

Daughterhood the Podcast

Episode #80

From Resistance to Readiness: Talking Assisted Living with Aging Parents

with Shari Ross

• 50:20

SPEAKERS

Rosanne Corcoran, Shari Ross

Rosanne Corcoran 00:13

Hello and welcome to Daughterhood, the Podcast. I'm your host. Rosanne Corcoran, Daughterhood circle leader and former primary caregiver to my mom, who lived with vascular dementia for 12 years. Through that journey, I experienced every phase of caregiving firsthand, the heartbreak, the joy and the aftermath. That journey showed me how vital support and connection truly are, and that's why this podcast exists. No matter where you are in your caregiving journey, I'm so glad you found us, because caregiving is far too much to do alone. So welcome to Daughterhood, the Podcast, part of the Daughterhood community, where we empower caregivers to navigate both the practical and emotional sides of caregiving together. Here, your efforts aren't just good enough, they're heroic, and here you're never alone. Join me in Daughterhood Before we dive in. I just want to share a quick note. This podcast is part of the whole care network. The conversations you'll hear are here to inform and inspire, but they're not a substitute for professional advice. The views you'll hear are those of the host and guests, and may not always reflect those of the Whole Care Network. If you have medical questions, please talk with your doctor and for legal advice, check in with your attorney. I'm so glad you're here. Shari Ross is a nationally recognized Senior Living consultant, speaker and author of the book and workbook Senior Living Made Simple with over a decade of experience in senior living, her SIMPLE Method equips families with practical tools and clear frameworks so decisions are made thoughtfully, not reactively. Shari has personally helped families navigate the emotional and practical realities of senior living, from recognizing when more support is needed to choosing the right assisted living community to actually helping to settle in and begin to feel at home. In this episode, we're talking about knowing when to speak up, how to start the conversation, how to tell the difference between helping and pushing too far and so much more. I hope you enjoy our conversation. Many adult children have the instinct that their parents need more support, or their living situation isn't really the best for them, but when things aren't, quote, bad enough, or there isn't a specific incident, it's hard to say something. What are some of the early, often overlooked signs that a parent may need more support than it appears?

Shari Ross 02:35

Yeah, I think one of the biggest misconceptions out there is that there's going to be some dramatic moment where it just suddenly becomes obvious that a parent needs help, and you know, whether that's a fall or, you know, a health diagnosis or a medical emergency, but most of the time it does start much more quietly. You know, I actually remember touring a community with a family once, and the son mentioned something interesting. He said that the first thing that made him worry wasn't a health issue, it was when he went to his mom's house and he opened her refrigerator and realized that almost everything inside had expired weeks earlier. And this was a woman who had always loved cooking, and it had been a big part of her identity, but gradually the grocery shopping and the meal prep had become overwhelming to her, and so that was, you know, a big signal. But it wasn't this loud signal. It was just, you know, kind of one of those little things that he noticed. Or I've, I've met seniors who have moved into a senior living community because they were afraid of their staves, not because they thought they were going to fall, but because they realized that if they did fall, there was no one that was going to be there. So that was just like, you know, one other small thing, they just don't want to be where they're stairs. So those are the kinds of signals that I think families would often notice first and again, they're not dramatic events, but just small changes in daily life that suggest that things are getting harder for them,

Rosanne Corcoran 04:02

Yeah, getting harder for them. And it's, you know, it's hard because you're seeing it, and they're like, I'm fine, and you're like, you're really not fine. You know?

Shari Ross 04:12

It's that I'm fine thing, yeah, no, I'm fine, Mom, you gotta, you know, I'm noticing that you're not hearing me speak a lot of times, you know, I'm fine. My hearing is fine. Just, you know, do me a favor. Just go grab go to the audiologist, check it out. Because, as we know, hearing is incredibly important, and it can lead to dementia if it goes unchecked, the hearing loss. So, you know, little, small things that are not fine, but they're brushing off as fine. Are the things that you want to notice well.

Rosanne Corcoran 04:47

And that brings me to, how do you start those conversations, especially when your parent is defensive and without like, triggering that defensiveness and all of that, how do you start those conversations? Yeah. Because it's also not just one and done.

