

So, what's a YURT?

*Our "Short Trip To The End" Became
"A Beautiful Journey To The Beginning"*

In late March 2004, we returned from Canada after speaking for the Alzheimer's Society in New Brunswick. To our surprise we found Mom's (Mildred) health had deteriorated rapidly and dramatically. Decisions needed to be made...very quickly.

In our work (speaker/teachers to family and professional caregivers), we encourage people to make decisions on behalf of loved ones based on individual needs. For those considering 24/7 home care, we say that two questions need answers: ***What am I able to do?*** and ***What am I willing to do?***

Suddenly, we needed answers to our own questions. Our professional lives and our personal lives were now blending in a way we had never imagined or anticipated.

The plan we had in place was for Mom to age in comfort and with dignity in the residential assisted living home where she resided, but she now needed more and different care. We were encouraged to take her to a hospital or move her into a full scale care facility. Neither of those options seemed right for her considering the severity of her dementia. But, what other option was there?

Our journey with Mom and dementia started eleven years earlier when the first signs were noticed. We have been her caregivers all along the way, but never in a full time position.

The turning point came with a thought in the night. The one place that always brought a gleam to Mom's eye was the family farm in rural Ray County, Missouri (close to Excelsior Springs). Mom and Dad raised their grandchildren on this farm...fishing, camping, swimming, and hiking. Warm and wonderful memories have been created on this land in the past thirty years.



During the summer/fall of 2003 we built a **yurt** (a round tent-like structure with wooden lattice walls and a built in sun-dome) at the farm with an adjoining building that has a completely equipped kitchen, bath and bedroom.

Unlike the 8x16 ft. camper Mom and Dad used all those years, we now have a spot that is comfortable and livable.

Why not use this wonderful place to care for Mom?

That answered the question ***What am I able to do?*** Now the question was: ***What am I willing to do?*** Was it a workable option to collapse our lives and care for her 24/7? At first, the thought of it was overwhelming, because our professional lives were moving in the fast lane. To slam on the brakes at this point seemed unthinkable...but was it really?

We decided to include Mom in resolving the mental Ping-Pong match going on in our heads.

Kneeling by her bed, I mused, “Mom I’ve been thinking.” In a fetal position, hands tightly clinched, her eyes darted to mine. “I was thinking maybe we should go to the farm.”

After days of not speaking and barely opening her eyes, she looked intently at me and said, “That would be wonderful.” In that moment the second question was answered. The decision was made.

Now we had to figure out how to get it done...while all the time surrounded by people thinking we had gone completely mad and warning us that her body was so frail she probably wouldn’t survive the transport. With the help of many supporters, we were able to safely move Mom 40 miles to the yurt where all the equipment was in place, awaiting her arrival. Our *short trip to the end* had begun.

We have had the privilege of seeing first hand the outcomes of what we believe to be true about caring for those with dementia. **The 12 S’s of Extraordinary Dementia Care®** is a program we developed long before we began our beautiful journey of caring for Mom on a full time basis. We have had the opportunity to put our material to the test, and found by meeting all of Mom’s basic needs, her condition improved.

At the end of April, most predicted Mom would live very few days. We said our final goodbye four months later on August 27, 2004. She not only survived on the farm...she thrived. The Hospice team agrees that what we witnessed was the power of the human spirit.

We feel even more confident in our work because of the lessons taught to us by my mother as we cared for her and as she responded to peace and comfort.



The lessons we learned from Mildred:

- **The power of the human spirit** to overcome both physical and mental challenges is absolutely mind boggling.
- **The effects of the power of love** defy logic.
- **Giving and caring** can return **moments of PURE JOY** and the delight of **experiencing self-fulfillment**. It is a living example of the work of Dr. Abraham Maslow.
- **Growth can be seen**, if you know what to watch. **People can flourish**, just as plants can flourish, when transplanted into an environment where the variables are right for them.
- **Being authentic and communicating with mutual respect** takes interaction to its highest level.
- **The moment we have is now**. Whether it be a few seconds or a few hours in a day, stopping other activities to enjoy the moment allows all the things above to happen.

This is a grave disease, and although her body was frail, Mom taught us that **dealing with death and the ability to laugh are not mutually exclusive**. Our observation skills have sharpened as we have learned that **growth mostly comes in beautiful, quiet moments** rather than blinding flashes of light. We have learned that communication has many forms, and in the absence of stress, **full sentences do come together**. And, we have been exposed to a new definition of love that has altered our lives.

So, what’s a yurt? In our case, it is the place where *our beautiful journey began* into the final chapter of Mildred Lee Schaedler’s extraordinary life.