In Their Own Words:
Families of Older Adults Who Died
After Being Injured During Resident-to-Resident Incidents in Long-Term Care Homes

Compiled by Eilon Caspi PhD

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Illustrator: Yuval Caspi

Putting a Human Face on
One of the Most Common Sources of Harm in Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Residences

WARNING: Some of the photos in this report contain disturbing content
86-year-old James Acker lived with Alzheimer’s disease

On a Saturday at around 2 a.m., 
a male resident with Alzheimer’s disease entered his bedroom 
and attacked him in his bed while he was asleep.

He suffered head trauma, brain bleed, black eyes, a fat lip, and a swollen, bloody face.

His wife Diane Acker said she “feels sickened by what he has to endure at the end of his life.”

“If this happened to a child at Sick Kids hospital, people wouldn’t stand for it.”

– Tammy Carbino, daughter, in shock that this happened to her father

James Acker died about 2.5 months after the incident.

His wife said, “I was with him, I had been sleeping there. He passed away in my arms.”
She added, “He is at peace now. He suffered a lot over this.”

Source: McLaughlin, A. (February 3, 2017). Family of elderly man attacked at nursing home 
demand changes to Alzheimer’s care. CBC News. https://tinyurl.com/mshv62e2

“The best way that I can describe this is like one of the most horrific horror movies that you would see on TV, but the difference was that you’re not watching it on TV. This is real life, and this is your own mother.”

– Denise Dinet, about seeing her mother Joyce Dinet after she was attacked by her roommate at an assisted living residence

Ontario, Canada

Diane Miles, left, and Frances Sadoway are Meyer Sadoway’s sisters. They had to wait six months to learn the truth of how their brother broke his hip. (David MacIntosh/CBC)

“It’s a horror movie.”

– Diane Miles, Meyer Sadoway’s younger sister

“She didn’t deserve this and they should have taken more measures to ensure her safety.”

– Nicole Kupko, family member of Clara Sutowski

Iowa

U.S. Navy WW II Veteran James “Milt” Ferguson Sr. – legally blind and lived with dementia

“It’s like my dad died at their hands.”

“Now that I have had time to sit back and seen everything and thought about everything, I think, it’s horrible. I hope they make changes.”

– Jim Ferguson, son

Arizona

Joann Thompson lived with dementia

“It’s like someone took a flipping ice pick to her face. I was knocked to my knees. I will never forget that sight of her.”

“I felt very guilty about what happened to (my mom). I felt like, I am the one who put her there. You would normally feel they would be safe.”

– Cathy McDavid Mazur, daughter


YouTube – Interview with daughter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpy92OKCqQ
93-year-old Dorothy Mavis Baum lived with dementia

“She was a loving, caring, nice Nana.”

He was “Disgusted” the nurse protected herself over the defenseless residents. Evidence suggested she tried to cover up the attack. “She shouldn’t have a job in my opinion.”

– Kim Martin, grandson

Source: Robertson, K. (February 26, 2018). Nursing home resident lay dying in her bed for hours after attack by patient. 9 News.
“It’s just been so hard knowing that how could somebody allow this to happen to him... Where were all the nurses? Where were the staff?”

“My uncle could still be alive today being with our family and I just feel like our family was robbed from the last few weeks maybe months that we had left with him.”

– Zoee Osterberg, niece of John Carr, a Veteran with Leukemia

“I feel guilty you know what do you think? There’s no words to describe it. I gotta live with this.”

– Edward Carr, brother

New Jersey

91-year-old Herman Walker who lived with dementia

“They told us that he got into a fight with his roommate, that he had a couple of scratches and bruises. We went over to the emergency room to see him and when we got there – what we saw compared to what they told us, it was horrific.”

“This was a good person,
he was a great grandfather,
and he didn’t deserve what happened to him.”

– Naliah Eden, granddaughter

Robert Bradley who was strangulated to death by his roommate and his daughter

Felt “shocked, horrified, nauseous and on the verge of a panic attack” when she walked into her father’s hospice room and saw his injuries.

“Part of me is going, Oh my God, what happened? Oh my God, this is like a war victim. Oh my God, this is someone who has gone through hell, and I wasn’t there to protect him. That was the thing that bothered me the most.”

– Sally Renee Johnson-Kozelman, Daughter

Source: Sharma, A. (September 9, 2022). Homicide puts further scrutiny on troubled El Cajon nursing home. KPBS.
Dwayne E. Walls who lived with Alzheimer’s disease and his wife

“I walked into the room and gasped. He was black and blue all over, swollen and on Oxygen.”

“It’s the way Dwayne died that bothers me. He was such a gentle man, and he always took care of the underdog.”

– Judy Hand, wife


Documentary film Fighting for Dignity (Terra Nova Films): https://tinyurl.com/s8uvhyy7
“All the warning signs were ignored.  
This was negligence, pure and simple.  
Why would you get a free pass for being negligent?”

