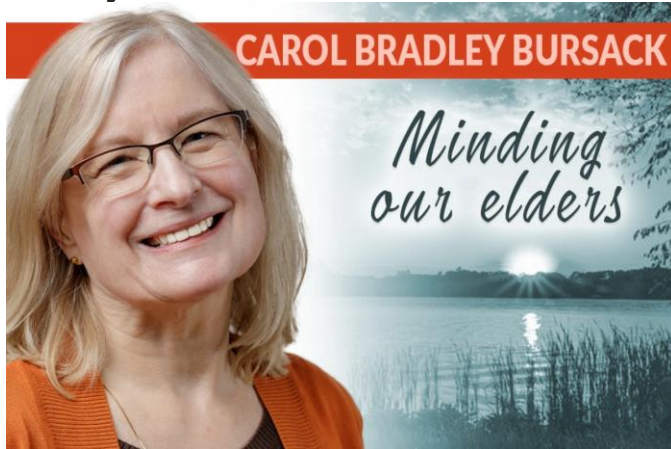




Transitioning from spouse to caregiver presents a confusing dynamic
"You're experiencing a kind of pain that is unique to long-married couples," Carol Bradley Bursack writes.



Column signature by Troy Becker

By Carol Bradley Bursack
May 16, 2026 at 10:00 AM

Dear Carol: My husband and I have been together for 59 years and married 56. He's in his sixth year after a dementia diagnosis. Overall, it's been a good marriage. During the first years, my husband was aware of his cognitive decline, and while frustration was common, he remained a loving partner. Now, that's changed; he's in denial. He thinks he can climb on the roof to fix the gutters, get his driver's license back and invest in what I view as risky "opportunities". How do I keep both of us safe while I cope with this disconnect? – SJ

Dear SJ: You're experiencing a kind of pain that is unique to long-married couples. This person, who was once a partner, now needs your supervision and care. Of course, this happens in parent care, as well, but with couples, it dramatically alters the dynamic of their relationship. At this point, spouses must learn to use language that can reassure and validate the person living with dementia. It's important to reassure them as valuable partners, while they simultaneously keep control of the aspects of life that threaten safety and financial security.

You mentioned that your husband now thinks he can clean your home's gutters when this is obviously unsafe for him. Consider thanking him and telling him how much you appreciate his willingness, but the insurance company considers this an unnecessary risk. They tell people to hire a handyman for risky chores. You can agree the rule is dumb, but that's how insurance is these days. These words validate his worth and let you remain the supportive

spouse. Use the same approach when he says he can drive. You can remind him that, silly as it is, the state says he must pause his driving because of his diagnosis. If he insists, tell him that you'll support him in taking the required test if he'd like. Most likely, the urge will pass, or he'll just complain, yet put it off.

Money is trickier, but you could say that now, with AI, everyone is having experts handle their money. Try to move everything possible online so physical bills don't arrive in the mail. If necessary, you can have him sign checks that you can later shred.

All of this makes for a painful, exhausting shift from a mutually supportive marriage where you operated with honesty and clear communication. You'll need support as you absorb the fact that these *fiblets*, as professionals call them, are necessary to preserve your husband's dignity while protecting both of you from potential disaster. His brain no longer offers the competency needed for important decisions.

If there is a [Memory Café](#) in your community, the group would offer you both a chance to have quality time with others who share your challenges. Additionally, please join a support group. This column on [caregiver stress](#) provides tips and links to groups.

Your husband is fortunate to have you, SJ. Warm wishes as you move forward with the challenges and rewards of spousal caregiving.



By Carol Bradley Bursack

Carol Bradley Bursack, a certified dementia support group facilitator, has provided care for multiple family members. She's also an author, newspaper columnist, consultant, and blog host at www.mindingourelersblog.com. Carol can be reached by using the contact form at www.mindingourelers.com.