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*Still Standing*

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A Psychologist's Guide  
*to Aging Without Shrinking*

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*First edition, 2026*

**Dedication**

*To Courtenay and Lindsay  
and to Raegan  
who remind me that love grows forward.*

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# Preface

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77 is not the end. It is the end of pretending. If you are reading this, you likely know the particular fatigue that does not come from age alone. It comes from years of being the reliable one. The composed one. The one who understood what was never spoken. There comes a season when endurance is no longer noble. When pleasing everyone begins to feel like self abandonment. When silence no longer resembles grace. For decades, you may have survived by accommodating, smoothing, absorbing, enduring. Strength was measured by how much you could carry without complaint. You became skilled at holding families together, at calming storms, at managing what others could not. But survival is not the same as wholeness. There is a difference between resilience and self erasure. Between loyalty and the absence of boundaries. Between love and quiet disappearance. *77 and Still Standing* is born from that distinction. This book is not about bitterness. It is about clarity. It is not about blame. It is about truth. It is about standing upright in the later decades of life without apology, without shrinking, and without pretending that endurance alone is fulfillment. If something in you is tired of shrinking to keep others comfortable, this book begins there.

# Introduction

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## Before We Begin

By the time we reach our 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond, something subtle but irreversible happens. The illusions thin. You begin to see where you overgave. Where you stayed too long. Where you explained too much. Where you accepted less than you needed. You may not talk about it out loud. But you feel it. You realize time is not unlimited. Energy is not endless. Fairness does not automatically arrive simply because you've earned it. For many, this realization is disorienting. For others, it is awakening. You might look around at your life and quietly ask: Is this how I want to live the remaining decades? Do I still need to be the strong one all the time? What would it mean to stop shrinking? The chapters that follow are not instructions. They are examinations. We will look at endurance. At fairness and the illusion of justice. At supporting adult children without shrinking. At money, power, boundaries, loyalty, and self respect in later life. Some pages may feel familiar. Some may feel confronting. Some may feel relieving. You do not need to agree with everything here. You only need to notice where something stirs. That is where your real work begins.

# The Strong One Is Tired

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If you have been the strong one your whole life, aging does not feel soft. It feels heavy. Somewhere in your sixties or seventies, you may have expected relief. You may have imagined that by now someone else would take over, financially, emotionally, practically. That the weight would shift. That the years of carrying would translate into rest. Instead, you are still the infrastructure. Still the one who stabilizes family conflict. Still the one who steps in when money falls short. Still the one who absorbs anxiety so others don't have to. Still the decision-maker when something breaks.

You are not weak. You are not fragile. You are not incapable. You are tired. There is a difference. Many people in their sixties, seventies, and eighties are not collapsing, they are functioning. They are managing households, estates, medical crises, finances, adult children, siblings, and partners. They are the quiet central beam in the house. But even beams experience stress fractures. The strong one is tired not because they failed. They are tired because they have succeeded for too long without recalibration.

## A Personal Moment

Recently, I realized I was not angry, I was depleted. I had spent a year managing legal matters, supporting family members, stabilizing everyone else's anxiety. I was functioning well. Clear. Competent. Capable. And yet, beneath that competence was a quiet thought: "When does someone carry me?" Nothing dramatic had happened. There was no breakdown. No crisis. Just a subtle recognition that strength, unexamined, becomes automatic. And automatic strength becomes invisible, even to oneself. This is not about collapsing. It is about choosing what I continue to hold.

## Psychological Insight: The Competence Trap

There is a psychological phenomenon I call the Competence Trap. When someone demonstrates high functioning over decades, family systems recalibrate around that reliability. The competent person becomes the stabilizer. Over time, that role stops being questioned. Resilience becomes expected. Strength becomes invisible. Exhaustion becomes private. The Competence Trap is not a flaw in character. It is a role that has outlived its original function. Recognizing that does not diminish your strength. It refines it.