Shari Ross 05:02

It is never one and done. It's not just like you're gonna go have a conversation and be done with it, like that's the end of it. It is an ongoing process, and they're delicate. Because you when you bring things up to your parents, they're often seeing, you know, hearing what you're saying as sort of a loss of independence, right? So you don't want to create resistance, and so you want to just sort of pin prick, sort of mention, bring things up slowly and gradually and softly in a way that's not like you said, going to put them on the defensive. So if you immediately go to your parents and you say, you this is not a safe house. You need to go to assisted living. You need to do this. And, oh my God, you're losing your memory. Like you that's just automatically gonna be like, Oh my God. Like, don't talk to me. But instead, if you know you're going out to lunch with your mom, and you're just like, you know, casually, sort of

like, Hey, I'm just curious, you know. Like, what do you what do you think would be the best way for for you to live your life out, and what would be the most comfortable? Or maybe you ask, like, hey, is there anything that's that's uncomfortable for you at the house right now? Like, is there anything that's bothering you or really getting a little more difficult for you to do, instead of, you know, telling them anything you want to just ask questions that are coming from your heart, that you know, show that you're just, you know, showing them that you love them and that you care, but not in a parent way, not in a you know, because, as you know, we've switched roles now in a way, as our parents age and you know, we're adult children, we're now the parents. They're now the kids. And you don't want to put them in that position, you know when you're talking to them. So it's the same way that we wouldn't have wanted our parents to talk to us like that too. So just the same thing, and it's just showing them respect and showing that you realize they've got it under control, but you're just checking in to see what their plans look like. If there's anything that you can do to help at all?

Rosanne Corcoran 07:00

Yeah, it's very important to remember that dignity part, because that really factors in.

Shari Ross 07:08

It does but I do have to say, like we said before, it is a gradual it's a process. So as an example, about three years ago, ish, I went to visit my father in law, who lives in Florida and I live in California. So, you know, we're across the country from each other, so I don't see him too too much, but when I went to visit him about three years ago, we went out for dinner with my husband and him, and you know, I noticed that he definitely was slowing down. He was not walking as well, and he had some skin issues, and I knew that he was living alone. He, you know, he was sort of isolated. So I knew now internally, that he needed more, but nobody had ever really talked to him about it. And so I, I brought it up, and wow, it was like a little explosion. I was like, because all I said was, hey, you know, have you I said it wrong? I said, Hey, have you ever thought about assisted living like that is so not the way to do it. Like, don't even, don't even, like, use those words like, Don't even bring up what the the options can be. Just, you know. So I stopped because he got mad. He was like, I'm not going anywhere. I'm living in my house, and you nobody's gonna move me. And blah, blah. He got really defensive. Well, okay, so I dropped it few months later. I did see him again, and I brought it up again, but in a very different way, just saying, hey, you know, is anything like getting really difficult for you, you know, in your house, have you? You know? And he had just gotten into a car accident too. I was like, you know, what are you thinking about? Maybe, let's, let's try Ubering, like, or, you know, I started like, asking probing questions about what's actually happening inside of his home, and how he's actually going about his daily living each day, and just very, very sensitively, you know, instead of just spouting out, like, hey, what do you think about this? Like, that's not, that's not gonna work. I can get into this later, but you know what the actual result of all that was? Or I can

Rosanne Corcoran 09:08

You can certainly share. Yes, let's hear it.

Shari Ross 09:11

So we had more conversations over the next, you know, year, I would say, just kind of asking. It got into his head, for sure, but he didn't make any moves. He didn't want to do anything. Okay? Well, there's

one of two things that happen, either somebody has something that happens to them dramatically, or they make the decision to move on their own, right? Well, yes, so he fell, and he broke his hip. He was found. He was probably on the floor for several hours, and, you know, it could have been really, really, really bad, but thankfully, his brother, who also lives in Florida, found him, and he was able to get him the hospital, and he went into rehab. And then we all kind of talked to him and said, you know, hey, you know, probably not the best idea to go back home. And be by yourself like this, because we didn't know, but he had been falling, you know, more frequently than that. So he had it in the back of his mind already. So it wasn't a big fight for him. It wasn't a big, you know, dramatic, like, moment. He was like, Yeah, you know, I've been thinking about it too. And like, you know, he ended up moving into an assisted living, and about two months in, I thought I was seeing a different person in front of me, like it was incredible, because he had really deteriorated. I mean, he was just lonely and depressed and probably not taking his medications properly and just not looking good. And after he went into the assisted living. I mean, he was now socializing, he was playing cards. He was getting rides now with the shuttle to target, and he was able to have that independence of, like, going out and doing things. And, I mean, he looked like he was 10 years younger by the time, all of a sudden done. And it was just a serious success story in terms of, you know, somebody moving into assisted living. Doesn't always work that way, but I see it more than I don't. So it was great.

Rosanne Corcoran 11:06

That's wonderful. And it's so funny, because I think people have a misconception the well, if I fall down the stairs, I fall down the stairs. Yeah, but you forget the part where you fall down the stairs and you can't move, and you're laying there, and then what happens? Or, you know, you do that and you break your neck, and you're living, but you're living in a much different way.

Shari Ross 11:26

Exactly. So getting that, you know, assistance before something like that happens will contribute to more independence. Because if it, if does, if something does happen, where now you're suddenly in a wheelchair, how much independence? I mean, do you have now, like, comparatively? So, you know, take those steps to to keep your independence before you lose it.

