

Jacquelyn

Still Here: A caregiver series

I had ended up taking a 21 day leave from my job. And I thought that I would return. And it turns out that I did not fly back to New York City at all.

Hi, I'm Jacquelyn Revere. By the way, I stutter, and so I just like to say that too.

I began taking care of my grandmother and my mom in 2016. At the time I was living in New York City.

I received a phone call from my mom's friend while I was on the subway, actually, on a Saturday night.

I was an aspiring late night TV writer and I was working as a writer's assistant on a show at that point. And that was a job that I had, like, hustled so hard to get. And I finally had it, and I was so excited.

And then within one phone call, that was wiped out completely, and I pretty much started all over. And then I came home to see that the home that my grandmother and my mom bought—they usually kept it looking beautiful, right?

But I came home to a refrigerator full of food that was expiring. But I think what was most, like, daunting was that we had notices saying that we were, like, leading towards foreclosure because the mortgage hadn't been paid for the past two months.

It's like a punch in the gut and a karate chop in the throat. It's like climbing a mountain and then being shoved off.

But I think what was more painful was seeing that my matriarch was fallen apart. I started, like, researching everything.

How can I stop Alzheimer's? How can I, you know, heal her? I would see her changing all the time.

And I'm like, nothing I'm doing is working. And it was all just making me feel worse. I eventually came to the conclusion that, like, this will eventually kill her.

Do what you will with this time right now, because that's it. She couldn't even, like, form full sentences. But she would say like, you know, like, “fun” and “love” and “joy.”

And she would like, say these words that were feelings that she wanted. And so we would do anything. Go to the beach, watch people skate.

We would go to concerts or shows or we would eat food. And like, what I started noticing was that we were quite content. You know, we were very happy within the small world that we made.

Alzheimer's is called the long goodbye, and so you really do experience a bit of loss, like, each day. And culturally we don't examine, you know, that we are all born and then we don't stay here for forever.

And so like, one week she was up and we were dancing at the park. And then the next week, not here.

When a passing like that is so sudden, you wake up that next morning and then you're like, okay, what do I do? Who do I make food for?

Caregiving requires a restructuring of who you are. And so, like, your identity shifts completely.

I'm much more aware of our medical system and the shortcomings that it has. It's also just made me very aware of the aging population, and how we need more of an interest in care and cultural shift in the way we talk about it also.

But me, I'm much more happy. I don't sweat the small stuff nearly as much. My mom would dance. Okay—if she heard music and she liked that song, she would dance, full out, in public, anywhere.

And starting out I was like, “Mom...” But then it got to the point where I was like, “Well, she's dancing. That's awesome.” And like, now, if there is some song on, I dance full out. Now, whatever thoughts people have, like, it doesn't matter.

And so I, I live life in a much more full way now. I experience more joy. And that's absolutely a choice.