like half the residents and staff had gone home for the holidays. How would I be able to enjoy the Chanukah celebration with my daughter and grandchildren and my ex-mother-in-law knowing that my father was ten minutes away and I didn't invite him?

I couldn't enjoy celebrating a holiday without Dad, yet no one else in the family worried about this. Bill called and gave no indication of when he might next visit. When I asked him, "How did I get stuck with this job?" he answered, "No one asked you to do it."

No one asked you to do it. I guess that meant it was my own damn fault.

I had two days of cooking and eating and drinking to look forward to. No work. No exercise. I had completely stopped my routine of meditation and yoga. The room I meditated in was too cold in the mornings. I'd wait for it to warm up, and then the day would pass.

My attempts to "live in the moment" had not worked.

I knew I had to stop trying to control everything. The night before we had three or four possible movies to watch on TV and I picked the wrong one—*The Two Jakes*. By the time I realized we should have chosen *Breaking Away* or *Mr. Holland's Opus*, we were too far along. It was too late, and all my fault.

I finally called Laura to find out what I should do, and she told me it was perfectly OK not to have Dad join us. Adrian went over in the morning and played pool with him for an hour. Adrian was great about going to Dad's, especially when he knew it was hard for me to do it.

Elsie arrived after church and chatted with me while I made the potato latkes and kugel. When Blixxy arrived she put Rachel down for a nap so we had a couple hours of peace. Adrian helped Mike light the Chanukah candles and then we played the dreidel game.

When Rachel got up the children opened their presents. Mike was disappointed in the coloring and activity books I'd gotten him. I thought they would help his eye-hand coordination, which his kindergarten teacher had complained about. Next time, I thought, I'll get him something he'll love instead.

The roast chicken, slow cooked, came out moist and tender. The cabernet was good. We were too full to eat the pies I had baked, so I sent some home with Blixxy for Gene. She explained that he hadn't come because he had to get the wood in for their wood stove. "And besides," she said, "he'll be spending most of tomorrow at his mother's celebrating Christmas."

"Two days of holidays are too much for him," I said.

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"Yeah, he's a lot like you, Mom. He can handle work much better than a holiday." Gene was a workaholic like me, but he ran a dairy farm so he had to be.

That night I dreamt about spiders, a phobia I've had all my life. Then each time I woke up in the morning, I went back to sleep. There was no reason to get up early.

In the afternoon Adrian picked up Dad, got him a beer, and started to build a fire.

"This is a beautiful place you've got here," said Dad.

Laura had recently sent us a home video that Jim made eight or nine years before when Mom and Dad and Adrian and I were visiting them. I brought Dad into the TV room to watch it with me.

"Who is that with the bald head?" Dad said. "That's not me, is it?" Of course he was most fascinated by seeing himself.

"There's Ella," he said, indicating my mother. "She looks good. When was this taken?"

I patiently answered his questions.

Just as Dad was fascinated with his own image, I was fascinated with mine. There was something disturbing about it—not that I looked old or fat or bad, but just that I had trouble seeing myself in the same way I saw the others. In one shot I noticed that I stuck my head forward, my neck bent, like a bird. I wanted to watch the tape alone, in secret, and study these images.

I was making a very special dinner for Dad—steamed lobster tails and an Italian shrimp salad. This would make up for the last Christmas in Melbourne, when all the stores were closed by the time we arrived and I had to serve some mediocre spaghetti to Dad and his friends.

Shrimp and lobster were Dad's favorites, just like mine. Dad and I shared a lot of the same tastes like that—we always loved the most expensive seafood, the best cuts of beef—the food we were denied growing up poor in Newark and Irvington, New Jersey.

I removed the lobster tails from their shells to make it easier for everyone, but Dad seemed not to know what they were or how to eat them. I had put little bowls of lemon butter for each of us to dip the lobster in, but I had to tell him to use it.

"Oh, it does taste better this way," he said. He was trying to cut off the reddish membrane, as if it were inedible.

"You can eat the whole thing," I said. "It's all good. Just cut it into pieces and dip it in the butter."

What a disappointment—not to know what lobster was! To me it was precious and I couldn't imagine leaving any uneaten, to be thrown away. I had to give myself a little lecture about relaxing, about not caring if his lobster was eaten or enjoyed or wasted.

"Everything is delicious," said Dad.

When he was eating his salad, he didn't seem to know there was shrimp in it. The dinner was incredibly wonderful, yet all I felt was the sharp pang of loss for Dad's lack of caring about the food he had once loved. No wonder he thought the food at Alterra was fine. He couldn't tell the difference any more.

It meant that another part of who Dad was had fallen away. Piece by piece, he was leaving us.

After dinner Adrian said he'd like to see the family video, so we all went into the TV room and watched it again. Dad enjoyed it pretty much the same way he had the first time, asking the same questions and thanking us for showing it to him.

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"It's great to relive old times," he said.

When we finished our coffee and pie, it was dark outside. "Did I bring a sweater or coat with me?" Dad asked.

"Yeah, Dad, and a hat, too."

"Where are they?"

"In the closet. I'll get them for you when it's time to leave."

"If it would save you the trouble of driving me home, I can sleep on the floor here."

In the car I pointed out that there were hardly any cars on the road.

"Those people are smart," he said.

I wanted to drive faster in order to end the tension of sitting in silence through the dark night, but I reminded myself that driving slower would frighten him less.

After I parked, Dad said, "Walk on the sidewalk, where it's cleared."

"Alright."

"I shouldn't be telling you what to do."

"That's OK," I said as I got to the door and opened it. "You're my father. You can tell me what to do."

How a Manic-Depressive Artist Survives Being the Primary
Caregiver for Her Father & Ex-Mother-in-Law: A Memoir.

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