

God Bless Middle-Aged Daughters

By

Ellen Shriner

As I walk into the skilled nursing center where Mom is rehabilitating, I see other women like myself. On the street, we often go unnoticed although we're attractive. We dress well, but in age-appropriate clothes. No six-inch heels or short skirts. We may carry 10 to 20 extra pounds, but we're fit, trim, and solid enough to carry the weight of the world.

On our lunch hours, after work, or during visits from other cities, we care for our failing mothers and fathers. We bring them flowering plants, hard candy, clean socks, and good cheer. We comb their hair and smooth hand cream on their veiny hands and swollen feet.

Once they managed demanding jobs or their family's busy schedule, kept track of birthdays, recipes and grocery lists, but now they can't remember what you told them a few minutes ago, so we answer the same questions again and again. The times they emerge from the twilight, smile and say, "Oh honey, I wish you could always be here," are heartbreaking treasure.

As we go back to the office, drive home, or head to the airport, we sigh at the slippage and blink back tears at the losses. Then we put on our game face because somebody else needs us. We keep moving—plan the marketing campaign, schedule the meeting, throw in a load of wash, or make a decent dinner.

We are careworn. Our lives are not glamorous (and never were—we didn't aspire to that). We don't expect much. We can be made happy with so little—a compliment when we don't feel sexy or a hug from a kid who often seems oblivious.

We're the sensible, competent women who make it all happen.