

# Mom

Category: COVID-19

written by Betsy Kates | April 6, 2020

My mom is ninety-six years old. She lives in a wonderful assisted living facility, and is mostly blind and incontinent. She has lost most of her motor skills, uses a wheelchair and suffers from dementia.

Mom was once as sharp as a tack and a force to be reckoned with. Despite her dementia, she is still that. Each day in my heart, I bow down to the wonderful aides who treat her with infinite patience, humor and gentle kindness.

Two nights ago I received an email telling all residents and families that four residents had tested positive for COVID-19.

I last saw my mom almost a month ago. I had been planning to visit the next day, when we were told that the facility was on quarantine effective immediately. No visitors in and no one out. Then, about a week ago, we were told that someone on her dementia care floor had respiratory symptoms, so all residents were confined to their rooms.

Alone.

It is difficult to imagine what kind of special living hell that is.

Mom wants to know when her court date will be, because she is "still incarcerated." She cannot enjoy TV, can't listen to books on tape because she can't follow a story as she once loved to do.

She becomes agitated, she screams and cries, and the only thing that will settle her is the promise of a call to me. She cannot place or receive a phone call without assistance. When I was finally able to speak to her today, she told me she was frightened because suddenly she can't stand, walk or see. (It's been more than two years since she could do any of those.) She does not understand coronavirus or its context at all. She is petrified of being left alone.

There is only one thing my mom wants, and that is to see me.

I have tried to get information about what protocol might happen should she fall ill. I suspect the facility is short-staffed and management is way too busy changing Depends, serving meals and soothing residents to answer my emails and voicemails. I suspect staff is terrified. Two days ago four cases. Today, how many? How close to my mom? Without information there is no telling. The unknowing clutches my chest.

And what will happen if my ninety-six year-old mom falls ill? Where will they take her? Can I see her, be by her side? I know the answer is "no." FaceTime is completely meaningless to her. That would be no way for me to say goodbye

to her, as I know it has been an impossible substitute for others before me. Her only comfort would be my hand.

What I hope for her if she does fall ill is illegal and unspeakable.

Never did I imagine that the shadow of death would loom so close, or that my mother would face such a dire situation.

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