

Ty

Still Here: A caregiver series

You go through ups and downs and nobody knows the battle that you fight in your mind. Nobody knows the tears that you cry. Nobody knows the thoughts...when you're like, "Do I really need to do this? Why am I here?"

So I scheduled an appointment with a neurologist in Atlanta, and I remember him running a battery of tests. And so he came back after the assessment and he said, "Your mother has Alzheimer's." I remember thinking like, "What are you talking about?" And there was nothing after that. There was no pamphlet, there were no "here are your next steps." And I remember looking at my mom and just seeing her break down and cry, and we rode home in silence. It was like a deafening...it was a loud silence. And I just, my mind was racing, trying to figure out what is going to happen next? What am I going to do?

The emotions with being a sandwich caregiver are literally all over the place. I questioned a lot, I was angry a lot, I cried a lot. It's hard just to wake up knowing that you have to take care of someone full-time and your life is not your own.

Because you find yourself believing that you are the role that you play, and so you become what you do. I get caught up in caregiving versus who is Ty really? And it's hard to separate the two.

I began to join groups and all they would talk about was just how their loved ones were going to die and just, you know, the gloom and the doom of the diagnosis. And I just made a decision one day to say, "I'm not going to live like this." We're going to find joy in this journey. And let's go and let's live. Mommy, she's never had sushi before; eat the sushi. She's never worn holes in her jeans; baby, rip 'em up. All of these things, things that she would never try, and I know if she did not have Alzheimer's, she would probably have a fit, but you're going to do these things. Places she's never been; she's never been to Vegas. Let's go. She's never been to California; now you live here. And so I want to give my mom the best life that she can have, even if she doesn't know what she's doing, we're going to live too, and we're going to have fun.

When she leaves, she's going to leave and be like, "Man, that was just so good. I lived." Isn't that the purpose of life? To live? And not letting anything stop you?

My relationship with my mom was amazing. She was such a great caregiver. She always made sure that she provided for us and that we had everything that we need. Mommy wasn't a, like, loving type, so she wasn't the one to say, "I love you," or to give a lot of hugs. But one of the greatest ways that we knew that she loved us was her ability to be generous towards us as well as others.

And after the diagnosis, it's funny how things changed. And I had to become a mother to her, and that is what she sees me as now. But for me, it has given me the ability to walk in joy, because now all I hear is, "I love you, you're my baby, you're my mother, I can't live without you." Like, she says all of the things that my heart longed for as a child, and I get to hear it now as an adult. You know you go back to the inner child within you and it's, as I'm walking this journey with my mother, it's healing the broken pieces in me.

Every single thing that I've had to endure in life has taught me to be strong and has equipped me in giving me the tools that I need to be able to walk out this journey with my mom. I've had caregivers that said, "You know, you're doing such a great job and I'm just horrible." Baby, no. Today was just a bad day. This morning was just a bad morning. No, you're still striving. You know, get back up. It's okay, you know? And a lot of times we don't forgive ourselves and that really holds us captive. Forgive yourself and be free. And that's how you become better.