

Hope in a Hopeless Place

Category: Hope

written by Paula Mahon | December 25, 2016

In 2008 my father was committed to a long-term care facility, and our family visited him daily. We testified to the nursing home staff of the funny, smart, kind and generous man he once was.

Sadly, diabetic micro infarcts had scattered across his brain like stars in a night sky, taking from him his good judgment and all semblance of social graces. Those lapses in judgment caused falls from a ladder that broke his hip, shoulder and wrist, immediately followed by yet another fall that gave him back pain from compression fractures in his spine. He spent the last eighteen months of his life in a nursing home bed attached to a feeding tube pump.

Yet his memory was still intact, and he worked with great self-discipline to regain his skills through physical therapy. But he never succeeded in getting approval from the PT staff as to his fitness to be discharged. He became an angry, hurt, sickly man who abused nursing home workers verbally and sometimes physically.

All my father wanted was to go back to his home, located a mere fifty yards from the nursing home where he was required to stay! A small request from a dying man, and I, as his physician daughter, thought I should be able to do something to help make it happen.

I called on our family physician. Our family had been Dr Cannon's first patients after his completion of training. He had known me since high school and had followed my career through college, med school and primary care practice with interest.

"Dr Cannon, is there some way we can bring Dad home? I'm sure we can arrange to have private duty nursing come to the house. Mom won't have to lift a finger. We can make this work."

Dr Cannon shook his head. "It's just too much stress on your mother."

Inwardly, I had to agree. Dad's temper in recent years had given Mom a case of hypertension that several blood pressure medications barely controlled. So I asked again, "Why don't you just tell Dad that he's going to have to stay in the nursing home? Aren't you kind of leading him on with your 'let's see' attitude?"

And Dr Cannon replied, "The Jesuits at Fairfield taught me that taking away the hope of another man is the greatest sin you can commit."

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