

Care giving across the miles: one woman's experience

When Susan Sommers's mother started showing signs of Alzheimer's disease, she was living more than half a continent away, across an international border. Susan, in Toronto, quickly realized that helping care for her mother in California would add a whole new dimension to their relationship.

"Every time I went to California, it was a series of appointments. It wasn't visiting anymore," recalls Susan, marketing coordinator for the Alzheimer Society of Toronto. "I went there to put out fires, take her to the doctor, buy a shower chair or pick up medication."

While she counts herself lucky that her brother -- capable and compassionate -- lived close to their mother, she says she "kept wanting to run out there all the time."



"I'd be on the phone with her and she'd say, 'Yes, I'm taking my pills right now.' Well, you just hope that's true," says Susan, whose mother died in early 2009.

Supportive family, employer made all the difference

As it was, Susan visited roughly three times a year, staying 10 days at a time. A couple of times, when her mother was hospitalized, she stayed for a month.

"One of the reasons I could manage it was that I was working for the Alzheimer Society. If anyone understood, people at the Society did," she says.

Her husband, who had always been close to his mother-in-law, was also supportive of Susan's frequent absences, as were her two grown daughters.

Asking for local help

At home, Susan spent hours on the internet researching local groups that might offer her mother help while she lived at home, and later when she went into residential care.

While in California, Susan made friends with the family of those with Alzheimer's disease in care with her mother. She relied on them to give her insight into how her mother was doing, independent of staff.

"There is some guilt (being so far away)," admits Susan. "But you have to say, this is the life I have. You have to ask yourself, what would she want? She'd want me to live my life."

For more information about long distance care [check these useful tips](#).