



UNIVERSITY OF  
**WATERLOO**

# **CASES OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA WHO GET LOST AND GO MISSING IN CANADA**

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Public Safety  
Canada

Sécurité publique  
Canada



## 4. A grandmother living with vascular dementia gets lost while driving to an antique shop

### Personal information

**Name:** Madeline Gibson.

**Age:** 84 years old.

**Gender:** Woman, pronouns are she/her.

**Living situation:** One-bedroom apartment in a suburb outside Ottawa, Ontario. Lives alone.

**Social support:** Robin, Madeline's daughter, and Liam, Madeline's son.

**Health:** Vascular dementia, high blood pressure, stroke history, heart attacks, anxiety, insomnia, bladder problems. Takes medications for blood clots, high blood pressure, and anxiety.

**Interests:** Coin collecting, spending time with grandchildren.





## Background

### Madeline's life and family

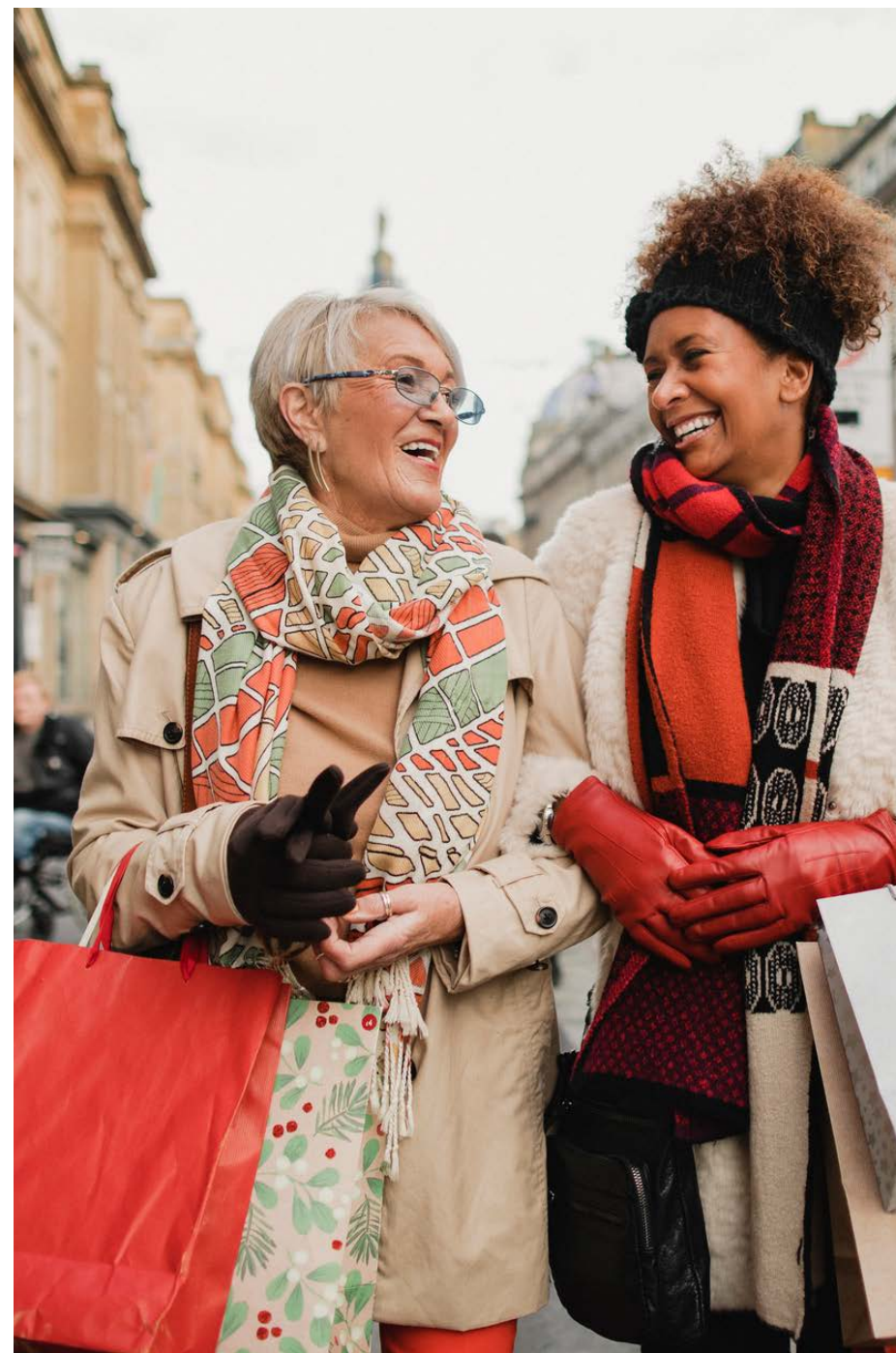
Eight years ago, Madeline moved closer to her children after her husband passed away. She lives five minutes from Robin, her daughter, and visits her grandchildren every Saturday. Her son, Liam, lives a 10-minute drive away and visits her a few times each month.

