



Toronto: Oct 29 – Story 1

AKI: I was able to see her outside in the summer months or, like, over the window when it was cold. But that's not really caregiving—meeting is not. It's not, you know, enough caregiving, right?

Okay, so, my name is A.L., and my mother has been here since February 2020. Just a month before pandemic started. She was diagnosed as a dementia patient in 2017. And after that, she started moving to retirement home and she was admitted here one month before pandemic started. So, it was very difficult transitioning because after thirty days, lockdown started, and I could see her online quite soon. And after that, we were able to see a bit over the windows. There was a window between, and she was inside and I was outside and we were talking.

With dementia, you don't have the ability to manage your life and I didn't know what was going on in the room. So, my caregiver role is more organizing her room, making sure everything is neat and nice. And back then, you know, PSWs are so busy.

It was very difficult. So, when I first entered the room, I was like, I don't know how to describe my feeling. It was, I can only say, disaster.

The first thirty days, transition suddenly—no physical contact whatsoever. It's shocking, but at the same time, this place did a lot. And also, I think, the Alzheimer's Society of Toronto started calling caregivers: "We're going to organize a support group (virtual). Why don't you join?" So once a month, I had this virtual group to share. That was great. And I do have great relationships with staff members on my mother's floor, so they teach me a lot of things. you know, when I go to support group and somebody is struggling—some similar situation—I can give them, you know, tips. So, we try to help each other. I think I had my social life, somehow, as a caregiver. I was quite active, which did probably help my mental health.

So, last year, I was able to get training through a Japanese non-profit organization in British Columbia. They offered a program called Peer Counselling. And so, I went through the training for one and a half months, twice a week. Certification. And after that, I applied for this volunteer position as a peer mentor. Then, I've been mentoring caregivers.

Yeah, so I'm probably over the top but, you know, I'm trying to do something in the caregiver community.

Staff here are unbelievable. They came up with a lot of creative ideas. And then we tried, you know, understand my mother's situation. One good example is the social worker. He was really helpful. He said, why don't you bring a portable DVD with Japanese CDs or whatever? I don't

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watch Japanese movies, CDs, or whatever, so I didn't have anything. And that was a time, remember, when you couldn't buy non-essential items in the store.

It was difficult. So, I ordered portable DVD online, of course. And then I talked to Japanese organizations. There were four or five people willing to give me DVDs. And the one person was actually, she was actually living in Newmarket. And I live in Mississauga. She actually drove to Mississauga. That's amazing. So, yeah, that was kind. It makes me cry when you think about it. People are connected through COVID.