— Greg Garrett, son of 80-year-old Garland Garrett Jr. who lived with dementia in a secure “memory unit” of an assisted living residence

“It made me angry, very, very angry that nobody even hinted that this guy was walking around in there.”

— Amanda Garrett, daughter-in-law

She was racked with guilt after the incident, because she had been the one who found the assisted living residence for her father-in-law.

89-year-old Robert Driver – a War Veteran who lived in a special dementia care unit

He died after being hit from behind by a resident with dementia

“We want accountability for this incident. This was totally preventable.”

– Julie-Anne Jones, daughter

Source: BNH News (September, 20, 2020). War veteran grandad, 89, dies after ‘being king hit by a fellow nursing home resident.’
New Zealand

99-year-old Len Hewgill lived with dementia

He died a couple of days after a resident with dementia entered his bedroom and attacked him.

“I don’t want any charges laid against this man at all. It’s most unfortunate because these people have no idea what they’re doing. The other family are absolutely devastated. I feel so bad for them.”

– Leonie Hopkins, daughter

New Zealand

80-year-old Shirley Vermeren lived with Alzheimer’s disease in a rest home

She died after an incident in a secure dementia unit

“If this had happened to a child, it would straight away be to the police if we couldn’t say what happened.”

– Linda Vermeren, daughter

“There is no way she could have sustained those sort of injuries with a simple fall.”

She added, “...there was actually nobody supervising in the main area where mum was.”

Some of the staff at Kensington were “fabulous”...“but how would you feel if this was your family member?”

– Wendy Davison, daughter

“You think a secure unit is safe but actually it isn’t because you’re kind of trapped.”

– Jo Vermeren, daughter

91-year-old Jessie McKinlay lived with mild dementia

She died two months after a man with dementia pulled her out of her bed in the early morning hours and punched and kicked her

The way my mother died was “traumatic.”

“We had no idea there was someone running amok at the home, so it was a real shock.”

– Georgia Moon, daughter

Marilyn (Lynn) Anderson, 83, died 13 days after she was attacked by a resident with dementia

Her son, Alan Anderson, said he was initially notified by staff that his mother was being medically treated at an on-site clinic following an unwitnessed fall.

He wasn’t informed about the severity of his mother’s injuries until hours later, when she was transferred to a regional hospital when he was notified by hospital staff.

Lynn had sustained a fractured hip, elbow, ribs, and skull along with a black eye.

Sharleen Anderson, her daughter-in-law, said:

“One eye was black, swollen shut, the size of a golf ball sticking out of her head... How can you think, ‘Oh, she’s just going as a precautionary scan, she will be back home tonight?’”

84-year-old Emily Houston and her daughter

“She was punched and pushed into a metal doorway frame and suffered a complete break in her left hip. Her fingers were broken and her arm was all bruised up.” She died 10 days later.

“I don’t blame the other dementia patient. She didn’t know what she was doing but [name of care home] knew.”

– Nancy Bradley, daughter

The daughter said that she does not blame the resident who pushed her mother because she simply wanted to return to her former bedroom, which had been given to her mother.

She added that before the assault she had made repeated complaints to staff about the woman entering her mother’s bedroom and rifling through her things:

“We talked to them before about this woman but they didn’t take it seriously.”

Ohio

65-year-old Richard Cain who lived with dementia

He was punched by his roommate “causing him to fall backwards and hit his head.”

“If his roommate had to defend himself, I don’t blame him at all. I blame the nursing home and staff for not paying attention. They’ve been in several verbal confrontations weeks prior and nobody’s done anything about it. Why couldn’t you separate them?”

“Every time I close my eyes I see my dad, and it’s just so heartbreaking. Why couldn’t something be done? Maybe my daddy would still be with me today.”

– Bonnie Cain, daughter

She said she wants justice and more training for nursing home staff.

Australia

Janet Adams who lived with dementia and her husband

“We were told that my mother had pushed this man and that he had pushed her back.”

“With hindsight, an accident like that shouldn’t have happened, but given the level of staff-to-resident ratio, especially on the weekends, you can kind of see how it happened.”

– Jillian Adams, daughter

Atkin, M. (February 11, 2019). Call for urgent rethink of how aged care centres deal with patient aggression. ABC News. [URL link no longer works]
97-year-old Helmut Gutmann who lived with Alzheimer’s disease and his wife

“I don’t know what precipitated the attack, if anything. All I know is that [resident’s name who lived with Alzheimer’s] lifted my father off the floor and then threw him down on the ground, and that caused him to crack his hip.”

– Ruth Hennig, daughter

Her father died 2.5 weeks after the injurious incident.

The tragedy has devastated both families.