### Madeline's coin collection

Madeline loves collecting coins. She drives to small towns to explore antique shops and look for rare coins.

### Madeline does not wear her MedicAlert® bracelet when shopping

Although Madeline has a subscription to MedicAlert, she does not wear the MedicAlert bracelet. She takes the bracelet off when she goes shopping or visits her friends because she does not want people to know that she has dementia. She values her independence and worries about what people think of her.



## The day of the incident

### – Getting lost

#### 1. Driving to the antique shop

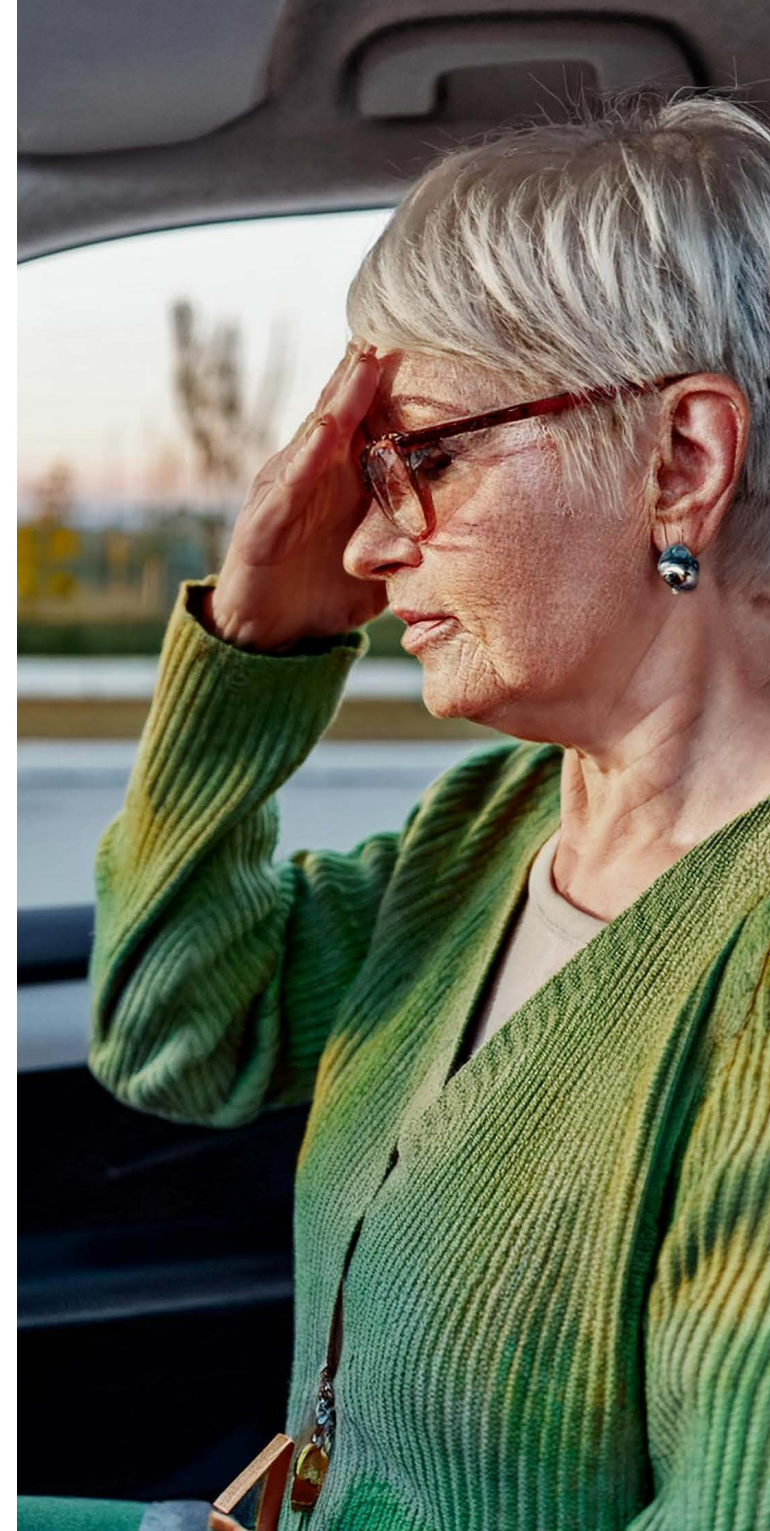
One Monday afternoon, Madeline drives about 40 minutes from home to visit one of her favourite antique shops and meet up with her friends. She has a portable car navigation system (GPS). However, she knows the route well since she visits the store every few weeks. She feels she no longer needs the GPS device and removes it from her car.