Rosanne Corcoran 11:50

Right. Well, and it's also the fear of it, yeah, do you know the fear of, I'm gonna leave my house and I'm gonna go and, you know, let's, we can say this. And I know that you've worked at many communities, you we can say that sometimes it's like high school, you know, you've got to find your way, you have to sit at the table, you know, all of that, and you're leaving you're letting go of your things, and you're letting go of your routine in your house, and it's really hard. I think we have to look at it like there's fear here. It doesn't matter that there's 22 steps that they have a hard time navigating every day. It's their 22 steps. So how do you get past? Do you try to appeal to that? And I always say, you know, having this conversation is like feeding a baby deer, right? It's like little bit at a time. So do you include the fear in that, or do you strictly stay to the you know this. What are your thoughts about? Like, which way do you go?

Shari Ross 12:46

Yeah. I mean, I think that you need to be real and realistic with with your loved ones, with your parents, and not try to, like, smooth it over and say, Oh, it's gonna be great. Like, fabulous. Like, no problem, easy peasy. Move in and it's all good, you know, it's, it's understanding that, yeah, I mean, change is hard for everyone, but I think especially for seniors, because they are so ingrained in their routines and their lives, lifestyles and so understandably and so, you know, they're going to be fearful. So you have to incorporate that into the conversation, too, and then be understanding and, you know, find out what it is that's triggering them to feel fearful and and, and kind of go with that and don't, don't gloss over it, because that's not going to help them. So acknowledge it, you know, and then say, well, you know, what I get that I understand. Let's see how we can work together to, you know, kind of alleviate some of that fear. What can we do in that sense, do you, you know, would you prefer me to come visit you, like, three times a week or once a month? Like, what do you want? What do you see will make you feel more comfortable. And also, I think that you know, when somebody moves into a community, just like when you move in general, it's hard, it's going to be hard, a hard adjustment, and it does take several months. Typically, I always say, give it three months before you decide you know how you really feel about it, and slowly but surely, if you're, you know, if you're in a good community where there's caring, you know, staff and they get to know you, they should help to, you know, bridge that gap, and, you know, help you to meet other residents that are similar to you, and to make sure that you're feeling comfortable and that they're calling you by your name, and that you understand who to go to for what issue. And so you know, finding the right community, where you have that support around you is key number one, and and where there are people that are similar to you, you know that are not I. Um, you know, if you are wanting to do all sorts of activities and be busy and you don't want to be in a six bed boarding care, you know what I mean? So like, finding that right balance of where you are is going to certainly help. But, yeah, I mean, just acknowledge that you know, and they know that it's going to be a difficult three months or so to just adjust. But in the end, what I have seen over, you know, for decade of doing this, is that ultimately, the resident, after three months, the mom, the dad, the spouse, they start lighting up and they're, they're like new people, just like with my father in law. You know, it's like they start to become used to it, and this is their new life, and this is their new home, and they are happier than they ever were because their quality of life has typically improved quite drastically. And that social, that socialization, eating the right foods, getting some physical exercise, all of those things contribute tremendously to that quality of life, and those were generally things that people were not getting prior to moving. So it does take time, but it you'll you'll get there and and you just have to know that, and you got to kind of wait it out and do whatever you can in the meantime to kind of keep them feeling comfortable.

Rosanne Corcoran 16:17

Yeah, you know your book and workbook Senior Living Made Simple. And let me just say I love your simple method, because it is simple, but it was so practical and so informative, and it was warm and compassionate, and it really did feel like having a conversation with you, and I feel like it's so much softer, because this is so fraught with guilt and fear and anxiety and all of that, and it really helped. You. Know, as I was reading it, I was like, this is really like having, like, just sitting and having a cup of coffee and talking to you, and I love the vignettes about the residents. I thought that was just heartwarming. But can you tell me about the simple method and how it cuts through all of the chaos and plans it out for you.

Shari Ross 17:03

I think that you know, instead of trying to solve everything at once, that families need to move through this process, you know, step by step, and you know you obviously, you don't know until you know, until you know. When I met with families, it was often the very first time that they even thought about senior living. They didn't know the difference between assisted living and memory care and independent living, and what's this, and what's that, and all the acronyms, and it's very, very overwhelming and seeing, you know, but I understand, because why would you, why would you go and think about it? Why would you stop at the assisted living around the corner from your house? Like, even though you've seen it on your way to work every single day, why would you go there until that time when, yes, your parent might need, might need it. So I wanted to kind of, you know, create this framework, kind of idea of, you know, the process of really going through navigating Senior Living and that whole maze of confusion, simple in my book, is a is an acronym, and it stands for the following words, so support, information, matching, preparation, letting go and engagement, and I can kind of go through each one just briefly, if you like.

