

Transcription

Media File Name: Aliza Rothenberg Interview Excerpt.aac

Media File ID: 2985144

Media Duration: 8:21

Order Number: 2003195

Date Ordered: 2021-03-25



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I retired from my job in the summer of 2019. So, once I retired and then moved her, I tried to be with her every day around the mealtime so that I could feed her and take the burden off the staff. And also, it gave us some level of interaction. So, the last time I was with her was with her...sorry...was March 12th of last year, and we didn't know the facility was coming to shut down. You know, I came March 13th, a little bit later in the day, because I had been running some errands for her, because I sort of felt like the facility probably will shut down, but they haven't told us yet.

So, I wanted to make sure that she had enough of, like, spring clothes as the weather was getting better. You know, and I came over there the afternoon of the 13th, a little after 4 and got to the front entryway and the person at the desk said, "We just shut down 10 minutes ago." So, there was no, like, "I'm not going to be able to see you because of COVID," not that she would have understood COVID.

So, they were good about doing FaceTime visits. So, I would talk to her, in the beginning, it was more often, but as COVID progressed and the demands on the staff changed, it got to be about twice a week. So, I would have these conversations, which I refer to really as 10-minute soliloquies. Because of the dementia, she really didn't understand any of it. I have a not-great singing voice. She had a worse voice. So that was sort of a joke between us, but I would sing certain songs to her that I thought might resonate. My mother was a Jewish educator her whole life.

So, you know, I would sometimes try and sing Hebrew songs or, you know, she used to sing, I don't know if you're familiar with the, I love you, "A Bushel and a Peck" song from Guys and Dolls, I think. And she used to sing that to us as kids. So, I would sing that to her. I had started even when I was there because of the uncertainty around, you know, who knows what's going to happen next? I would do the shama [SP] with her every time I was with her.

So, I would do that on the phone but she really didn't understand FaceTime. I mean, you know, the staff was great about holding the iPad in front of her, but I don't know that she knew me, and I don't know that she realized where the voice was coming from. So, my case, you know, it's been, like, 10 years of prolonged mourning. Over the summer, we did have some outdoor visits when the stats were really low.

But again, I was sitting at opposite ends of a 6-foot table and masked. And, you know, so I have no idea if my mother had any idea, you know, who is this person talking to her? They did offer window visits at the beginning of COVID, which at that point I opted not to do because I felt she would get more out of the

FaceTime visit where she could actually see me. After they had to stop with the outdoor visits, they went back to window visits. So, I did see her a couple of times, but, you know, with somebody with such advanced dementia, it wasn't any sort of quality interaction.

You know, it was more my ability to put eyes on her directly as opposed to, you know, through a FaceTime call. But I couldn't touch her. I couldn't hug her. I couldn't give her a kiss, or any of that stuff. So, she may, and for all I know, you know, she thought we abandoned her because she didn't understand COVID. You know, and I would explain it to her, but I have no idea if she understood any of it. You know, with dementia, you have no idea what's getting through them. And I did have a FaceTime call with her that Friday.

And, you know, I said to her in the call, "You have COVID, but you got to fight this because I want to see you again." And, you know, I figured once I got vaccinated, which hasn't happened yet, they might be opening things up and allowing us to come back and see her. So, you know, it's not that she understood anything, but I did say that to her as part of the call. And that was the last time I talked to her.

You know, we did our normal songs and shama and that kind of thing. The chaplain had gone in to see her around 10:00 in the morning and I guess he didn't like what he saw. And he had called over to the hospice and said, "You need to get the nurse here sooner rather than later." And by the time she got there, my mother had died. So, there was no goodbye. I mean, that's the thing that really hurts the most is that there was just no final goodbye.

And, you know, my one brother lives in New Jersey and the other one lives in Las Vegas, and they had each gotten COVID tests. You know, we all got our tests [inaudible 00:05:50] with it if it came to that they had the option of coming, but, you know, the end happened so quickly. There was no goodbye. And, you know, I suppose, I mean, I did have the option of going over to the funeral parlor to see her body if I'd wanted to.

I did not do that because to me that was not my mother. You know, it's like the thing that hurts is that she was alone at the end. And, you know, at least if one of us had been there to hold her hand or whatever because she, you know, she might not respond verbally but she was aware of her surroundings. Like, when I would have phone calls with her and she wouldn't be paying attention or doze off, I would say to the staff person, you know, "Rub her shoulder," and whatever, and then she would wake up and respond.

So, you know, here, I mean, the only thing that I guess is a little comforting is that the chaplain had been in with her. He said he had read some Psalms or chanted Psalms to her. So, somebody had been with her close to the end, but, you know, I never thought that my conversation the Friday before would have been the last call I had with her.

We couldn't do any of the normal morning practices. You know, when I grew up, my mother was very prominent in the Baltimore Jewish community. If it had been a normal funeral at Levinsons, the big room probably would have been packed. You know, because she was an educator, she taught kids, she taught adults. She also ran a [inaudible 00:07:41] shop.

And so, she had all these contacts with people who came to her to buy things. We did a memorial service on Zoom, and we had Zoom Shiva Minyans, and Zoom Shiva hours, you know, but it's just not the same. It's not the same as being able to give somebody a hug or having that personal support. I feel absolutely no guilt because, I mean, my mother and I were incredibly close, and I always had her best interest at heart. So, you know, sadness, but no guilt.