

Michelle Pennington and her Mother Joan - April 2008

THE daughter of an elderly woman with dementia has told how Morrisons staff threatened her with arrest after she tried to leave without paying for her shopping. Michelle Pennington said her mother Joan, 78, who started showing signs of dementia eight months ago, became confused on a trip to her local store. The 78-year-old grandmother of two was taken into the office with the security guard and a female member of staff. They told her that if she tried to come back she would be arrested. Then, without contacting any family members, they ordered Mrs Pennington out of the shop in Blackburn. Her daughter, who rang the store when she heard about her mother's ordeal, said the way the situation had been handled was 'nothing short of a disgrace'. She said she had been keen for her mother to retain as much independence as possible but relatives would now have to accompany her whenever she wanted to go out. 'I found out after Mum returned home about what had happened,' she said. 'As soon as I entered the house she said, "I'm going to be arrested". I thought she was making up a story but I became concerned and rang the shop.' Miss Pennington, 36, wrote about her mother's experience on Facebook and received more than 1,500 supportive comments.



'People need to understand dementia,' she said. 'My mum is loving, caring, happy and extremely loved. People just need to be a bit more aware of what's going on around them. 'People couldn't believe the way she had been treated and how staff had handled the situation. I'm not the only one who is surprised that the senior staff at Morrisons have so little awareness and experience in dealing with elderly people who are more prone to be suffering with illnesses.' Miss Pennington added that despite the positive response, several people blamed the family for what had happened to her mother. She said: 'Some trolls tried to blame us for what had happened, saying we should have been keeping a closer eye on her. 'Unfortunately we can't do that all the time, and on the morning of the incident she took herself off in a taxi. She won't have that independence now.'

A spokesman for Morrisons said: 'Following the incident, we met with the family and agreed that, in future, Miss Pennington's mum will be accompanied by a family member or a store colleague on shopping trips.'