#### 2. Lost on the road

Madeline is deep in thought; while she focuses on the road and traffic, she does not pay attention to the exits. When Madeline realizes that she also needs to use the restroom, her attention shifts to the present and she does not recognize where she is. She starts to feel anxious and worries that she has missed her exit. Her heart races.

#### 3. Stopping at a gas station

After driving for another 30 minutes, she finds a gas station and uses the restroom. Returning to her car, she realizes the antique shop is now closed. She tries to make a plan for how to get home but is unable to retrace her way. She is in distress and loses track of time. Madeline notices people looking at her, but nobody asks her if she is okay. She feels alone and anxious.





## The day of the incident

### – Being found

#### 1. Gas station employee calls for help

Nina, the gas station employee, remembers Madeline from when she used the restroom two hours ago. Nina calls the police because she wants to help, but she is working alone and she cannot leave the cash register.

#### 2. Police arrive to help

Officers arrive, and Nina explains the situation. An officer goes over to Madeline, who is confused and anxious. She shares her name and home address. The officer says Madeline is 60 km away from home. The officer confirms that Madeline does not need medical help and asks for a family member's name and phone number. Madeline remembers her son Liam's name and the police officer helps her find his number on her phone.

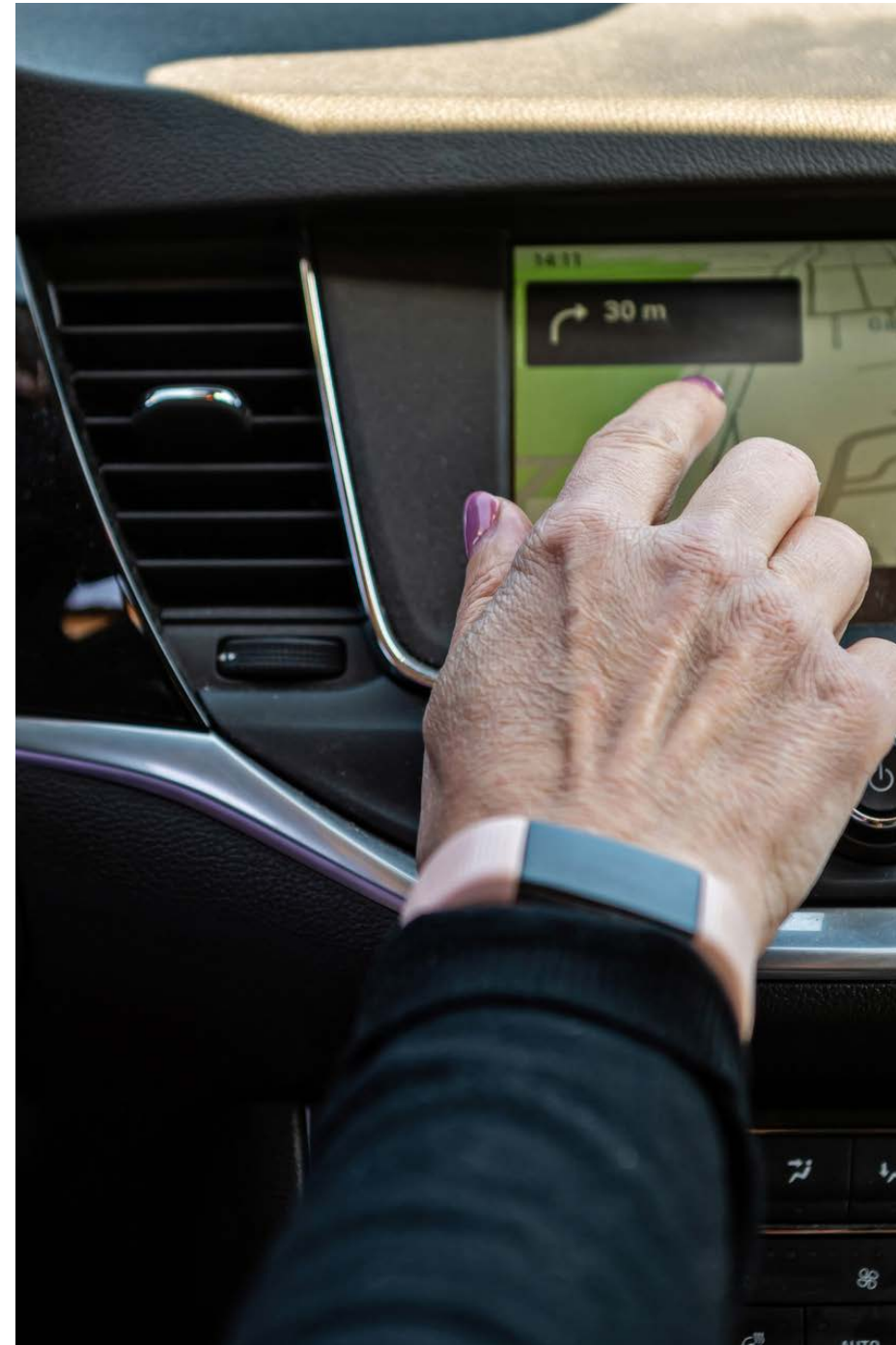
#### 3. Family is contacted

The officer calls Liam, and they arrange for him to pick up Madeline. The officer stays with her until Liam arrives.



## After the incident

Madeline's family worries about her driving ability given what happened today and after seeing several dents on her car that Madeline could not explain. Madeline, Robin, and Liam agree to discuss the need for a driving assessment. She agrees to resume using her navigation system in the car. For future safety, she will look into locator devices that can share her real time location with family members. Madeline feels it is now time for her to accept her dementia diagnosis, which she has been struggling with.



## Resources

Locator devices can help people living with dementia maintain their independence by giving others access to their real time location in case they need help finding their way. There are many types of locator devices available. The Alzheimer Society of Canada has resources that describe the differences between locator devices.

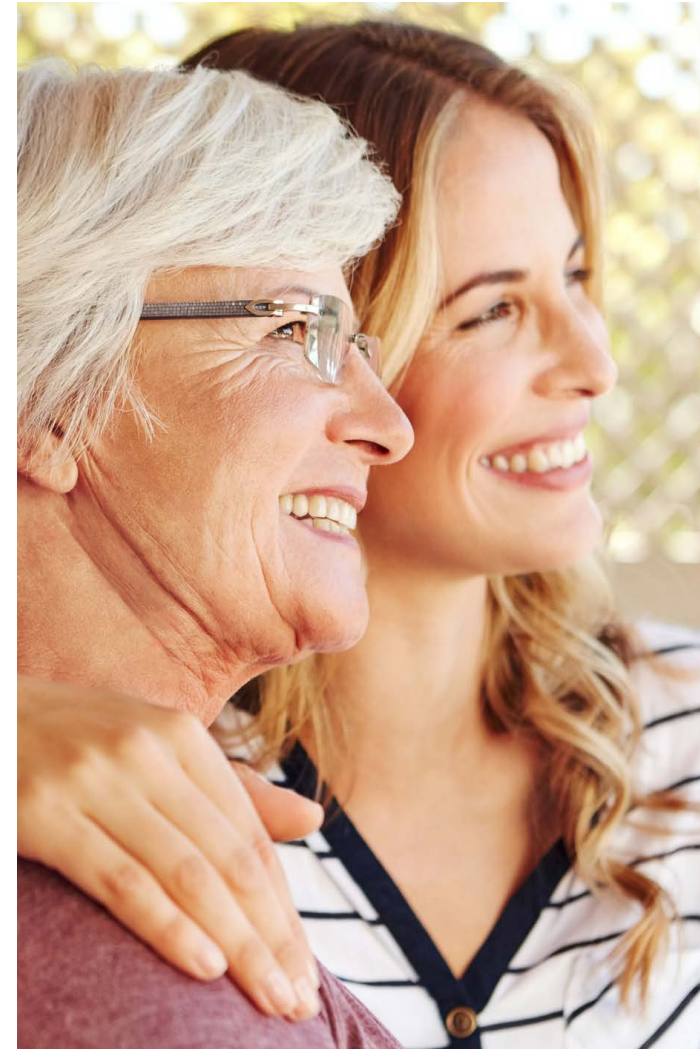
- <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security/tracking-devices>
- <https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Tracking%20Devices-Alzheimer-Society.pdf>