88-year-old Frank Moir lived with “advanced dementia”

He was found dead at around 6:30 am in a shared bathroom after being attacked by a resident

“It’s a very sad day for all of us at [name of care home], and I’m sure it is going to take a long time for us all to get over this.”

– Patricia Gordon, President of the Family and Friends Council at the care home

Source: CTV News (October 23, 2009). Senior’s death ruled a homicide: Police
https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/senior-s-death-ruled-a-homicide-police-1.446539
New Jersey

85-years-old Rita Ellinger and her niece

Mrs. Ellinger was grabbed, choked, and knocked to the ground by a male resident. Her head hit the ground causing her to suffer “massive brain injuries” leading to her death five days later.

“Ms. Potere [niece] and her entire family want to ensure that what happened to their aunt will not happen to others residing in assisted living and long-term care facilities.”

Frank Piccolo lived with dementia and Parkinson’s disease.

He was repeatedly hit on his head and face with an activity board by a woman with dementia who entered his bedroom.

“We had no idea anything like this could possibly happen.”

“The nursing home was entirely, completely negligent and they did not keep my husband safe as they are required to do according to the Long-Term Care Act.”

“I don’t understand why nursing homes can’t be charged with a criminal act when something like this happens.” She described it as an “invisible crime.”

– Theresa Piccolo, wife

Theresa is determined to ensure her husband’s tragedy isn’t an “invisible crime.”

She is hoping that no one else will suffer the way her family has.

Frank’s daughter, Christina McCarthy, said:

“I wanted people to see what had happened. It was a horrible sight. He had a bandaged head. He was bleeding, and no one wants to see their parents like that.” She added, “We wanted my father to be safe and to have to rely on another place to make his safe was very difficult.”

Canada

William “Bill” May lived on a dementia unit

“I hope there is something that can be done to prevent this from happening again.”

He added,

There are steps that can and must be taken to better house vulnerable seniors. I just don’t want anybody else to go through this, because this is really lousy.”

– Scott May, son

“It is quite clear that much was wrong with the living situation at [name of care home]. The attacker was known for certain behaviors that made it unsafe for other residents to be housed along with him... My father was in relatively good health when we took him to live in this facility in February of 2013 and yet he was dead only four months later.”

She added, “In retrospect, it was an entirely traumatizing experience from start to finish and that he should meet his end the way that he did is tragic.”

– Moneca Jantzen, Daughter of 79-years-old Jack Shippbotham who lived with dementia

https://infotel.ca/newsitem/coroners-report-on-kamloops-care-home-death-calls-for-changes/it36270
Canada

82-years-old Bobby Charalambous lived with dementia

He was hit by a male resident, fell down, and the man continued hitting him, causing a bleeding from his head and other parts of his body.

He died 12 days later.

“We want to make sure that it doesn’t happen again because no one should have to go through this.”

– Nicolas Charalambous, son

Australia

70-year-old Graham Rollbusch

He died after suffering head and neck injuries in an attack in his bedroom by resident with dementia

“If the gentleman in question was as bad as they made him out to be, he should never have been there.”

“Unless you’re at a place 24/7, you don’t know what goes on there, you just got to have faith and trust that they will look after your family member.”

– Lorraine Allen, niece

Source: Donnellan, A. & Gage, N. (April 6, 2017). Oakden nursing home murder hunts victim’s family. ABC News. [URL link no longer works]
“Why would you want to put someone with violent tendencies with someone who is not violent?”

“Why didn’t they do what they needed to do to protect my dad?”

– Russell Smith, stepson of 77-year-old Ivory Jackson who lived with Alzheimer’s disease.

He died after his roommate smashed a clock radio in his face as he laid in his bed.


You Tube interview (AP): More mentally ill people are being put in nursing homes nationwide along older patients, sometimes with tragic results. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=8t5qkodH3nA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=8t5qkodH3nA)
77-year-old Norbert Knowin who lived with Alzheimer’s disease

He died two weeks after being beaten by his roommate with a towel bar.

“Who would have ever thought that when you put someone in a facility that they needed to be in medically that something like this could have happen. This is something that you read in a novel”

– Pam Rumpf, daughter

Sources:


Nova Scotia, Canada

79-year-old Gordon Birchell who lived in the earlier stages of dementia

“The people who work there were told that...if she comes after him, you’re supposed to stop her from going near him”

– Joan Birchell, wife

He was pushed by a woman with “severe dementia,” fell, hit his head, and died later.

“He was a nice man, a sweet, sweet man... We’re just sick that he died in that way.”

– Bonnie Cuming, a friend of Gordon Birchell – She visited him four days before his death

"They promised us the world. We thought he would be safe."

– Margaret Druilhet, sister of Gilbert Perea who lived with dementia on a “memory care unit”

His 67-year-old roommate, a retired state police officer, who lived with “severe dementia” beat him so badly that he suffered a blunt force trauma to his head – determined in an autopsy as the cause of his death.

