



# Sound Familiar?

BY ROBIN R. RINKE

I found her door unlocked when I arrived. When I entered the door, Missy, her Siamese cat, greeted me with a very loud almost aggressive Meow.

"Well, hello, Missy! I pushed the door open with my tennis shoe as my arms were full of groceries.

Mom called out from the living room, "Who is it?"

I shouted back as I put the small bag of groceries down on the kitchen counter, "It's me, Mom...Linda."

She shouted back, "Who?"

I came around the corner, "Hi Mom, I'm here with your groceries."

"Oh, hi honey. I saw Missy run for the door - I figured someone was here."

I bent over and kissed her forehead. She patted my cheek like she has done since I was her little girl. There is so much love expressed in that little gesture. I made a mental note to cherish that moment.


"Did you know you forgot to lock your door again?" I grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze.

Mom looked at me with a puzzled look. "Oh, for Pete's sake. I swear I did that last night."

Another alarm went off inside my heart. Here she was again going all night long with an unlocked door. I know she can't help it, but her memory is not keeping her safe. I just went over this very thing with her two weeks ago. As backup, I also had Jimmy, my brother, call her and back me up on the "it's very important to read your notes in the morning and at night to make sure you do everything on the list" speech. Apparently our foolproof method of post-it notes is not working.

I smiled at her. Her blue eyes were tired, but still beautiful as ever. Dad used to call her his Movie Star. But it is and always was a deeper beauty than just her stunning looks. She carried a beauty of character.

"I brought you some chocolate milk, Lorna Doones, fresh fruit, cottage cheese and those Hard Tack crackers you love." I opened up the window shades to let the sunlight in. Another thing on her morning list she forgot to do.



"It's a beautiful day out today Mom. Would you like to have some coffee or tea out on the patio with me and open up those Lorna Doones?" She loves those cookies.

"Oh, not today. I'm a bit tired. Just come sit by me and tell me what is new." She patted the arm of the sofa next to her chair.

Missy jumped up on the sofa and began meowing like a wild cat.

"My goodness Missy, you sure have a lot to say today." Then it hit me, she was probably hungry and letting me know. Another thing on mom's morning and night list of things to do.

"Mom, did you feed Missy today?" I asked as I got up to feed her knowing she did not manage to get to that task. Missy followed me into the kitchen like a shadow.

Mom said, "Oh, I think so. I don't remember."

"Well, I'll just check and see." I buy the cans of food for Missy weekly, when I looked in the pantry only a few cans were gone from the supply I brought over five days ago. I thought, oh poor Missy. You have missed a few meals this week! I made a mental note to check her litter box also.

I opened a can for Missy, and she ate like a wild tiger that just captured a gazelle on the Serengeti. Poor baby. I popped another one open. I swear that cat smiles.

Dad passed away five year ago. He was her rock and kept up with everything in the house and bills. Since he passed Jimmy and I share the responsibilities, but we both work full-time, so it gets to be a lot.

She was diagnosed with Alzheimer's six months ago and back then was in the beginning stages and still in that grey area. When we received the diagnosis, we realized that we had been seeing the signs for quite some time. But we didn't want to see the signs or talk about them. But now the grey area was getting darker rather quickly. I will need to call Jimmy tonight.

Jimmy and I have noticed a considerable shift in moms cognitive decline over the last two months. We have been kicking the can on making a decision on when and where to bring mom so that she would be safe and happy and still feel a bit independent.

It just seemed so overwhelming. I didn't expect this to be so emotional.

We did hire Maria to come 3 times a week in between my visits to check up on her and do housekeeping and laundry. She was a good companion for Mom, but that was only during the day. It really makes me wonder what is happening at night when no one is with her. Finding the door unlocked has happened two times now and I can no longer ignore it.

Now, it was a matter of her safety that concerned me.

I put on a kettle for some tea, fed Missy and opened up the Lorna Doones. I shoved two in my mouth for comfort.

"Just making us some tea Mom, I'll be done in a minute."

I grabbed the Ginger tea bags from the canister and the Manuka Honey. Standing there in Mom and Dad's home I felt tears well up in my eyes. Seems so final to move her out of her

home...I knew this was going to be hard on all of us. Jimmy and I had promised Dad that we would take care of her. I almost think now that Dad had known she was showing some signs of dementia. He asked us to make sure she was happy and safe. How do I do that with my career, family, commitments. But I need to keep my promise.