The following resource from the University of Waterloo outlines some locator devices available in Canada:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/aging-innovation-research-program/locator-devices>

The Driving and Dementia Roadmap provides safety considerations related to driving with dementia: <https://www.drivinganddementia.ca/#>

MedicAlert is a service that provides emergency medical information. The bracelet should be worn at all times so that first responders and medical personnel can access a person's emergency contacts and medical information.







## Resources

**Toolkit** to manage the risk of getting lost and going missing for people living with dementia.

This toolkit contains strategies to help with the common concerns of people living with dementia and their care partners regarding the risks of becoming lost.



## Emergency card

People living with dementia can carry an “In Case of Emergency” card. It has important information to help them if they go missing. This card was made by the [Calgary Missing Older adult Resource Network](#), see page 16.

## The Herbert Protocol

Important details about the person at risk can be gathered in The Herbert Protocol. This information can help first responders when someone is missing. Keep this information at home on your fridge and give it to care partners. Click this link to access the [‘Resource Guide for Older Adults at Risk of Going Missing’](#); fill out the form on pages 15-20.

## Safety and leisure activities

Balancing leisure time with safety can be challenging. [The Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering](#) provides strategies to promote safe wandering and manage the risk of getting lost when doing leisure activities.

## Driving with dementia

It can be challenging to drive a car when the driver has a hard time remembering, navigating, and attending to the environment. This [Driving and Dementia Roadmap](#) includes safety considerations related to driving with dementia.

In Case of Emergency	
Full Name	_____
Date of Birth	_____ Blood type _____
Address	_____
Cell	_____ Work _____ Home _____
Current Meds	_____
Conditions	_____
Physician	_____ Phone _____
Allergy/additional info	_____
In Case of Emergency	
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Additional Info	_____
_____ Last updated _____	

## Locator devices

Locator devices help people living with dementia share their location with family in case they are lost. They may also help the police find people should they go missing. The [Alzheimer Society of Canada](#) shares more information about the purposes of locator devices. The [University of Waterloo Aging and Innovation Research Program](#) outlines features of locator devices, including cost and battery life.

## What to do if you find a missing person

A missing incident is an emergency. Call police and ask the operator or service how you can help. [A video from Dementia Network Calgary](#) outlines a missing incident involving a person living with dementia and how to help.

# Links

- **Toolkit** to manage the risk of getting lost and going missing for people living with dementia, made by the University of Waterloo. <https://uwaterloo.ca/managing-risks-of-disappearance-in-persons-living-with-dementia/toolkit-0>
- **“In Case of Emergency” card** made by Calgary Missing Older Adult Resource Network. See page 14. <https://missingseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Resource-guide-for-people-at-risk-of-going-missing.pdf>
- **The Herbert Protocol** described by Calgary Missing Older Adult Resource Network. See pages 15-20. <https://missingseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Resource-guide-for-people-at-risk-of-going-missing.pdf>
- **The Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering.** [https://canadiansafewandering.ca/#more\\_information](https://canadiansafewandering.ca/#more_information)
- **The Driving and Dementia Roadmap.** <https://www.drivinganddementia.ca/>
- **Locator device overview**, as described by the Alzheimer Society of Canada. <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security/tracking-devices>
- **Locator device features**, as described by the University of Waterloo Aging and Innovation Research Program. <https://uwaterloo.ca/aging-innovation-research-program/locator-devices>
- **What to do if you find a missing person.** Dementia Network Calgary’s video [dementianetworkcalgary.ca/](https://dementianetworkcalgary.ca/)





# For more information

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