



## Family Caregivers of British Columbia

### The Great Shopping Cart Caper

by Barbara Warman

Most of us who are family caregivers would call this a thankless job. My mother, who is blind, believes that in my heart of hearts, I really want to go grocery shopping with her, not with my husband and certainly not by myself. The idea!

But within this thankless job there are moments of pure pleasure, if you allow yourself to see them. Taking confused aunty to Safeway was always an exhausting but oddly stimulating afternoon. She would lose her cart and take someone else's. I would find her wandering the soup aisle, her favourite place, and notice a large salmon and three turnips in her cart.

"Joan, is this your salmon?" I would ask.

"What salmon?"

"This 14 pound salmon right next to the turnips."

"Someone stole my buggy," she would cry out, and the search would begin for a puzzled shopper wondering what happened to her fish and why it was replaced with three hand picked sticks of celery. We would transfer the cans of soup from one buggy to another and carry on until I next took my eyes off Joan and she resorted again to the "Great Shopping Cart Caper."

Mother would always be with us, too, and it became my greatest wish that I could have a leash for both of them. Mom would be wandering along peering closely at the Kotex boxes wondering if they were cereal, Joan was in the soup aisle and I was looking for both of them.

The upside? When Joan moved out of her house we had enough soup to keep the Mustard Seed going for a week and enough Kotex to insulate our wall.

We would then go to lunch where Joan would say in her loud voice, "There are a lot of fat people in here today, aren't there, Barb. Would you like to taste my soup? And what will I do with that salmon?"

# Cranky vs. Dusty

By Roberta Bedard

I've finally found a solution to my embarrassment and guilt over my inability to maintain my housekeeping standards while being a loving wife, mother, companion, nurse, chef, physiotherapist and all around caregiver to my husband. While staying relatively sane and maintaining some kind of life for myself.

I've given up. Trying to maintain my standards, that is. What a relief!

I came to my decision after I heard myself snapping at Ray. "I've just cleaned that!!!" when he put a dirty spoon down **right on the counter**. The poor man stood there, looking ashamed of himself. Thinking he had just committed a terrible deed. He shuffled dejectedly out of the kitchen, sat down on the couch, stared straight ahead and stayed out of trouble.

And my heart broke.

This is not what I want for us. Neither for him nor for me. "But I can't do it all!" I told myself, and proceeded to have a severe attack of the "poor me" syndrome. I wept in my guilt and frustration. "I can't do this."

Luckily, I am a practical person, even when I'm feeling terrible. What was it I couldn't do, exactly? I was happy and content doing everything that needed to be done to be a good wife and caregiver to Ray. I enjoyed my volunteer work, and the occasional Rotary meeting. I loved having lunch and giggling with a girlfriend. I could manage all these things as well as napping every day. The only thing that got in the way was the housework.

"So," I asked myself. "Why can't I give up most of the housework?" Other than what the neighbours would think, would it really matter if my windows sparkled? All I really needed to do was to lower my standard to just above what was required to keep the Board of Health away, which only means sanitary and safe. Which doesn't even attempt perfect. Which doesn't even care, really, about neat. The clutter need only be kept within reasonable bounds. I don't always have to be ready for "company."

This decision came hard. I had the sort of mother who could spot a thread on the carpet at twenty paces; who insisted that not only must work be done well; it must be seen to be done well. I'm the type of person who schedules housekeeping chores into my Microsoft Outlook, with reminders for daily, weekly, monthly and yearly duties. If these chores are done regularly and well, keeping a small condo up to snuff is relatively easy.

BUT I don't like housework. I like a shiny house, but I was born to have maids (notice the plural – it would take two) who would do the work for me. Housework makes me snappy and cranky, which is not a good thing to be when your beloved has Alzheimer's. Hence the decision.

Now we hold hands and watch television while unsorted, un-ironed clothes are piled on a chair. Now my carpet keeps its spots. Forget writing my name in the dust, I could build little forts. But I now have time to cook great dinners, searching through my cookbooks for variety. I don't rush through eye care and foot care duties. I have the time to just sit and listen, and appreciate what a terrific guy I'm married to. Alzheimer's or no Alzheimer's. My husband is smiling more, as am I. As I have written earlier, I even have time for a belly laugh now and again.

The ghost of my mother looks disapprovingly over my shoulder. I still cringe internally when the doorbell rings unexpectedly. I am not able to get over my upbringing enough not to be embarrassed, or feel occasionally like a failure at wifehood because I can't do everything. But I've made my choice.

Cranky? Dusty? If that's the choice, and for me it is, then it makes itself. Life's too short to keep chasing dirt as my main mission.

*From the "Alberta Caregivee" Volume 1, Issue 1*