



## Finding the Light: Navigating Dementia with My Son

**Kasey J. Claytor**

Osprey Publishing (Oct 4, 2024)

Softcover \$15.99 (150pp)

979-821847700-4

*A poignant memoir about caring for a son facing dementia, Finding the Light seeks to counter the negativity surrounding substantial health challenges.*

Ayurvedic and spiritual consultant Kasey J. Claytor's affecting memoir *Finding the Light* is about her son's diagnosis of frontotemporal dementia.

In 2019, Claytor's forty-nine-year-old son, Justin, began experiencing issues with his memory. Perceptive and intelligent, he already had a general tendency to be "foggy-headed," yet it soon became apparent that his worsening memory and increase in impulsive behaviors required professional assessment. His first medical diagnosis suggested that he had ADHD and depression, while an Ayurvedic doctor felt that suppressed anger was causing an "imbalance" within Justin's brain.

While Claytor welcomed further alternative theories, subsequent CT scans and MRI testing revealed that Justin had frontotemporal degeneration and early-onset dementia. Following this diagnosis, he lost his job at the Kennedy Space Center, got divorced, and required a supervised living environment. Soon, he was unable to drive and had to rehome his pets.

The prose is pragmatic in its coverage of caretaker challenges like managing insurance, healthcare, and legal matters for dementia patients; it also explains Justin's conditions in clinical terms. FTD, it notes, is "caused by shrinkage of the brain's frontal and/or temporal lobes," resulting in a decline in communication skills, "executive functioning, short-term memory," and "social conditioning." In contrast, Justin himself is honored via joyful photographs and with notes about how he returned to childlike, unaffected behavior as he moved toward his "long goodbye." Elsewhere, the prose is emotive, as where it focuses on the personal impact of the diagnosis on Claytor, including her anguish and shifting perspective regarding her son's condition.

In a style akin to journal entries, Claytor relays her initial dismay over Justin's diagnosis and her feelings of self-blame, which had to be replaced by self-compassion and compassion toward Justin as she became her son's primary caregiver. Indeed, the narrative is quite segmented; its pieces sometimes flow together well but at other times are rushed through. Sectional summary boxes are used to suggest focus points, though.

In an intentional counter to general negativity surrounding similar diagnoses, including in internet support groups, the book strives for positivity throughout. In addressing the management of dementia-related illness, it promotes holistic approaches and caregiver self-care; "survival tips" for fellow caregivers are included. But because this is, at its core, a personal story and not a book that includes official guidance on handling similar challenges, the bibliography is limited to a condensed reference list.

A resonant memoir, *Finding the Light* is about a mother's experience of caring for her son through his debilitating illness.

MEG NOLA (October 30, 2024)

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