Rosanne Corcoran 18:23

That, would be great. They're all jam packed with emotion too.

Shari Ross 18:29

Absolutely. Well, yes, every single, you know, every one of those words is, is full of emotion and and this whole process is full of emotion. It's not, you know, just a practical, let's go find an apartment. You know, yeah I mean, that was the main thing. When I started doing this so many years ago, I thought, Oh yeah, I'm gonna, I'm gonna show this family this lovely apartment and see if they want the one bedroom or the studio. It's not that at all. That's the last thing they should be concerned about, really, it's it's more about the quality of life and making sure that this environment is correct for them, and and then just the dealing with the guilt, dealing with the all of the emotions that come up. So number one, the support or S is for support. So obviously we can't, we shouldn't, and we can't do this alone. We need to make sure we're enlisting the support of our friends, of a geriatric care manager or a trusted doctor or a social worker, other family members, so, you know, making sure you have that kind of like circle around you, so that you're not feeling like, my god, I'm drowning. You know, I have to do this all by myself, and so, you know, that's never a good idea for anybody. So no, make sure you have that support. Yeah, information is the next one. So making sure you know most people, again, they go into this completely blindly. I. Um, but if, if, ahead of time, we can plan, you know, when I know everybody always wins his when I say, hey, talk to your parents when they're in their 60s. But honestly, just, just not to say, Oh, you're gonna have to do this, or you're going here, or whatever one day, you know, or to talk about more mortality. It's just getting information. It's like, okay, what is assisted living. What is the difference between that and an independent living or a CCRC or a Life Care life plan community, or what is a boarding care? Or who do we talk to to get more information about these places and what are the costs? And that's a big one, obviously. So all of that information is just so important to just just learn about, you know, as early as possible, that will definitely help with, you know, the future, actual planning of things, and then matching m for matching. Matching is kind of what I was just talking about earlier, where you want to make sure that the environment is the right environment for each individual person. They all. Everybody has their own personality and their own needs, whether that's their specific care needs or their social needs. So one place may look gorgeous and you walk in in the beautiful lobby and the chandelier, but maybe they don't provide, you know, the assistance of you know, maybe they don't

have a nurse on site who is able to help a parent transfer out of a wheelchair, like or it's an independent living where there's no care at all, unless you bring it in yourself so matching to whatever the needs are, care wise and personality wise, and in you know your social desires and all of those things. So that's really important to find a right place for you, right and then P for preparation. So preparation is essentially getting all your ducks in a row in terms of your legal documents, your financial documents. Who's the power of attorney? Do you have a long term care insurance policy somewhere? Is it hidden in the basement in a box. Let's find it, and let's find make sure there's all the pieces are together and that there's nothing falling through the cracks, so that when it is time to, you know, go and potentially move into a senior living community, you have everything. You're not scrambling at the last second. And in fact, you know, like we talked about, a lot of times, moving into community happens after an emergency. So if that is the case, you don't want to and during that, during that emergency, be looking for, you know, all this paperwork and your Medicare card and your, you know, your life, your legal documents and your will, and just have it all in one place. Know where it is, if there's a safety deposit box, you know, know where the key is, and make sure that your loved ones also have that information. So that's all preparation. And again, all of this stuff is really pretty obvious, and it's pretty simple, but it's, you know, people don't think about it. And so this just gives them kind of a guide, a framework, again, to to know what, what to do. So L, L is letting go. So this is more of the emotional side of things, right? Yeah, and it's actually, it is twofold, because in my book, I write about letting go of the guilt. And this is for caregivers, letting go of a guilt, and for the parent, letting go of what was before, and letting go of feeling like you know you have to live out your life in your house, you know by yourself, maybe, and so letting go of the ideas that maybe aren't practical at this point in your life. The other part of it is letting go of things. You know, we're all we're so focused sometimes on what we have and what's in our house and so, I mean, so many times I met with families who, you know, the mom was like, Well, what? I can't move in here. I have, I have this table. It's not gonna fit in the room, in the apartment.

Rosanne Corcoran 24:07

And the hutch.

