

Bailey

Still Here: A caregiver series

If you would have asked me ten years ago if I would be taking care of my dad, I would have laughed in your face and I would have said, "Why would I do that?"

I live with my 10 year old daughter, and then my dad lives with me, and he has alcohol onset dementia.

And my mother lives with me as well, and she has a traumatic brain injury. And we all just live together in our little nursing home.

And my parents are divorced, and my mom never saw herself really living with her ex-husband again.

We would move across the country to get away from him, and he'd follow us. I was the only one out of my whole family that like, gave my dad any chances.

I've had drug addiction, I've been to rehab, I dropped out of high school. I was an angry teenager who hated the world, and then I gave birth and I met Lily, and everything changed.

The love I feel for my daughter and my mom and my dad has like, changed me.

I was mad at my dad for so many years and I was so angry at him and then I almost lost my dad and I could not imagine a life without him in it, and I don't want to.

When my dad was first released into my care and I became his full-time caregiver, it was very overwhelming and a very helpless feeling to me.

I felt alone because it was just all put on me all at one time. And I don't think people understand that being a caregiver isn't just like going to somebody's house, taking care of them and leaving.

I don't get the opportunity to leave. Caregiving is my life, 24/7. And taking care of my parents and the situation I'm in, like, definitely has its moments of sadness, but I'm happy with them here.

I still have these expectations of my parents and the things they should do, and they just cannot do them anymore.

So I feel guilt for expecting those of them. And I know I need to let those expectations go, but when I let those expectations go, I feel like it's like real and I'm letting my parents go.

I do feel trapped in my emotions sometimes and I feel like I'm not allowed to feel how I want to feel because I signed up for what I'm doing and like, I don't want anybody to feel bad for me ever.

I'm hard on myself because my dad always taught me to be. A lot of the times it feels like I have to be a caregiver before I'm even a person.

And that doesn't feel fair sometimes. I leave myself hanging to make sure everyone else is okay. And that's where I struggle. But I'm working on it.

My dad is happy just to be sitting in the same room as me. We just sit there and he'll look at me and he'll say "I love you, thank you for everything you do for me." He doesn't even know what I do for him. He has no idea. But he can feel that love and unlike before, when he would never express anything to anybody, now my dad is the most expressive man I've ever met in my life.

I swear one of the best things about being a caregiver to me is like, in my room, and I can hear my mom and Lily and dad laughing. And I know it sounds corny, it's literally the best thing ever.

I'm not as hard on myself as I once was. And I feel like through what my parents have taught me, even after they've been sick, that I can quite literally do anything.

I'm still learning how to love myself, and how to love even the things I don't like about myself. I want me as a caregiver to grow and be able to be like, I can talk about these feelings and I'm allowed to have these feelings. And I'm also a good caregiver, and my parents would also be proud of me with these feelings or without.

I think I'm pretty cool. I've learned that. I've learned, I think I'm pretty cool. And I can, I can do it. And it'll be ok.