

From Caregiver to Registered Nurse: How Caregiving Shaped My Career



“One, two, three, pull!” My friends and I sang as we tried lifting my mom up from the ground at Disneyland. She was overheated and there wasn’t a bench nearby, so she thought it would be a good idea to sit on the floor. The problem was, she didn’t think of her escape plan for when she was ready to get up. “I’m stuck!” she exclaimed, “My legs are locked!” We waited a few more minutes and tried again. Success! We finally pulled her up and continued our day. While my friends and their parents were frolicking around Disneyland, I was watching my mom like a hawk.

“Pick up your feet! Stand up straight! Look in front of you!” was my mantra to my mom whenever we were walking anywhere, but especially on sidewalks with uneven surfaces. When I could see my mom getting fatigued, I would say “I know you’re tired, but you know if you drag your feet, you trip and fall.” She would usually reply with a “Yeah, yeah Sloane I know.” or a typical “Shut up!” in the most loving way possible.

My mom was stubborn and always wanted to push herself to her physical limits. I would stand on her right side as we walked and she would grab my left arm, using it as a crutch. During our walks I would focus on her feet and the surfaces in front of us, always anticipating what was to come. “Please, let’s take a break.” I would plead with her, noticing her feet dragging more and more. Sometimes she would listen, other times she would get frustrated and say she was fine. On her worst days, she would push too hard, trip, and fall.

I gave her the utmost respect for trying to stay active while MS took over, but I always wished that she would take my advice into consideration. I hated seeing the consequences of her overworking herself. Whether that was her falling to the floor and having to call an ambulance or having to stay seated on a bench for an extended period until she could get up, it was always hard for me to see her struggle. But I was only a child, and she was the adult, so I had to obey by her rules.

Fast forward to 2023 and I am now working as a registered nurse doing similar caregiving that I did with my mom as a child. I walk with my patients in the halls of the ICU and repeat the same mantra I told my mom “Pick up your feet! Stand up straight! Look in front of you!” When caregivers come in to see their loved ones, I always check in with them to see how they are doing. I resonate with the mindset of putting others’ needs before my own because I always put my mom first, believing that I would be fine if she was okay. **What I’ve learned over the years is that to be a great caregiver, you must take care of yourself first.** I’ve begun implementing this in my own care as a nurse, allowing myself to take breaks without guilt and taking mental health days to reboot and practice self-care.

My mom’s stubbornness still pushes her forward today. Although her MS has progressed and she now uses a wheelchair, she still goes to physical therapy twice a week to improve her strength. She may never walk again, but I can still point her in the right direction while she maneuvers her wheelchair, “Watch that corner!”, “Slow down!”, or my favorite at my brothers’ wedding “Don’t back up that wheelchair into the pool!” Her response? “Oh, shut up Sloane!”

In the most loving way possible.

Editor’s Note: Children sometimes assume major household and personal care responsibilities when a parent has disability due to MS. [**Read the Society’s “A Guide for Support Partners” brochure.**](#)