

HARD DECISIONS

By Duane Starkey 9-12-2013

Susan's hand was shaking as she put down her coffee cup. She had to do something because she was desperate. Tears streamed down her face as she blurted out her inner feelings. "Mike, I can't take it any more. Your mother has worn me out. I know she has to be taken care, but it's so hard. I don't have any time with you and the kids any more. You know her memory is getting worse and she just sits there in her chair and stares at the TV. Then suddenly she's up and wandering around. I can't keep an eye on her all the time and she slips outside when I'm busy. The kids keep an eye on her when they can, but she still gets away. Yesterday, is the third time this month, we had to go find her and bring her home. I hate to lock her in her room and she screams and yells when I do. We have to do something now, because my nerves are shot and it's tearing our family apart."

Somewhere in the back of his mind, Mike knew it was coming. He hated to face it, but he was losing his mother. Janet was still alive, but she just was not the same anymore. He gripped his coffee mug in anger and frustration. He loved Susan and his mother. Construction work was hard and home building was in a slump right now. He had to work shorthanded and cut corners trying to make a living. They were having a hard time making ends meet and there just wasn't any money to spend on extra care for his mother. The glare in his eyes slowly faded to sorrow as he took a good look at Susan. She was a jewel and always stood by him. When his mother could not live by herself anymore, Susan was the one that said let's bring her home and let her live with us. That was three years ago and his mother was able to pretty much help herself as long as you kept an eye on her. He knew she had gotten worse and a burden on all of them. He just held off dealing with it, but something had to be done. She had always said "No nursing home for me. I had rather die first." He had agreed with her and promised no nursing home. He didn't want her living for years with strangers in an institution where neglect and abuse often occurred.

He finally spoke, "I know you are right honey and you have done your best and then some. I hate to put her in a nursing home, but I don't know what else we can do. Susan said, "I've got an idea that might work for now. I went online and found a program that seems to really help seniors and their families in situations like ours. It's called adult day care. It's centers where they keep seniors all day, kind of like child day care. Then come home in the evening to be with family. They even pick them up to go to the center and then bring them home. They have a nurse on duty, that monitors their health and makes sure they take their medications. They have a licensed activity director that helps them do physical exercise and have games and activities that stimulates their minds. They even have a dietician that plans their meals and makes sure each person gets the right food. They get to make new friends and have lots of social activities. These centers are licensed by the state and are inspected regularly for safety and medical compliance. It will give us time to ourselves during the day and the seniors are ready to rest when they get home.

Mike interrupted her, "Honey we can't afford something like that right now. How much does it cost"?

Susan smiled as she answered, "Believe it or not, the state pays for it under Medicaid if the patient qualifies under the financial requirement rules. Your mother does not have any money and she only gets social security, so she does not have to pay. Even if she did have to pay, it costs less than half what a nursing home costs. With her gone, I can go back to work and really help our finances. I can get out of the house and not worry about your mother. Halleluiah ! I really need to try this."

Mike grinned as he saw her face light up with hope and anticipation. He said, "Let's find a center around here and check it out."

Susan laughed again and said, "I already found one and checked it out on their web site and with the state. They have a good record and gave me several references of caregivers whose members go there. We have an open appointment to visit the center whenever you can get away for a couple of hours. They want us to bring your mother and let her see the fun and activities. She can talk with some of the seniors there and meet some of them who will encourage her to come to the center. The staff there will take your mother's information and process it with the state to make certain Medicaid will pay for it. They do this without cost to us and your mother can start going immediately even while the paperwork is being done."

Mike gave a big sigh of relief as he felt the worry and burden of care for his mother leave him. He said, "Man, what a relief. Wish we had known about this earlier, but better late than never."

Three months later.

Mike's mother gave everybody a quick hug and rushed out the door to enter the van headed to the center. She gave the driver a big smile and greeted all her friends as she sat down. They started chatting about the "dressing game contest" that was planned at the center that day. They drew numbers to select the teams to dress volunteer patients. Some were men and some women. The judges decided which team did the best mix and match on their volunteer and gave prizes. It was fun and helped each person practice getting dressed at the same time.

After the contest, Janet rushed over to her favorite chair to sit by John, her special man friend. She took his hand and asked him how he felt today. He smiled and said, "I feel a lot better now that you are here. I want you and me to practice our dance steps in a little while. You know the contest is coming Friday and I want us to win". Janet laughed with pleasure and said, "We're sure going to be hard to beat. I think we are good together".

Susan called Mike from her office and asked him if he had time for lunch. He said, " Sure do. This new guy I hired got us four more contracts but we don't start until next week".

This family was lucky that Susan found out about adult day care centers, Most families don't know about it and are unaware that day care centers for seniors even exist. I'm glad you got the knowledge.

Duane Starkey