Shari Ross 24:08

Yes, I've got all my my China. I gotta bring that, like, that's not gonna fit, you know. Well, guess what you're you know? Yeah, you can keep your china and your Hutch and your table and all that. But what kind of life are you going to have like inside your house, sitting there at your table by yourself, you know, not being able to get the help that potentially the support that you need? Yeah, let go of all that the objects, because that's not is what is going to give you quality of life in the end. But, yeah, letting go for the caregivers of the guilt, because we can only do what we can do, and that is the bottom line of all that. Like we we can, you know, talk till our face turns blue, we can support as much as we possibly can. But in the end, it is our parents love. Lives, and we have to let go of what we cannot handle and what we cannot do because we can't do everything. So go with the guilt. Yeah, we are not super people, Super Woman, Superman. And then engagement is easy. It's the final one. So just because our parent goes off and moves to a senior living community doesn't mean that we can't continue engaging with them in ways that maybe we weren't even engaging before. No, that engagement level definitely shifts, because now, instead of being that caregiver, instead of being the one cooking the meals or driving them around or making sure their medications are all in order, like every single you know all of those tasks now, all of a sudden we can engage with them in a way that's like mother daughter and

enjoy the time together. So come visit your mom and like, have lunch with her and not worry about all those menial tasks, and just know that that she's getting supported in those ways. But now we can have a nice talk about the grandkids and what, what am I doing, you know, right? As the daughter, like, Hey, this is what's going on in my life, you know, and talk to them and have conversation and play cards with them and do fun stuff and go out shopping, if possible, and, you know, just engage in a way that's now mother daughter or mother, or father, son, or whatever it may be. And that's so important to continue that engagement and not just say, Okay, well, bye, yeah, good luck to you getting your help. And you know you don't need anymore.

Rosanne Corcoran 26:34

Right.

Shari Ross 26:35

So, yeah. So this all the simple framework kind of turns what really does sometimes feel very chaotic into something that you know, families can really approach in a more calm and thoughtful way. And again, I stress early planning, early planning, early planning, like, just do it as early as possible, so they are not doing all this at the last second.

Rosanne Corcoran 26:59

Because nobody, you know you can't make a good decision under that much stress.

Shari Ross 27:04

Exactly, you can't, and then that ends up costing you, you know, financially, potentially emotionally. You know, it can lead to potentially, you know, mistakes and where you actually choose to go, or what if you know you're making a last second decision, and now there's nothing available that's actually right for you, so then you end up having to move again and you know, or you're unhappy, or any number of things. So if you kind of can start early and get all the your ducks in a row, like I said, then, then you're not making these crazy last second decisions that can be detrimental.

Rosanne Corcoran 27:38

Right. It's, um, it's a very helpful thing, because you cover everything, I mean. And let's face it, we plan for our vacations more than we plan for the last quarter of our lives. I mean,

Shari Ross 27:51

I completely agree. Yeah, no, I know everybody talks about their, you know, their vacations, or their the weddings, or even their real estate, or whatever it is, like, you know, all that stuff is important, great, wonderful, but, and no, but nobody really wants to face the mortality of that last quarter. Like you said, Yeah, I mean, it's, but it's inevitable that we will get there, you know. So we're all aging, and we're all going to eventually get there. And so, you know, just like we plan out our vacations or just like we plan out our weddings or whatever the big event is, we also need to plan out how we want to live the rest of our our years. And the unfortunate thing is, none of us really know. You know what that looks like ahead of time. Obviously we don't know if we're going to be in good health or, you know, have, you know, mobility, or if we're going to have memory loss. You know, those things are all unpredictable, so you can't really plan for those things, but what you can do is plan for in the event of this happening, what

can we do to make sure that we can have a much smoother transition and to continue having or have quality of life going forward without the quality of life, I mean, like, why are we here? I mean, so let's, let's do the very best we can to try to maintain that or add it into our lives more as we even as we age. Just getting older doesn't mean we have to not have a good life.

Rosanne Corcoran 29:29

Agreed, and it's it's really hard, because people don't talk about quality of life. So it's like, Yes, I know you love your house, but is your quality of life. There is the safety, there is your independence. There is it helping your independence, or is it hurting your independence? Like these are all decisions that have to go into that. And then there's also the cost that goes with that. And it's two ways, right? It's the cost to you as a person, and it's the cost of these. Communities. So how do we, and I know they range, depending on where you're at, where you're at in the country, what you're looking for is there a way, I don't know, tell me how we can look at the cost and because a lot of times it's more than their mortgage ever was. So that's a hard sell, Shari.

