

Are You My Mother?
By Lindsey Wray – Arlington, Virginia

Are you my mother?

You, who taught me how to sound out the short “a” for “apple,” but who could no longer read the word “apple.” You, who didn’t know an apple is the sweet and crispy fruit you used to slice up for my little fingers to handle.

Are you my mother?

You, who planned birthday parties that were the envy of my friends — custom-made games and cakes with homemade frosting — but who no longer knew when either of us was born.

Are you my mother?

You, who adeptly sewed Halloween costumes and school play outfits, and who helped me learn to sew for school projects. But you, who didn’t understand what to do with a needle and thread.

Are you my mother?

You, who read books to me in bed, on the couch, at the kitchen table, again and again, and then listened when I read them to you. You, who later couldn’t make sense of the blur of words spoken to you.

Are you my mother?

In the children’s book “Are You My Mother?” by P.D. Eastman, a baby bird hatches while his mother is away finding food. The bird leaves its nest and begins exploring the wide world in

search of his mother. He asks a dog, a cow, and even a bulldozer: “Are you my mother?” He’s not sure how to recognize her.

“I have to find my mother!” the bird exclaims at one point. “But where? Where is she? Where could she be?”

At the end of my mother’s journey with Alzheimer’s disease, I wasn’t sure where she was some days. I recognized *her* less and less, but still more than she recognized me. *Where is she? Where could she be?* Alzheimer’s erased her from the pages of her own book, yanking her out of the nest she worked so hard to build.

The little bird in Eastman’s book remains determined to locate his mother: “I have to find her,” he says. “I will. I WILL!”

As my mother entered her final decline, finding her got more difficult. Sometimes I’d see her searching, too — leaning down, seeming to eye an item just beyond her gaze. Looking for something lost, perhaps, or for something familiar.

Yes, yes, you are my mother. I have found you. And I think what you were looking for was a way to fly.