

## Each Step of the Way

My mother was always so strong and independent; I simply was not prepared for the changes when I returned home last summer. She sat in her rocking chair, with uncharacteristic stains on her clothes, dishes piled in the sink, and more dirty dishes found in the cupboard. The refrigerator was filled with spoiled food and the kitchen table was a mess of papers, mail, and bills. I felt so guilty. She had sounded so normal on the telephone, always leading me to believe that she was just fine, but she wasn't fine. She had dementia.

We went to the doctor together and discovered she hadn't seen him in over a year. She wasn't taking her medication properly and she was having difficulty remembering daily events. It was the doctor that told us about the Older Adults Program through CMHA, Fort Frances Branch and made the referral.

Our worker provided an assessment to the doctor and then helped us to understand the diagnosis. She was patient and helped my mother make changes that made a difference in the quality of her life and in our relationship. Although initially resistant, my mother accepted help in her home to assist her with meals, housekeeping, and personal care. Our worker told us about blister packs, day programs, and Lifeline services. But most importantly, she listened. She listened to my frustration, my guilt, and my anger at this disease. She helped me to begin to appreciate everyday with my mother. Instead of focussing on everything that I was losing, I began to see the beauty of being in each moment.

My mom isn't going to get better. Her dementia is going to get worse and someday she won't be able to live in her own home or make her own decisions. But I feel better knowing that we have the support of the Older Adults Program, each step of the way.