

SENIOR MOMENTS

Looking after an elderly loved one can be similar to raising a child, except your kid wouldn't accuse you of hiding the car keys. Learn how to handle difficult situations and still keep your cool.

BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY

1 *It's 3 a.m. when your aunt with early-stage dementia calls in a panic. She lives alone but says there are strangers in her house who won't leave. What should you do?*

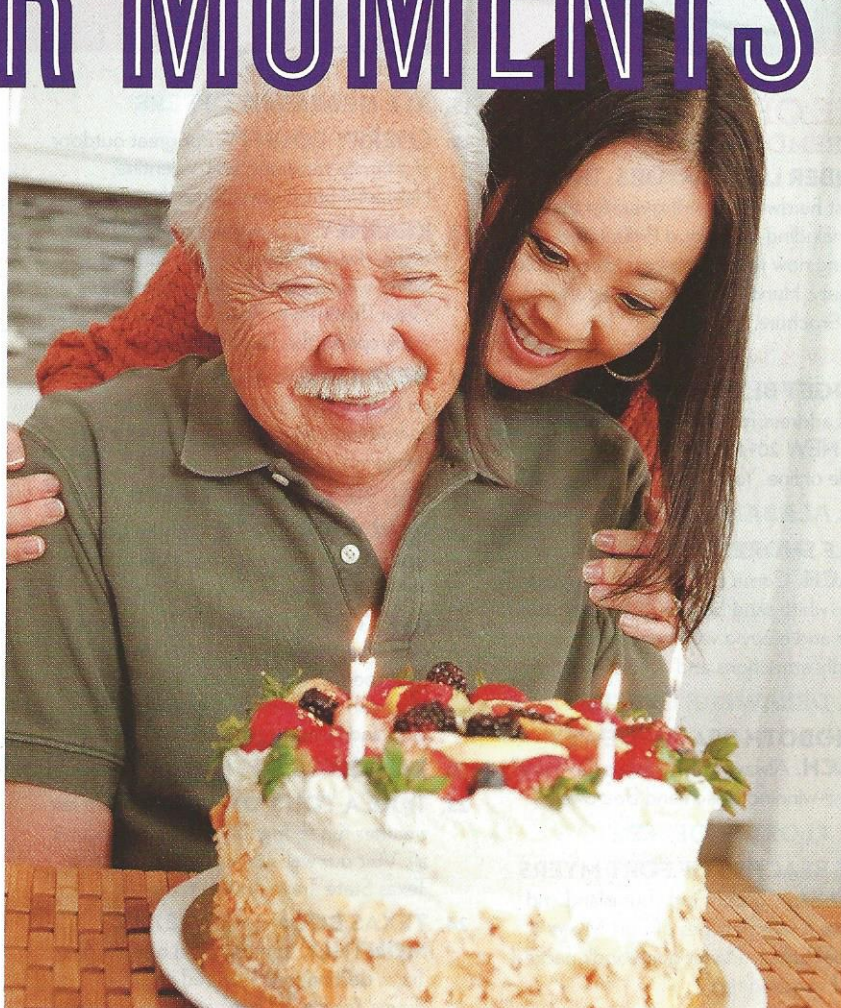
- A) Calmly assure her it's nothing, but promise you'll check her doors and windows in the morning.
- B) Call 911, then drive to her house.
- C) Change the subject so she forgets about the strangers.
- D) Ask her to give the phone to one of them, so you can tell them to leave.

Those "strangers" could be characters from an episode of *Law & Order* your aunt was watching—or actual burglars. "Until you identify a pattern of delusional behavior, always respond as if there is a real problem," says Molly Carpenter, caregiver advocate at Home Instead Senior Care and author of *Confidence to Care*. Moving forward, assess your aunt's house for lighting issues or shadows that might trigger a delusion. And don't spruce up her place by rearranging furniture or pictures. Familiar surroundings will reduce the chance of future 3 a.m. calls.

ANSWER: B

2 *You're putting in long days caring for your dad, who lives across town. Not only are you exhausted, but your husband and kids say they never see you. It's time to:*

- A) Suggest your dad move in to eliminate your drive time.



B) Explain that your dad needs you more right now.

C) Solicit friends for help with household tasks.

D) Have a heart-to-heart with your family about how they can help you reduce your caregiving workload.

"Focus on quality—not quantity—of time when caring for an ailing loved one," suggests Patricia Moon, RN, director of Family Care Services at Virginia Commonwealth University. "That will help you balance your and your family's needs with those of your dad." If family members, friends and church groups are able to lend a hand, set up a caregiving schedule for them with general chores (grocery shopping, mowing the lawn) that allows you time for more personal tasks (bathing, help with eating) and some free time of your own.

ANSWER: C & D

3 *On a recent visit, you notice that your father appears to have lost weight and his refrigerator is nearly empty. You realize you have to:*

A) Gently scold your father for his poor diet choices.

B) Take dad to lunch to share your concern and offer to help him plan meals.

C) Research meal ideas for a single person.

D) Cook a week's worth of dinners for him.

Time to make a reservation at your dad's favorite restaurant. Once your meals arrive, ask if you can accompany him to his next doctor's appointment (if he doesn't have one scheduled, suggest you make one for him) to rule out any medical issues. Medications that suppress appetite, dental

