

# CAREGIVERS

*Each family's caregiving story is unique with a common thread: the desire to care. We thank these families for sharing their stories so that others can learn from them.*

## share their EXPERIENCES

ALEISHA'S STORY

### My little flower

By Aleisha Ricardo

My grandmother loved to plant flowers. Her favourite was the sunflower.

Recently, her arthritis worsened to the point where she could no longer garden.

One afternoon, I visited her and brought a pot, soil, and sunflower seeds.

She struggled a bit pouring the soil into the pot, but she managed. Then she planted the seeds and topped it off with water.

Over the next few weeks, Grandma was excited to see the flowers starting to sprout. Now the bloomed sunflowers are a reminder that she can still do, at least in a small way, what she enjoys most. ☀️



JERRY'S STORY

### The right care

By Jerry Fields

When my friend Linda became too ill to take care of herself, she went to live with her son. I kept in touch with her, and she often came to visit me at my retirement residence. One day, I noticed a small bruise on her cheek. I asked her what had happened, and she said she'd tripped and hit her face against the wall. I let it go but I was a bit more concerned when she came in with a cut on her lip a few days later.

One day I dropped by to surprise her and to take her out for lunch. I was about to ring the doorbell when I heard some screaming. Peering in the window, I saw her son yelling and waving his arms around. Linda was crouched in front of him, tears rolling down her bruised cheeks. Then I saw her son punch her!



I was furious. I quickly got inside my waiting taxi and returned to my residence to ask for the staff's help. They notified the police who arrested Linda's son. The staff also helped me make arrangements for Linda to come and live at my senior residence.

Today, Linda is doing much better. She's a bit upset that her son is in trouble. I wonder how anyone—especially her own son—could have laid a hand on such an angel. ☀️

HAROLD'S STORY

### Bingo!

By Harold Anderson

As I reached for the telephone to tell the others I'd be arriving late, I felt a bit queasy. I had never felt this way before. My eyes started to fade out and my chest started to hurt. It felt like something was trying to come out of my chest. I called my neighbour, but as soon as I hit the last number, I collapsed.

I awoke after a horrible dream of losing at bingo 10 times in a row, I awoke to find myself in a hospital bed. What had happened? After a few minutes, a doctor came to my room and told me that I had suffered a minor heart attack. He said I'd need to stay in hospital for a few days to rest and that I should forget about my

beloved bingo, at least for a little while.

But I had other plans. My friends from the neighbourhood came to cheer me up, and they even brought a portable bingo game. We played for hours while I recovered. But soon my worst nightmare came true. I did lose 10 games in a row. Boy, am I ever unlucky. Or am I? ☀️



# A voice from the past

By Hayley Bershire

My 68-year-old mother recently found out that she has a twin sister, from whom she was separated at birth. The letter came on a lazy summer afternoon, as Mom was knitting in her rocking chair. Her twin sister, Mary, had found out about my mother when she was looking into her family history. Now, she hoped to meet her long-lost sister in person.

I found it difficult to interpret my mom's reaction when she read the letter. She sat there quietly reading, then she tossed it aside carelessly, as if it was yesterday's paper.

Several weeks later, another letter arrived, and I wondered what mom would do next. She just read it and again tossed it to the side.

I couldn't stand it any longer.

After all, I wanted to meet my aunt! I asked her "Mom, don't you want to meet your sister?" She looked at me and said, "No one tells me a thing for 68 years, and now they expect me to believe this?"

When the third letter arrived, I decided to try and convince mom to give Mary a chance. After yet another letter, mom finally agreed to meet her.

A week later, I brought mom to the seniors' residence where Aunt Mary lived. I recognized the Bershire family resemblance right away, as she looked exactly like mother. The afternoon went unbelievably well, with lots of chatter, tea and laughter. It was wonderful to see Mom and my Aunt Mary chatting excitedly and sharing stories of those lost 68 years of each other's lives.



I'm glad mom finally decided to meet her sister, as it has truly enlightened her life. They found out that they have lots in common. Now, mom pops by to visit Mary every few days to go for a walk, have lunch or just chat. I've heard it said that the bonds between siblings are special and can't be broken. After seeing my mom and Aunt Mary, I believe that is true. ☀️

# For my mom

By Lauren Greffster

For a long time now, I have been taking care of my mother. Although her health isn't great, I won't let her live in a nursing home. She has done so much for me over

the years and now I am able to return the favour and look after her. We get along great together.

A few months ago, a week before her birthday, I knew just the gift to get for her. She had always longed for her piano, which she had back in her home country but couldn't bring with her. And she never had the chance to get one here. Although she hadn't played for a long time, I was sure she would still remember some

of her music.

Finally the big day arrived, and our family celebrated and enjoyed the afternoon with mom. After the cake, it was time to open her presents. I had saved my gift for last.