Shari Ross 30:17

What I think is surprising to a lot of people, though, is, you know, because most of us, our first thought is, let's stay at home, let's age in place and live in our house. And that'll be that. Well, let's say now your mobility has declined and you have a walker or a wheelchair. Does your house support that? Now? Do you have to completely make all these modifications to your house that's expensive to put in a new bathroom, shower, widen your hallways, perhaps, or whatever the case may be. So that's step one of the expense. Now, okay, you need somebody to come in and help you out. Well, that's 30, \$40 an hour, and you add that up over the course of you know, if you still, if you need full time help, we're looking at \$20,000 you know, a month to have somebody come in and take care of you, or it's the expense of a loved one, you know, a caregiver taking off work and being at home with you, caring for you, and all those hours of unpaid labor, but you compare that then to potentially moving into a community where, yes, it is expensive, but maybe not as expensive as having in home care, and now you also have the dual sidedness of that social component and the ability to really become more independent because you have so much at your fingertips right as so many options of things to do, and you have your meals prepped, and you have your built in caregivers that are there for you if and when you need it. I always say, you know, maintain that independence until you absolutely cannot so do everything possible that you can do when you live in an assisted living community, or even an independent or whatever it is, do what, everything you can do, and you know, when you really, really need help, that's when the caregivers come in. But going back to cost, yeah, I mean, there's definitely ways to try to manage that cost, whether that means having to sell a house or maybe you've got long term care insurance policy that can really help. A lot of people don't have those anymore. They don't sell them the way they used to. You can get a small rider, maybe on an insurance policy, a life insurance policy now, but they're very expensive, and, you know, a lot of people just don't have them. Back in the day, they used to, used to be amazing policies. So some of the people going to assisted living now, right now are like living there almost for free, because they have these amazing lifetime policies. But if that's not the case, you know, let's see. What else can we do? Are there siblings involved? Can you know, the other siblings contribute? Can other family members help out financially. Can the adult child afford to maybe contribute a little bit? So if everybody's working together, you know, throwing, throwing a little bit into one pot, that helps, certainly, right? But, yeah, you have to, this is, again, why you have to start early,

because you have to figure out where is this money going to be coming from. It's not just gonna magically appear. So you have to kind of map out and budget, and again, we can't know how long we're gonna live and how much care we're gonna need. So maybe, maybe look at it like worst case scenario in a way, like, Okay, I could live another 10 years and I might need memory care, and that's going to cost me potentially 10 to \$20,000 a month, or \$15,000 a month, or whatever. So let's see, how are we going to get this money together? And, you know, work with work with a financial advisor, work with an elder care attorney. What you know, have those, those people in place, those professionals in place so that you can go to somebody who is trustworthy. And can, we can help you out with those decisions and and you can make it work. You know, there's other options out there, like there's because, as we know, Medicare does not pay for assisted living. It's all private surprise. You know, a lot of people have so just know that going in, there are some communities that do accept, you know, Medicare, Medicaid waivers. So that's something you can look at. There are, if you're a veteran or a spouse of a veteran, you might want to look into veterans benefits, you know. So there's but that can take a little while, you know. And there's lots of forms. So again, get help with getting that done. Don't just try to do it yourself, because then, you know, six months later, you get a rejection letter, and then you have to start all over again. So make sure you're doing it correctly the first time. So yeah, there's, there's little, you know, there's obviously a lot of we could go on forever about different ways to pay for a system. Living but or senior living, but the key is to start gathering that information and the right professionals in place as early as possible so that you can make those decisions. Well,

Rosanne Corcoran 35:10

I totally agree. You don't think about it until it's all you're thinking about. Right?

Shari Ross 35:14

It's so overwhelming. Yeah.

Rosanne Corcoran 35:15

It's so overwhelming,

Shari Ross 35:17

I have to say, as an example of an opposite case of my father-in-law, I personally going through this right, right as we speak with my mom so but it's a completely opposite situation, because she well, several years ago, we actually sat down together and we went through her big book, big black binder, and it had all of the documents in place, and she showed me at all. She also had already planned out, like, for her and her, my step, my stepdads, um, what they want for their wishes, for end of life, and so all of that's there, like, it's amazing, right?

Rosanne Corcoran 35:51

So, fantastic, yeah,

Shari Ross 35:53

Yeah. So she lives like five minutes away from me and in a house. And couple weeks ago, my stepdad, who is 83 and she's 79 he got into a car accident, and he and I knew he should not have been driving, and she knew it, and he probably knew it, but okay, thankfully he did not get hurt. Car got totaled, but