Mom and I finished our tea and chatted about the kids, my job and her sister Betty (who passed away a decade ago). Yet here we are talking about her like she was visiting last weekend. Mom She looked like she needed a nap, it was almost 11 in the morning, but she always like a little snooze before lunch.

I got her settled in her bed and headed to the kitchen to prepare lunch for us. Missy snuggled up beside her. I am now Missy's superhero with a can opener.

I used the time to tidy up and then made tuna salad for lunch and washed the few dishes that were in the sink. Mom used to keep such a clean and tidy kitchen. It is now needing a little love and attention in the groves and corners.

I could hear her stirring in the bedroom and Missy meowing to alert me she was up.

With the hand towel in my hands, I went into her bedroom, "Well, that was a short nap!"

"Oh, goodness, I need to use the restroom." She began edging her way out of the bed.

Mom was always a quiet woman with wonderful taste in clothes and home décor. She had many friends and was busy on most days of the week with charity work and lunch with her friends.

She slowed down after Dad's death, but never really was the same. It left her with a big hole in her heart. They had been together for almost 65 years.

We watched her decline and become isolated. Her friends were passing away or moving away to be closer to family. Her life changed rather quickly in less than five years. Now with the diagnosis we knew we only had a few more years left with her.

The rest of my time with her was chatting about the birds that came to her bird feeder and the new young family that just moved in next door. She really enjoyed watching their children play.

When I left, I locked the door behind me and was in a melancholy mood.

That night after dinner I called Jimmy.

"Jimmy, we need to find a place for Mom." I sighed and told him about Missy and the unlocked door.

Jimmy said, "Well, it's now a matter of safety regardless of our guilt."

I took a sip of my wine. "I'll begin researching tomorrow after work. There are a few memory care and assisted living communities right in between the both of us."

"Sounds good. I will contact Jack and let him know what is happening." Jack was dad's trusted adviser and handled their financial affairs.

Touring communities was interesting. I tried to imagine Mom living there as I walked through and observed. Each of them did say that they would need to do an assessment of Mom's cognitive ability to determine if she was ready for Memory Care or if assisted living would be appropriate for now. I was thankful for the information they gave me. It was eye opening. Not only the price, but the differences in each community.

I called Jimmy and gave him the information I collected. We agreed on two of them that were in her budget, but also the two that I had good feelings about when I toured. I have learned one thing in life is to trust your gut.

I set up a second round of tours for Jimmy and I at the two we felt most fit our Mothers best interest, budget and our needs as her children.

After both tours we had lunch together and discussed our thoughts.

"I like the fact that they have programming that meets the needs and desires of the resident." I was referring to the community that we toured first.

Jimmy agreed. "And, they have an APP for families to see what Mom is up to on a daily basis." He took a bit of his BLT.

"Use your napkin." I laughed at him.

Jimmy laughed, "Now, you're sounding like Mom."



We used a few guidelines to make our final decision:

- **Friendly staff**
- **Trust of the management**
- **The “Good” feeling when we toured**
- **Met Mom’s budget**
- **Safety**
- **Programming that will help her get out of her chair and busy doing something**

With those in mind we selected the community that fit our list.

I am not going to say it was easy physically or mentally moving Mom, but both Jimmy and I have more peace of mind knowing she is safe and cared for 24/7.

We hired a company to help with the estate sale and the moving of her favorite things to her new apartment. Her new space is just the perfect size for her. That helped tremendously.

What I have found is when I visit Mother now, it is no longer a feeling of guilt or fear, but pure daughter love. I’ve even started patting her cheek like she has done to me since I was her little girl. She has settled in nicely. It took a good month for her to feel adjusted, but she has made friends and she really enjoys the activities.

Jimmy and I had a conversation the other day about promising Dad that we would take care of her. We decided that we ARE taking care of her. We are taking care of her safety, health, and happiness. It just looks a little different than what others might call “taking care of her”.

Missy lives with me now and I bring her to visit. They both enjoy seeing one another.

Kicking the can with “what to do with Mother” was ok for a bit, I think a lot of adult children go through this emotion. But waiting until a crisis happens is what we did not want to do. We are so grateful that we made this decision before we were forced to make a decision.