I could tell she was puzzled when I put the large, long gift-wrapped box in front of her. She looked surprised when she ripped off the wrapping and saw the brand new piano bench. That's when I led her into the next room where her new upright piano was.

She was thrilled. She even sat right down and played a pretty little tune—music to my ears! I'm sure I'll never forget mom's happy face. ☀️



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NICOLE'S STORY

## A picture is worth a thousand words

By Nicole Naylor

I have lived with my grandma almost all of my life. My parents passed away when I was only two years old and she took me in to care for me. Over the years, she has always been there for me.

I know I mean a lot to her too, so last year, when I had to leave home to live on campus during my first year of university, I knew she would be lonely without me. I wanted to come up with something special that would remind

her of me while I was away.

A few weeks before I had to leave for school, I gathered all the photos of me and of my life that I could find, and I created a collage of pictures, trying to capture the bond between us. I included a picture of grandma holding me when I was an infant, one of both of us eating ice cream when I was six, a picture of me riding my first bike and a picture of us sipping lemonade when I was 14.



On the day I left, I presented her with the collage and I knew she loved it. She said nothing but I saw a couple of tears roll down her cheek as she looked at each image. Together, we put it up on the wall in the kitchen, where she likes to spend most of her time. When I call, she always talks about how she loves to show the collage off to her friends. ☀️

GILLIAN'S STORY

## Our little lifesaver

By Gillian Gillman

One summer quite a few years ago, my husband and I went on vacation to Cuba for two weeks.

We left our three kids, Josh, Lauren and Alex, aged eight, six, and four, with my mother, Grandma Lily, who was in good health and always loved to look after her grandkids.

In the middle of our first week, we received an urgent phone call from the hospital: my mother had suffered a heart attack!

It turned out that Josh had come into the kitchen for a snack and found his Grandma on the floor, clutching at her heart. Fortunately, he remembered to call 9-1-1 immediately, as he had been taught to do in an emergency.

We cut our trip short and rushed home to be with mom. The doctors told us that if Josh hadn't called 9-1-1 right away, Grandma Lily might have died. It really is marvellous what kids can do! ☀️

Grandma Lilly with Josh, Lauren and Alex.



## Pet power

By Zara Goumakos

My husband and I moved to Canada from Greece just over 23 years ago. Despite our pleading, my parents chose to stay back home. Everything was great, until two years ago, when my father died from a stroke.

We invited my mother to come live with us. We hadn't anticipated the changes in her that were apparent as soon as she stepped off the plane. She seemed depressed and distant.

Although we had hoped she'd be happy with us, she wanted to return to Greece after a few weeks. We didn't want her to be unhappy living with us, but we couldn't let her go back due to her increasing frailty.

One day, as we were browsing in a pet store, I noticed my mother staring



lovingly at a grey striped kitten. Watching her from afar, I got an idea. The next day, I went back to the store and purchased the fluffy, tiny kitten.

I brought him home, and went into my mother's room, where I found her sound asleep. I gently walked up to her and placed the kitten beside her. Half an hour later, I went in to check on her. My mother was holding the loudly purring kitten in her lap, stroking it gently and displaying her familiar loving smile. "I will name him Teodor. After your father," she said.

Today, mother is still mourning the loss of my father, but Teodor the cat has certainly helped her recover from her grief. We are grateful to have her back again. ☀️

## It's the little things that count

By Samuel King

One winter night I was walking down the street when I noticed an elderly woman struggling with two heavy grocery bags. The sidewalk was icy, and snow was falling heavily.

I introduced myself, and offered to help her with her bags. The smile of relief that lit up her face could have melted the snow. I carried her groceries all the way to her home, making small talk and making sure she didn't slip.

When we got to her house she said, "Thank you so much young man. It's people like you that make this world go round." The moment reminded me that it is the little things that count in life. ☀️



## The surprise visit

By John Donaldson

After my dad moved from his home in the country into a long-term-care home in the city last year, our family wasn't able to visit him as often. One day, I decided to take my daughters to see him and surprise him with his favourite desert, blueberry pie, that my mother had taught me how to make long ago.

My daughters were thrilled to be visiting Grandpa. My youngest, Emily, decided to wear grandpa's medallion. My eldest, Jess, put on her grandpa's favourite baseball cap.

After a few hours on the road, we

finally reached Toronto and dad's new home. We stepped off the elevator and walked towards his room. We knew dad was in for a total surprise and we were all excited as well. We stood in front of his door and knocked. We waited to hear him shuffling to the door and we opened it up. There stood my dad in his white dress shirt, black cotton pants and brown shoes.

"Surprise!" we yelled with great big smiles.



