

A carer's ever-changing life: Ambra Sancin

The word carer had hardly entered my vocabulary nine years ago. I'd assisted my mother with many tasks over the years since dad died but had not considered myself anything more than a dutiful daughter.

I'd started looking out for mum after my father's death almost 30 years ago, assisting with financial and legal matters that he'd taken care of. This increased steadily over the years as she became frail and tripled since her stroke almost eight years ago. Luckily, she pulled through without too much physical damage, but the healing process was long and intricate.

My mother had just turned 89 and, apart from numerous ailments affecting her heart, eyes, bones, balance, and brain, she was fine. But the stroke brought with it a new set of challenges: specialists' appointments, home visits by physiotherapists, and - because mum lived alone in the family house - modifications to assist day-to-day living.

Mum's private nature made getting community care assistance difficult, and I thought I'd won big time when I convinced her, after a hefty struggle, to allow a 'stranger' into her house two hours per week to help with chores. But not without mum reminding me that as soon as she was strong enough, she'd manage by herself. But fate had other ideas, with the onset of dementia ruining her plans.

It was a struggle for us both, with mum's body and mind wearing down and my stress levels going up. Added to this, the house needed constant maintenance and the handyman skills I'd gleaned from my father were inadequate. I sought advice about the best way forward from health care professionals and geriatricians. I also needed to look after my own wellbeing, not knowing how I'd manage this new chapter in our lives. As an only child, I'd been a sole carer for so many years and I was physically and mentally exhausted.

Mum entered residential aged care two years ago after a severe viral infection that almost finished her off. But she pulled through and has also survived hip surgery after a fall, a fractured wrist and upper arm and dental procedures.

We muddle along in this new reality and, Covid-9 restrictions aside, I visit her often and we have Zoom calls regularly. It's not a perfect outcome, but at (almost) 98, she's receiving better care than my tired, stressed, and creaky self can give her.