*Albuquerque Journal.*
https://www.pressreader.com/usa/albuquerque-journal/20141103/281492159594228
Larry Rzar lived with Alzheimer’s disease lived in assisted living memory care home

He died after his 90-year-old roommate with dementia beat him with a golf trophy

A county official reportedly wrote off her husband’s death as one crazy person killing another.

To this she says, “He was my crazy person.”

– Kathie Rozar, wife

What his wife wants is some sense that someone is working to keep this from happening again.

Rodeny Hamm, the son of the resident who beat Larry Rozar, said,

“At some point, there has to be a place where people are safe. And evidently, that place is hard to find.”

Source: Shaffer, J. (September 3, 2015). No answers in Alzheimer’s patient death. The News & Observer. [URL link no longer works]
Scotland

91-year-old John Taylor lived with dementia in a care home

He died 30 minutes after being struck by a male resident at least nine times in the dining room.

“Usually after a funeral you can move on but until something comes out of this, we will not be able to do that.”

– Ian Taylor, son

New York

83-year-old Ruth Murray with Alzheimer’s disease and her daughter

She mistakenly entered the bedroom of a male resident with dementia who beat her.

She died three days later from her injuries.

The family said that the nursing home downplayed her injuries when they told them that she had just fallen and had laceration, scratches, cuts on head and nose and bruising on back:

Doctors at Erie County Medical Center said her injuries were far worse:

- Broken bones in her neck,
- Low back fractures,
- Five broken ribs,
- Punctured lung,
- Facial fractures,
- Nasal fracture.


News 4. Records show staff at Emerald South nursing home downplayed woman’s injuries that turned out to be fatal. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI3tmBXq9MU
83-year-old Vera Sanger lived with dementia

She died after being pushed by a resident with dementia while watching TV in the communal lounge.

The resident who pushed her was involved in eight other incidents labeled as “aggressive” and “violent” in the past year.

“The incidents are increasing, what you have put in place is not working.”

– Andrew, son

“Why was Mum’s health and safety compromised when you already knew [name of resident] had slapped and pushed other residents?”

“I couldn’t get the truth out of them. They admitted lies were being told. I didn’t have any trust.”

– Christopher, son

England

86-year-old Allan Wallace lived with dementia

He died less than three weeks after being injured by a 75-year-old resident with dementia who used to work as a miner.

“They found my father on the floor in a very distressed state, bleeding from head wounds.”

“It appeared that he’d been kicked in the head and the chap was wearing steel toe cap boots which nobody was aware of. He was very, very bruised, very incoherent, semi-conscious really. Bruising around the ears, around the head, on the hands. He looked a mess.”

– Allison Wallace Wood, daughter

“He’d been in two or three care homes and there’s been similar incidents, serious incidents in which there was aggression and serious injury to other service users. We weren’t aware of that information. If we’d have known that, we wouldn’t have accepted that gentlemen into this home.”

– General manager, Julie Hammond

Two months before the injurious incident, the resident was identified as “high risk” to staff and residents. The care home had requested that he’d be relocated and begun looking for alternative placement.

90-year-old Catherine McNamee lived with dementia and received care at a transitional care floor of a rehabilitation complex-care hospital while waiting to move to long-term care.

A 68-year-old resident with “developmental challenges” pushed her, she fell to the floor, striking her head.

Her son John said, “She used to walk miles and miles through that hospital every day and she couldn’t do that (anymore).” She was mostly confined to her bed before her death a week later.

He added that he and his five siblings are “very upset” about the circumstances leading to their mother’s death. Among their allegations, the care home told the family their mother fell and hit her head but didn’t tell them she was pushed by another resident until a day prior to her death.

Winnipeg, Canada

“We want to see a solution. We don’t want the death of our father to be in vain. . . . I want to see something done so this doesn’t happen again.”

– Son of 87-year-old Frank Alexander who lived with Alzheimer’s disease and died four days after being pushed by another resident with dementia

“It is heartbreaking to hear this is still going on.” She added, “My heart goes out to the family from 2016 that had to deal with, and are still dealing with, the loss of their loved one. Because that’s not how you expect an elderly person to die.”

Daughter Joanne Rislund, reflecting in 2018 on another resident’s death after being injured during an incident with a resident


Debbie Stultz-Giffin
Daughter of 87-year-old Dorothy Stultz who lived with Alzheimer’s disease

Nova Scotia, Canada

Her mother died after being shoved by another resident in her nursing home.

“It’s shocking that the information never left the facility and got to the higher ups where it could have been more closely looked at.”

“I think my mother would be quite saddened that her death wasn’t more openly discussed, that it wasn’t looked at...under a microscope.”

“They are our most vulnerable population, and we should do everything in our power to protect those people.”

Looking over photos of her mother, she said,

“Breaking the silence on the issue is a crucial first step.”