he wasn't hurt. So thankful he didn't end up, you know, in a horrible, horrible way. But it was a wake up call to both of them that maybe you know where we live, you have to drive everywhere like it's suburban, you know, you can't walk to the store. It's get in the car and go. So it shifted. My mom's thinking like that, just just that one incident, but basically now she's looking at moving to an independent living community, and so she literally just, like, told me this the other day, and she's like, Yeah, I think, you know, I'm gonna go visit this place, but it's two hours away. I'm like, What? What? Okay, one, let's think about just I said, this is great. Well, I started it with saying, This is great. I'm so glad you're planning this out. You know, she's thinking about moving in about a year, right? So I'm like, This is great. You're taking all the right steps. You're looking at this, you know, in a really, really intelligent way, and planning it and figuring out your finances. Wonderful, but let's, let's just take a step back, because there's two little red flags. One, you're looking at independent living. Okay, I get she's super social, so she wants involved with clubs and this and that and doing all these activities. Great. But I said, what happens in three years or four years, or five or six, whatever it may be when you know you take a fall, and now you're needing assistance. And you know, we're my stepdad, who is, again, he's 83 so if by the time you move, they move, he's 84 he's slowing down. For sure, what happens if his health, you know something's going on with his help, and you know he needs assisted living. There's no, you know, it's independent living. There's no healthcare on site, you're either going to need to bring somebody in, which can be very expensive, or you're going to have to up and sell this, this house now that you're moving into and move into an assisted living. So that's two moves, and it's a lot of a lot to go through, yep, and adds to the expense. And then the other thing is, why are you moving two hours away at the time of life when you need some you know, you may need support from your children, right? And so that's not making a lot of sense to me. So anyway, we, we are literally in the process of discussing this, but I am, as the adult daughter, trying really, really and, you know, it's hard because I'm in this profession, absolutely, but when you're with your own family, those emotions come out. So I'm trying really hard to temper those emotions and speak to her as if I would be with a client or with a family, and just ask the probing questions. Well, let's think about this scenario. What would happen if X, Y and Z, and just get her to think about it. And so, you know, we'll see to be continued.

Rosanne Corcoran 39:07

To be continued.

Shari Ross 39:08

I know

Rosanne Corcoran 39:09

Well, and it's interesting too, because you ask the probing questions, but then you have to do something with your face, right? You have to do something with whatever is going to register on your face, like, Are you kidding me? You've got to dial that back.

Shari Ross 39:23

I know I was on the phone so she didn't see my face, but

Rosanne Corcoran 39:26

That's good.

Shari Ross 39:27

That would have been bad. Like, I'm really glad we did it on the phone. Yeah, maybe that's the key. Don't, don't do it in person.

Rosanne Corcoran 39:32

Don't do it because that's what I'm thinking. I'm like, you can't I mean that. What do you do? Because you have to temper that, yeah, because you're trying to have this, this, you know, legitimate, calm conversation, exactly, but your mind's going like, Are you kidding? Like, you know, I'm just gonna stay here. How do you temper that and be supportive?

Shari Ross 39:54

Well, another, another thing that you can do, which is something that I actually did, was I said, you know. Yeah, there's a lot that I definitely want to think about this, you know, and on my own, like, I want to, like, do some research too, and just, you know, look into it and, and, and think about what other, you know, what other issues there might be alongside of this. So maybe let's revisit this, you know, in a few days, and, and we'll talk about it's more because if you start getting heavy into this conversation, and you start, you know, get letting your emotions take over, then you know, it's just gonna ratchet it up. And, yeah, you know, that's just no good for anybody. So just take a step back, if you need to, and say, Let's what's re like, let's rehash this like in a few days, and in the meantime, you know, do that research and start thinking about other ways that you can approach the conversation in a way that won't make your parent defensive, and just let them know that you're just, you're just thinking about their best interests and and go from there.

Rosanne Corcoran 41:01

When you get to that point where they're like, I'm not doing it, and I'm not talking about this anymore, how do you as the adult child, then say, okay, and release yourself from the I know the train's coming and I can see it and I can hear it, but they don't want to do anything, so I'm going to just back off. How do you deal with that as the caregiver?

Shari Ross 41:24

Yeah. I mean, sometimes that's just the reality of it. You have to take a step back, and you have to understand that your parents are your parents. They're individual people who are going to ultimately make their decisions if they're able to at that point, you know, but yeah, if they're in their their right mind, and they're they're cognizant and all of that, and there's no dimension whatever, then it ultimately is their decision, and you can't force them into doing anything they don't want to do. But that goes hand in hand with the whole idea of, you know, bringing this, these conversations up in small bits and pieces, and not just trying to, like, have one big conversation, right? So over time, you know what you what you say to them, and what you ask them will reverberate inside their their minds to some degree. The other option that I find helpful is, is enlisting others. Because when you are that close to somebody, a lot of times your emotions just get in. Everybody's emotions gets in the way, and they don't want to listen to anything you say. So maybe there is a social worker or Geriatric Care Manager that can be kind of a neutral party and, you know, maybe help out in this situation, or maybe there's a friend of theirs that you can enlist. You know, some, a lot of times, people listen to their friends way more than they listen to

their parent or their child or spouse. You know, I think that hopefully your parents have some, some friends, or some, you know, trusted people in their lives that you know, maybe you can go to privately and say, Hey, do you mind? You know, bringing this topic up and just seeing, you know what, how they react to it when you're speaking about it, because it's, I'm unsuccessful at it right now, and it's not working. So you know, it's just the same way that say somebody's in an assisted living or a senior living community, and they have just moved in maybe a few weeks ago, or whatever, and the staff, or whoever wants them to participate in, in a activity you know, their their best bet sometimes, is to say, hey, you know, so and so Sally is down in the dining room. She really would love for you to join her for for lunch, or for there's a Mahjong game going on, or whatever. Like, I think that so and so really wants you so, like, if you frame it as a way of like, oh yeah, a friend or someone that that they trust, like, or that they know that's not the daughter, that's not the relative, might make it easier for them to digest.

