



# Don't Leave Yet: How My Mother's Alzheimer's Opened My Heart

*Constance Hanstedt*

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As a young girl in the Midwest, Constance Hanstedt was consumed by fear—of her parents, especially her disapproving mother, Virginia; of social situations; and of people in general. Unable to connect with those around her, she embraced perfectionism as a substitute for love.

Raising her own family eased some of Hanstedt's self-doubt. But even as an adult she remained guarded around her mother, avoiding conflict at all costs. Still, when Virginia developed Alzheimer's, Hanstedt did what the perfect daughter she'd always struggled to be would do: she returned to the Midwestern town where she was raised to help care for a mother who could no longer care for herself.

In *Don't Leave Yet*, Hanstedt recounts her journey toward facing her fears and rising above the past; her mother's unrelenting bitterness regarding life, even as she loses memories of it; and her unexpected discovery of an emotion that reaches beyond familial duty: compassion.

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