

WHAT MY MOM'S DEMENTIA TELLS ME

One of the biggest challenges my family has faced in my lifetime is my mother's dementia.

She doesn't have a firm diagnosis because she manifests symptoms of Alzheimer's and frontotemporal dementia along with Parkinsonism, and more if we really teased out every symptom she's had.

If you met her you'd think she was pleasant and happy, provided you met her in the morning after a good night's sleep and chatted with her for only a few minutes.

If you had to spend any more than five to 10 minutes with her you'd begin to notice something wasn't quite right. That window of time has narrowed; two years ago she appeared normal for 15 to 30 minutes. It's a good day now when she can hold it together in public for 10 minutes.

Today was my turn to take my mom out for an airing. We were in the thrift shop where she loves to browse but a mere five minutes before she said something obnoxious about a woman next to her on a cell phone.

Sure, you may yourself have been tempted to say something scathing about cell phone users in shared spaces, but you'd also note whether that person was taking an important call and observe other context about the person and call. And then you'd apply your personal filter, bite your tongue, and quietly walk away.

Not my mom. I couldn't hustle her along fast enough before her filter broke.

I had to get my mom out of the house so my sibling could take care of some security issues in the home to keep my mom safe. She can't be left alone any more and even when home with one of us she still might injure herself or others.

In essence, she's become a nasty preschooler

regressing toward toddlerhood.

References to elderly in census documents from two hundred years ago now make sense – this woman “reverted to childhood,” a census taker wrote about a woman in her 80s.

Eventually my mom will be placed in memory care, but until then we’re going to have take measures to protect her from herself, and protect others from her.

But this post isn’t really about my mother. She’s an example of someone who needs intervention and continuous care and is getting it.

This post is about Donald J. Trump, president of the United States, who needs intervention and continuous care and is NOT getting it.

Trump’s behavior reminds me so much of my mother’s I am terrified for this nation.

We’ve locked up the car keys, hidden the credit and debit cards, secured firearms to keep them from my mom who can’t make a rational decision let alone remember what she decided minutes or hours or days ago.

But no one is protecting Trump from himself or others.

We’ve cautioned family friends that Mom has dementia and can’t be relied upon for factual observations though they often already deduced that based on her confabulations. She ate breakfast three times one morning because she forgot each time and became defensive when reminded about it.

Trump has been told, reminded, and warned about treaties and the law and he just does what he wants, as if he hadn’t been cautioned. He gets defensive. He makes false claims like having ended eight wars, and he may actually believe that. This is not the same as eating three slices of toast over three hours or distorting a memory of a shared past event.

If only Trump's behavior was that harmless.

My mom's obnoxious lack of a filter won't manifest itself in the breakdown of decades-long agreements between countries. The damage from her reflexive spouting can be limited by restricting her access to public venues where she won't offend many or is tolerated by others.

Trump, however, gets on his social media platform or on email and dumps his sundowning anxieties on long-term allies to the detriment of national security and world peace. No one is stopping him (and some may even be encouraging him).

Sometimes Trump's lack of filter is more narrowly aimed, like saying "Quiet, piggy" to a woman journalist asking him a question. Again, he's allowed to continue to do this while wielding the power of the presidency, and not hustled along to prevent him from continuing to be offensive let alone stop him from abusing citizens' rights.

White House staff are apparently unwilling or unable to check Trump's behavior, if they aren't abusing him and his office by manipulating him into acting out to disadvantage the U.S. and possibly to the advantage of themselves and others.

My mom can no longer drive and endanger others on the road. My dad's firearms have been locked up so that she can't hurt herself or others if she gets paranoid. Mom can only rant harmlessly at home when anxious. Thank goodness she can't do anything more to herself or others.

Unfortunately, Trump has the largest military force under his control. He's murdered people by direct or indirect orders, and without adequate accountability to the American people about his use of the military. He can incite others by venting his anxieties over social media.

Same, too, for his use of force against persons residing in the U.S. whether citizens, legal immigrants, or asylum seekers. Trump does not

respect the judiciary, a branch of government co-equal to the executive branch, and he fails to demand departments under his control obey the law.

I can't tell you how many times I have seen or heard Trump over the last 10 years and recognized the same behaviors in my mom and vice versa.

The shuffling gait down a ramp. The odd difficulty with stepping over changes in elevation. Challenges gripping objects like water glasses; stumbling for the right words like oranges instead of origins; failure to grab a vehicle door handle; frequently remembering events incorrectly and making up stuff along the way.

All fairly harmless symptoms until they interact with others, and then the magnitude of difference in their consequence is everything – suddenly all of Europe is insulted and scared, or an entire group of people must scramble for protection.

This can't continue. This must be stopped before it gets worse, and it will get worse like my mother's dementia. We can't rely on his family to intervene – they are venally manipulating him and generally useless when it comes to care for his person.

Congress must protect the country by restraining the executive branch. It – and by it I mean specifically the GOP congressional caucus – has abandoned its role as the check on executive overreach. This, too, can't continue.

If GOP members of Congress expect their party to survive the next three years, they need to put on their big people pants and collaborate on how to limit the power of a mafioso with dementia. It's disgusting the GOP has simply folded under Trump's weight like a broken lawnchair, abdicating their role in effective governance.

We know the GOP can step up; it once did when it checked Richard Nixon.

But if they don't fulfill their oaths of office to protect and defend the Constitution instead of protecting their own butts, the American public will look to other role models for guidance with regard to restraining an out-of-control president. Enough other countries have dealt effectively with leaders who posed far less of a threat to their nation and the world – we can learn from them, just as my family is learning how to deal with my mom.