

Wake-Up Call

Category: Getting the News

written by Jenni Levy | January 15, 2017

After my father died, I made sure I spoke with my mother every day. Dad's death was sudden, if not entirely surprising, and there were a lot of logistical details to sort out. Mom, at 71, was living alone for the first time in her life. She wasn't sleeping well. She was anxious. She didn't understand all the paperwork that flooded into the house. I wasn't surprised that she forgot things; she was overwhelmed with grief. And she'd never been good with technology; when she decided the phones in the house weren't working and replaced them for the third time in a year, we just rolled our eyes. I brushed off suggestions from my brother that she might actually have a problem with her memory. *Of course not. She's just tired, anxious and grief-stricken.*

The calls got shorter, and I was usually multi-tasking. I would empty the dishwasher, fold the laundry, sort the mail. So I wasn't really paying attention when she called and said "The doctor gave me a new prescription, and I don't know if I should take it." I replied, automatically, "What is it? Go get the bottle." She put the phone down and came back a minute later: "I don't think I can pronounce it. It's d-o-n-e-p-e-z-i-l."

My hands kept folding laundry while my brain came to a shuddering halt. For a second or two, I couldn't remember what donepezil was – and then it came back to me. I dropped the laundry. I sat down, hard, on whatever was nearby. My voice was shaking as I asked my mother what she remembered of the appointment, and she told me that she had asked her doctor about memory loss and the doctor asked her a bunch of questions "about the day and date and the President and some things I don't remember. And then she said I had Alzheimer's, but it's not serious. She thinks this will help."

In that moment, I knew what the future would hold.

Jenni Levy

Allentown, Pennsylvania