



Lillian Smoller, at eighty-five, has Alzheimer's disease. She is able to let her family know what is happening to her, and it is terrifying. Her husband, Louis, and her son, Ted, live with her in a seven-room apartment in Brooklyn, New York. Her daughter, Arlene, tells her story.

Mom is eighty-six years old and is in the third stage of Alzheimer's disease. I first recognized a change in Mom about ten years ago when she became emotionally volatile. My dilemma is: How much responsibility do I have for Mom's care while maintaining my own family life?

I am a fifty-two-year-old married woman raising three teenage boys. My career is in clinical psychology, and I have a Ph.D. in gerontology. I seem to be the logical one to coordinate her care, since I am her only daughter and have the knowledge of Alzheimer's disease. But I left my parents' home in Brooklyn, New York, long ago and now live in Colorado. How do I manage Mom's care long distance?

Mom's role in life has always been that of the caretaker. As a young girl in Poland, she took care of her two younger brothers while her mother worked to support the family. Mom married at seventeen after immigrating to New York. Shortly after her marriage, she felt that she had made a mistake, because my father had a temper that frightened her. Never working outside the home, however, she was economically dependent on Dad.

Her focus in life was being a mother and great *balabosta* (Yiddish for number one homemaker). The standing joke was for me to wear sunglasses when walking into Mom's sparkling clean home. Ac-



ording to her family, she made the best stuffed cabbage, chicken soup, and coleslaw in Brooklyn.

I was the youngest of the three children, having two older brothers. My brother Marty was twelve, and Teddy was seven years old when I was born. My mother's first child was a girl, who died of polio. After my second brother was born, the doctor told her not to have any more children, since she had a heart murmur and had had a very difficult pregnancy and delivery. Later, however, she wanted to try for a girl. She continued to grieve for her first child and wanted to fill the loss.

I was the much-loved daughter. I modeled myself after Mom and loved her with all my heart. I was her confidant and listened to the hurt and sadness of her unfulfilled relationship with my dad. She told me to get an education and have my career established before marriage so that I would not repeat her mistakes. Her dreams were my dreams. Her hurts were my hurts. I sided with her about my dad until I was nineteen years old.

Then came the years of search for my identity in California. I chose to follow Mom's directions and finished my Ph.D. in psychology and then got married. I didn't fulfill the expectations of marrying a Jew and living close to my family of origin. Those years were difficult.

Then, nine years ago, I was shocked when Mom became