Rosanne Corcoran 43:59

Gotcha the red flags to look for in a community.

Shari Ross 44:03

Yeah, I mean there's the obvious ones when you walk in, and if you're, you know, there's a really bad odor, or, like, urine or odor, or if it's like a super, super bleachy smell, like they're trying to cover something up, so go, you know, sniff it out. That's like an immediate sensory thing that happens right when you move in. But I think again, we want to look beyond a brochure and look beyond the chandelier and the beautiful lobby and actually look at how the residents are interacting, not only with them, with each other, but with the staff. So are the do you notice that the staff are calling a resident by their their first name? Do you see activity going on? Like, if you're walking in and you're like, seeing everybody just sitting there in a chair, like staring at a TV screen, or silently eating in like a dining room that's dark, those are. Obvious red flags, but really, really pay attention to again. How are the staff and the residents interacting with each other? And does it look like that the residents are engaged in in life? You know, that place that you go to and tour might have a gorgeous calendar up on the wall of all the wonderful activities that they do, but are those activities actually happening? Let's check that out, like go dig one, one level deeper, and don't just trust that, you know, because they have this great calendar, that that's what's actually happening. You know, if you're touring and you might want to ask, Hey, how long have you as the executive director, or you as the marketing person, been been here, you know? And if you're seeing that there's turnover every two months or every year, or whatever it may be, that's kind of, you know, not a great sign. Always ask, you know, who owns this place? Is it managed by the same company, like that actually owns it, or is it just some random company that's managing and from afar and isn't really invested in the outcomes? So there's so many, I mean, in my book, I have a whole bunch of questions that, you know, people can ask when they're on a tour. But I think for me, the really, the most important is, is really observing, when you go into a community, observing what the the residents appear to to look like, and whether you know, go up to them, Go up to the other family members that you see and ask them directly. Don't rely on what the tour guide is telling you about all the wonderful things actually dig in and ask questions of the people that are actually living there currently, and of their family members, and I think you'll get a much better perspective on really what is going on in that community. And I think that you'll have a more realistic view that way.

Rosanne Corcoran 46:59

I fully agree. Last question for the caregiver who's listening, who's overwhelmed, who's trying to go to this well over and over, to try to accept what their parents are saying and let it go and all of that, what's the one thing you want them to hear and take away from today?

Shari Ross 47:16

So there's a few things, and I know it's hard to narrow it down to one.

Rosanne Corcoran 47:23

No, that's okay, you can, you can take a few, that's okay.

Shari Ross 47:25

I think that I really want people to understand that planning ahead doesn't mean giving up independence. It means preserving choice. Okay? So we want to make sure that we understand our options earlier, so that there's more control over the situation and finding the environment that truly fits your loved one. And you know, all these decisions can feel emotional and complicated, but let's make them not mysterious. Let's let's get an understanding of what's in front of us before we have to confront it, and the more we understand the landscape, the easier it is to move forward with with confidence. And so we I just, I cannot emphasize enough, as a caregiver, you can only do so much. You can plan ahead and you can, you know, do all these things that we talked about today with your loved one, but in the end, as the caregiver, please understand that you are only human, and you can only do what you can do, and that's it. And let go of of guilt, of trying to make it perfect, because nothing is perfect. You know you might find the best place for your parent to move into, and it might be amazing and beautiful. It's still not going to be perfect. There's still going to be issues that come up. So know that, let it happen. Take a deep breath and move forward, and know that you're not infallible, like everybody is human here, and just, let's do the best we can. That's all we can do.

Rosanne Corcoran 49:03

A big thank you to Shari Ross for being my guest today for more information about Shari, her book, her workbook, and even how to connect with her. Visit SeniorLivingMadeSimple.com. I hope you enjoyed today's episode and found something helpful, whether it was information, inspiration or even just a little company. You'll find the full transcript and links to resources mentioned today@daughterhood.org in the podcast section. While you're there, explore more of what daughterhood offers. We're more than a podcast. We're a nonprofit community providing free services and support for caregivers, including nationwide virtual support groups. We call circles on our website, you can register for a circle, sign up for our newsletter and read our founders blog. Don't forget to subscribe and review us on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen. Your reviews help other caregivers discover the support they need. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram at daughterhood to stay connected. If you know someone else who may benefit from daughterhood, share it with them also a very special thank you to Susan Rowe for our theme music, Mama's Eyes. This is Rosanne Corcoran. I'm so grateful you spent your time with me, and I look forward to being with you again next time here in Daughterhood.