He was excited and thrilled to see us (and of course, mom's blueberry pie was a big hit). We shared the whole day with my dad as he showed off his cozy room with the lovely patio just outside. It was great to see him in such good spirits, and I could tell he really enjoyed our visit. ☀️

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EVELYN'S STORY



In 1947, I met my Prince Charming at a Sunday night dance in Toronto. He was a handsome young man of 21 with a nice personality, great smile and green eyes that danced when he talked. He was 21, and I was a very shy 17 year old.

### Until we meet again

To my surprise he came over and asked me to dance. I was very nervous. The rest of the week, I could only anticipate when I would see him next. The next week, we met again. We danced at the Sunday dances for about three months.

In September, I turned 18. To celebrate, he took me out to a nightclub, where we danced to a live band. Halfway through the evening, the band leader announced that a certain couple was getting engaged. I was shocked to hear our names called! Norm presented me with a diamond engagement ring, which I still wear proudly on my hand today.

### A change of plans

Eight years ago, a shadow came into our lives. My handsome prince was

## A lifetime of love

By Eve O'Leary

becoming confused, disoriented and suspicious. I took him to our doctor, who, after running some tests, told me my husband had dementia. I talked to the doctor about my husband's erratic driving as well, and he thought it was time to take away the keys. My prince was not happy!

### Time well spent

Three years ago, we moved closer to our family. Shortly after, I had to

place the love of my life in a long-term-care facility because I could no longer care for him on a 24-hour basis. Fortunately, I am close enough to his new home so that I can spend three to four hours a day with him.

During our visits, we tell each other, "I love you." We hold hands when we go outside for our walk. And we hug and kiss without caring who sees us. We are still very much that young couple of 60 years ago. ☀️

CHRISTINE'S STORY

## Spa-ing on Mother's Day

By Christine Cochrane

Mom lives in a long-term-care facility and relishes the chance to "escape" every so often. This year, my sister and I decided to do something special as a Mother's Day treat.

After breakfast, we picked her up and took her to the Milcroft Inn and Spa just north of the city. We all had much-needed manicures and pedicures, and we indulged ourselves with a lovely afternoon tea. The weather was nice, so a slow walk on the grounds was also a pleasure.

The outing was fabulous fun for all



of us. Mom was treated like a queen and enjoyed the chance to get out of the house for a much-needed break. ☀️

# A little extra effort

By Melissa Yuen



Caregivers don't always have to be family members. Take a look at Helen, a busy mom with two children, who takes time to visit Anne, her widowed neighbour.

A few years ago, Anne had a stroke, which affected her mobility. Now,

Anne uses a cane to get around. And get around she does. On sunny days, Helen will drive Anne out to a park or to a grocery store or shopping mall for a little bit of exercise.

Helen also visits Anne a few times a week to make sure she has all the essentials she needs. "I don't know what I would do without Helen," says Anne. "She's the most caring person I ever met. If only everyone had a neighbour like that!"

Meanwhile, Helen does not consider herself special. "I enjoy spending time with Helen, she's really a lot of fun," she says. "If putting in a just little extra effort makes life that much easier for her, I don't think it's any work at all!" ☀️

# A trip to the movies

By Jessica O'Malley

Grandma hasn't really been out much since my grandpa moved to a nursing home to recover from surgery. He is her life, and she never really felt comfortable going anywhere without him. We knew that even though she visited him every day, and that it was only a month until he would come home, she was still lonely at nights.

## A trip to the movies

To brighten up her spirits one day, I thought I'd take her to the movies. A few hours out with her would give her a chance to get out of the house for a while. After the movie ended, I could tell that she thoroughly enjoyed doing something different. She even wanted



to meet with me to see another movie the following week!

## A boost in spirits

I know the movie provided entertainment for grandma, but I think it also helped her get her mind off of worrying about my grandfather being away from home. Our little afternoon trip helped boost her spirits. I really believe elderly adults must stay active and social in order to keep their minds going strong. I can see it's working for my grandma. ☀️

# In touch

By Brandi Simpson



The first year that mom and dad decided to do the snowbird thing and spend the winters in Florida, they loved everything about it—except for being away from family. Mom, being such a chatterbox, spent hours making long-distance calls to me and my four sisters, spending hundreds of dollars a month on her telephone bill. My dad, a huge basketball fan, was also missing news of how the Raptors were performing.

## Linking the family

I suggested they join the modern world and go on-line. At first, they were a bit intimidated by the thought, since they had never used a computer before. They were both quick learners and it wasn't long before they got the hang of it and they were hooked. Now they can't live without it. My sisters and I live in different parts of the country and Mom keeps in touch with all of us by e-mail, while dad surfs the web to stay up-to-date on his friends, Toronto news and sports scores.

