

About 12 years ago, my mom was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Her story started like so many dementia stories do. In the beginning, it was the small things we noticed: Mom was forgetting things, starting to repeat herself and asking questions about things we'd just talked about.

When my mom was first diagnosed, she lived with my father in our family home in the country outside of Farmersville, Texas. As her dementia progressed, my dad became her primary caregiver. My sister lived just down the hill, and she and her husband took it upon themselves to check in on our mom and dad regularly. At first, this worked well.

Then, my dad got cancer. His condition worsened quickly, and he passed away. My sister, who lived nearby, told me and my siblings (there are five of us) that she planned to have mom move into her home. We were grateful for her offer, but we also didn't want her to have to shoulder the burden of caregiving all on her own. We came to an agreement: our mom would move in with our sister, and we'd hire in-home care to supplement what she was providing so she didn't get worn out.



Becoming the Family Alzheimer's Expert

By this point, mom was pretty far advanced in her Alzheimer's. She needed a lot of reminding to do things like brush her teeth and take a shower, and she needed someone to prepare her meals for her. That was when I started getting more involved. I have a long background in healthcare. Before I founded Tender Rose, I worked in healthcare consulting, and it was my job to get up to speed on a variety of different medical conditions in

short periods of time. This became the role I took on among my siblings. I became the Alzheimer's expert in the family, learning absolutely everything I could about the disease and educating my siblings on what we could all do to help mom. While my sister took on the task of hiring the caregivers to help our mom, I took on the task of finding training materials for those caregivers in dementia-specific caregiving techniques.



A Tale of Two Caregivers

At first, we had two different private duty caregivers coming to the house. One of the women was named Pam, and she really connected with my mom. Pam was always looking for ways to improve mom's quality of life. She'd look for things to do that would make mom happy; she'd engage her in activities, like taking walks in the garden and looking at the flowers or paging through old photo albums. She'd engage my mom in conversation or just be present with her. When Pam was on duty, my mom would have a great day. In many ways, Pam became the template for the Memory Care Professionals we now hire for Tender Rose.

The other caregiver was a different story entirely. She viewed herself as what we now call a "sitter". A sitter's job is to essentially make sure the person being cared for is safe, and nothing more. When this caregiver came over, she would sit down in the same room with my mom, but she'd be paying her bills and doing her own thing. She made sure mom didn't wander out of the house or fall and break her hip. She did the bare minimum of keeping mom safe and making sure her basic needs were met. She'd ask mom to tell her when she was hungry so she could make her something to eat or tell her if she was thirsty so she could get her something to drink. That was the extent of her caregiving.

Although she didn't do anything in particular to provoke a reaction, this caregiver irritated my mother. My mom—who was always a nice, polite, gentle and sweet woman—would say, right in front of this caregiver, "Can you tell her to leave?" We could see a clear contrast between the two caregivers: the sitter was keeping her safe, but also contributing to a poor quality of life. Pam, however, always made sure mom had a good day. My mother really looked forward to Pam's visits, and dreaded the sitter's visits.

What I realized through my research into best practices for dealing with Alzheimer's patients and through observing my mom's experiences, was that Pam was intuitively doing what we call person-centered, activity-based care.

That's when it all clicked, and the genesis for the idea that became Tender Rose Dementia Care Specialists was born.

What really made me want to take the leap to start this business was knowing everything I learned about how to take good care of my clients would in turn help me take better care of my mother. I love the idea that I get to spend almost every waking moment learning more about how to improve the quality of life for people with dementia -- as well as the quality of life for their family members.

As my mom approached the end of her life, she spent her last years surrounded by people who knew her, loved her and helped her live with as much joy and meaning in her life as possible. When my mother passed away in 2015, my siblings and I took comfort in knowing we did everything we could to give her the highest quality of life possible.

I started Tender Rose to help families like yours, who are undergoing a difficult journey similar to the challenges my family experienced. Our Memory Care Professionals provide one-on-one dementia care that is consistent, reliable and supportive. They will engage your loved one with the same level of person-centered, activity-based care that Pam provided for my mother. Our hope is that you will have the peace of mind that comes from knowing you have done all you could to give your loved one the highest quality of life possible.