



PO Box 312
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Peaceable Living

We had moved our mother into a new assisted living complex in early 2000. It was such a wonderful place. It gave my mother independence, yet we knew she was being watched over in the event of an emergency. My four sisters and two brothers helped with the move; as stressful as it was, it clearly took a toll on our mother as well. This wasn't what she wanted, yet she knew deep down that this was the best for her welfare. She couldn't live alone, so far from friends and family, and this was her new home.

It had now been two months since that move, and this was my first visit to her new place. Imagine my shock when we walked into what looked like a complete stranger's home. All her belongings were gone, replaced with new furnishings. A few familiar pictures adorned the walls, reminders of her life well-lived. The only other remaining items that truly meant something quite powerful to my mom were our old couch and a chime clock.

The chime clock hung neatly in the dining room, as it always had but now no longer chimed (I fixed the clock later). The couch had been the centerpiece in our home for many years; lots of holiday gatherings, laughter by the fire, curled up watching Sunday football. But because a few of my family members who live nearest to my Mom didn't care for the couch (it's old and falling apart), it was placed on the screened-in porch at the new complex. Want to guess where my mother was spending nearly all of her time?

My sisters had taken the lead in this effort because we were moving my Mom close by to their homes. However, my sisters did what they would have wanted for their aging years. They set up a Laura Ashley-like home, picture perfect in every way - except that it wasn't perfect for our mother.

If I had to do it all over again, I would have spoken to my mother in more detail before the move. I would have spoken to my sisters before they did what they thought was the right thing. Their hearts were in the right place but they never thought about how simply our Mother liked to live. I didn't want to chastise my sisters for turning my mother's new place into a showroom, because they did a great job. However, I did ask: "Where did her memories end up?" It wasn't a pleasant discussion.

As our parents age, let's remember that there's a balance between allowing them to live their lives in the way in which they have already lived their many years and how we'd like to see them live out their remaining years. TALK TO THEM NOW! Talk to your siblings. Have a plan. Reacting to circumstances is not a plan but a trap that will cause more anger, arguments and frustration at a time when you need to be compassionate, understanding and consoling.



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Yes, health, memory issues and mental capacity play into all of these decisions and can certainly change decisions made previously. But starting a dialogue sooner allows everyone to better understand what to expect further down the road.

*Don Dawson, Westminster
Cares Board Member*