Having a computer has made such a difference for all of us. Now we are in touch more and it costs us less! ☀️

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After her diagnosis of dementia, Josephine couldn't live alone anymore. David, her eldest son, did research to find a few nursing homes close to his own house. "My mother likes to have

### JOSEPHINE'S STORY

## Caring so much *By Anita Soloman*

family around her all the time," explains David. "As my siblings and I grew up and raised our own families, mom always said that it didn't matter where we lived as long as she got to see us."

After visiting several homes in the area, David found the right fit. Thankfully, Josephine didn't have any difficulties adjusting to her new home, thanks in part to regular visits from her family. "My kids are wonderful,"

she says. "They call and visit whenever they can. It means a lot to me that they care so much."

"I know it's dangerous for me to live alone, so I really don't mind living with a large group of seniors," she adds. Josephine mentions that the key to adjusting to a new home is to know that your family isn't abandoning you but are just trying to improve your quality of life. ☀️

### RITCHIE'S STORY

## Sure-footed in the bathroom *By Rosanna Capelli*

When I found out the bathroom is one of the easiest places for a senior to fall, I immediately thought of my aging grandfather. Although he is 89 years old, nonno is still independent. Since my grandma passed away from a heart attack three years ago, he's been living on his own and doing great. He drives to the mall everyday, and he loves to go play the slots, watch the horses, or do anything else that keeps him socially active.

However, I've recently noticed he has been slowing down a bit, and he is not quite as sure-footed as he used to be. About a month ago when we were going to the deli for lunch, he seemed

to be slower and more nervous walking than usual, and he nearly tripped when we crossed the road. I know how much nonno cherishes his freedom. He has always had this do-it-yourself attitude that I've admired, and I know it would eat him up inside if he had to rely on others to do what he can do himself.

After our outing, we chatted and he agreed that he wasn't as steady as he used to be. Together, we decided to install safety devices in his bathroom and to get an emergency response telephone. We hired a contractor who put grab bars next to and inside the shower and bathtub as well as a slip-resistant coating on the floor.



These simple, little changes will go a long way to helping him maintain his independence and dignity, which is very important for both of us. Prevention is vital, and nonno deserves to live out his golden years as a healthy, happy man. ☀️

# The gift of sound

By Amy Lang

For the past year or so, my husband and I have noticed that my dad's hearing has been going downhill. It first started when we were travelling with him and mom. He kept asking us to repeat what we were saying. At first I thought he was just tired and cranky; after all, he is 77 years old. Then, I called him one afternoon and heard the TV blasting in the background. It was so loud that I thought mom must have some of her girlfriends over for a game of bridge!

## A stubborn position

I knew I had to do something about my father's hearing, so I invited mom over

for tea to discuss the issue. She said that she had tried to push him to see an audiologist, but dad was adamant that nothing was wrong with his hearing and that everybody "should just leave well enough alone." Although I sort of understood his attitude, I felt it was not acceptable. After all, I thought, he ought to think about his safety. What would happen if he couldn't hear another car honking when he's driving?

## What a difference

Mom and I decided the only thing we could do was to keep nagging him until he finally went to the doctor. About two months ago, he was fitted for hearing

aids at a hearing centre. Boy, what a big difference! We no longer have to repeat everything we say, the TV is at a more acceptable level (thus saving mom's hearing) and he seems much happier and more social.

## Overcoming embarrassment

Dad recently admitted why he was so reluctant to go for a hearing test: he didn't want other people to see that he had "something wrong with him." He was surprised to learn that modern hearing aids are now so small that they're only visible when looking directly into the ears. ☀️

"The only source of knowledge is experience."

Albert Einstein

# A place to call home

By Bea Sanford

When aunt Rita began to show signs of frailty, I knew she couldn't live alone anymore. Her husband, my uncle Bennie, passed away two years ago and aunt Rita had no family here in Canada other than me. I decided it would be best for her to move into a senior's home, but once she got

there, she called me frequently to complain about the staff as well as other residents.

## Missing home

At first, I thought she was calling only because she was in a transition stage and missed home, yet her phone calls continued for several months. I spoke with the home's staff, who said that aunt Rita did not socialize well with others and even tried to leave, saying she wanted to go home. I knew that some people take longer than others to adjust to a new home, and

I hoped that she would feel comfortable in her new surroundings sooner or later.

After a year, aunt Rita showed no signs of improvement. I knew she wasn't truly happy, so I decided it was time for a change. My husband and I renovated our basement into a little apartment for my aunt and hired a full-time caregiver to help her. Now aunt Rita can visit or come for dinner with the whole family whenever she wants to. I can already see that her mood has improved, and I feel much better knowing that she is comfortable in her own place.

I always tell new caregivers that caring for seniors isn't so tricky; you just need to remember that they're just as sensitive as we are. I'm glad I could give my aunt Rita a choice that she's comfortable with. ☀️

