

Dad's Final Years

By Patrica Choi

My parents, Ernest and Rosaline Souza, had been married 66 years when mom passed. They were always a cute couple. Mom was fortunate to always have a good memory but her body grew weak with age. Dad was always a strong man whose memory faded over time. I used to tease them and say, "With mom's memory and dad's strength, you guys make a whole person."

Mom was fortunate to always have a good memory but her body grew weak with age. Dad was always a strong man whose memory faded over time. I used to tease them and say, "With mom's memory and dad's strength, you guys make a whole person." Mom helped dad to drive by giving directions. Dad kept the house clean by pushing the vacuum and so it went until mom died. Suddenly, dad was alone for the first time ever! Dad lived in Hawaii on a 20+ acre property in the Big Island. My brother helped dad until it became too difficult for him to live by himself. We brought dad to California to live with us in 2009.

Dad remained the kindest, sweetest and most lovable dad until he died. It wasn't always easy taking care of dad as his memory slipped away a little more each day. There were days of frustration on my part when dad claimed he took a shower and I knew he did not. Or when he had the same old dirty clothes on when

the clean clothes I laid out for him were left untouched.

There were mornings when I came downstairs and saw dad with a glass of wine because he did not realize it was only 10:30 a.m. I tried to ignore his confusion and deterioration. After all, dad was my rock—he took care of me. Finally, as difficult as it was, I had to accept that our roles had reversed.

I had become the caregiver.

Dad loved old western movies and spent a great deal of his day watching the same movies over and over but that was fine as the story was always new to him. He loved doing things with us. When we took dad out, he was always happy. Upon our return without fail, he'd say, "I had a good day. Thank you for the outing."





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Finally after two years with us, dad asked to go home to Hawaii. We all knew dad's time was nearing the end. With the help of dad's doctor, we got the necessary oxygen for the plane ride. Everyone helped dad prepare for his final journey home.

My husband flew home with dad. Needless to say, my husband was mentally prepared for the unthinkable should dad expire during the flight. Fortunately for them, dad made it home safely.

My brother took charge of dad's care. Dad's first week home was excellent; family and friends came to pay their respects and say good-bye. I flew to Hawaii to be with dad for his final two weeks.

The day before dad passed, as I sat holding his hand, he lifted my hand to his lips and kissed it. Then he raised his hands into the air and looked off into the corner of the bedroom that he had shared with mom and smiled.

How it is that something so sad can be so beautiful?

I asked him what he saw and he told me he saw mom waiting for him. Although it was difficult to let dad go, I realized that it would be alright as dad looked so happy to be joining mom. He died the next day surrounded by his family.

I often ask myself, "How it is that something so sad can be so beautiful?"

Editor's Note: I want to thank everyone who submitted a story for our first, annual "Caregivers Writing Contest" about caring for a loved one with dementia. "Dad Final Years" by **Patricia Choi** was judged the "best story" by ActiveOver50 media. Top five winners receive a TheraBaby® doll from TheraBabyCare.com. Winners: **Anand Jagannathan**, "Lost In the Memory Lane;" **Janet Seamons**, "Lifetime of Caregiving;" **Jeannie Pham**, "Grandmother's War Torn Past;" and **JoAnne Yee**, "Remember Me."

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