



Parenting Aging Parents Q&A with Founders Kim & Mike Barnes

1. How did Parenting Aging Parents start?

Mike: My Mom has Alzheimer's, and when my sister and I started looking at memory care places to possibly move her, we felt prepared. But when we started looking, we felt so overwhelmed. I came home and told Kim that I thought if we felt prepared and then got so overwhelmed that others must be really overwhelmed, so I thought we should start a Facebook group.

Kim: We put it on the back burner for a while, but when Mike moved his mom into memory care and posted something on Facebook I saw that, along with empathy, so many people commented that they had gone through something like that, were in the middle of it or they knew it was coming. So I knew it was something we should do. We started a free private Facebook group to see if others were interested in joining the conversation and were blown away by the response.

2. How is your group different?

Kim: Since we're former TV journalists, we thought it would be great if we could do interviews with "experts" and share them with the group. We've talked to a broad range of experts from lawyers and doctors, insurance providers and home care workers to downsizing and senior living specialists. All to give people in the group ideas of what to look for and questions to ask since there's so much we don't even know that we need to know!

Mike: And we found out quickly from the comments that people posted that they love the group because the community is a safe, non-judgemental space that keeps them from feeling so alone. Taking care of your parents can be a lonely task and it's not something you talk about with your friends or co-workers.

3. When is the right time to start preparing?

Kim: Now! We went ahead and have gotten our wills updated and gotten our POAs for our children, who are in their 20s. And with our parents it's much easier to have these conversations when they're still healthy and doing well. It's a lot harder when in a crisis.

Mike: There are so many things involving wills, powers of attorney, assisted living, and even finances that you may not realize you need until it's too late.

4. How tough is it being in the "sandwich" generation, taking care of your parents and your kids?

Kim: You can feel pulled in different directions when you're trying to be a good parent to your kids and a good child to our parents. Fortunately, our kids were already in high school and college when this really started. They were aware of what was going on.

Mike: And we kept them involved. When my Dad has iPhone or computer trouble, he'll often get help from my son.



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Kim: But even today it can be tough. In one ten day period in June, I moved my daughter to New York City for her job. I came home for three days and then drove to Houston to move my mom to a new independent living place. All while trying to balance work, too.

5. What have you learned from this experience (having a mom with Alzheimer's and parents who are aging)?

Mike: I was in a bad car accident when I was 23. I was in ICU with head injuries, not opening my eyes or communicating for five days. My mom and dad were told I might be like that for the rest of my life.

My mom later wrote in a journal for me (since I have no memory of being in the hospital), "I said to (your dad), 'Mike needs us to be upbeat—we can't go in that room and treat him like he's doomed. We don't know he can't get well, and we're not going to mope around waiting for the worst. And that's when the big turn took place for us. From that moment on, if we felt down, we never showed it again.'"

She didn't just write it down. She told me that story many times after my accident, whenever we talked about it. Fast forward 30 years and my dad, my sister, and I had talked and decided that with Mom's Alzheimer's reaching stage 6, it was a tough situation for her and for my dad with him taking care of her 24/7. So we moved her into a memory care establishment. Every time I go to visit her, even when she says, "Who are you?" and asks, "Are you my brother?" I remember what she said. I can't take it personally; it's the Alzheimer's. And I can't mope around when I'm with her. I can't be sad about what's missing. I need to enjoy what's still there.

Kim: I have to remember that my mom is doing the best she can. And, this is my chance to give back for all that she's done for me in my life.

6. What has been the biggest surprise parenting aging parents?

Kim: The time, attention and emotional energy it requires is more than I would have expected, and I'm just helping to manage things from afar, not providing hands-on daily caregiving. Just keeping up with doctor's appointments, what medicine is she supposed to take and when, did the prescription refill get delivered, is mom taking part in activities, did the hairdresser get paid, did she get a shingles vaccine can be a lot to remember. Which is why we created The Caregiver's Key, so I'd have a place to be better organized and have everything I need to know easy to access.

7. How do you handle the emotional rollercoaster and the toll it takes?

Kim: Not always very well to be totally honest! I just have to remind myself that I'm doing the best I can. I want to be a good daughter and a good mom so my attention is often swinging from my mom to my kids (and I try not to forget my husband). Sometimes, I just need to sit and do nothing or go on a walk and think about all I have to be grateful for. It's important to find time for yourself so you can be in a better place to help others.



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Mike: Don't take it personally. I have to remember that my mom didn't choose to get Alzheimer's. My dad didn't want to get a pacemaker. He didn't want to go to the hospital with COVID pneumonia. All of these things have been challenges and obstacles, but keeping the right attitude and staying true to your faith gets you through it.

8. How do you juggle the time as a caregiver?

Kim: We joke that there are days when I'm in one room, trying to work, and I'm on the phone with my mom trying to explain a scam email, while Mike's in the next room on the phone with his dad hearing how the latest visit was with his mom. And while this is going on, I'm getting a text from my daughter as she's trying to figure out a health insurance question or something. And it's in the middle of the work day when I'm supposed to be working!