

A Painful Decision

Category: Tough Choices

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | September 1, 2017

I thought it would be easier than it was, but it was one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. Ma had been declining mentally and physically for the previous several years. This once-feisty woman—who'd been able to add up her grocery bill to the penny in her head and work seven days a week at a local children's store while still maintaining an eat-off-the-floor home—had become a shadow of herself. Ma barely ate, rarely wore anything but an old white t-shirt and a pair of torn underwear, and sometimes at night wandered the halls of the apartment building where she and Dad lived.

Dad was worn out caring for Ma during the day and being on guard for her whereabouts and well-being at night. I, who lived two blocks away, was worn out by panicky phone calls from Dad that brought me to my parents' home at all times of the day and night. It was obvious that Ma needed more care, that she required placement in a nursing facility. But making the decision to send her there was emotionally painful.

I cleaned out her closet, separating the clothes she'd once worn to work from the clothes I knew she'd be comfortable wearing in the nursing home. I emptied her medicine cabinet, packed her comb and brush (which bore a few of her gray hairs), put her spare pair of glasses in a case and gathered some pictures of family that Dad and I could place on the dresser in her new small room to remind Ma that she was still loved.

And then Dad and I drove Ma to the facility. To this day, ten years since Ma's death, I tell myself that Ma did not understand what was happening. Yet a part of my brain insists that she had an inkling that her life was about to change forever, that she would never again see the home she once loved and cherished. I caught Ma looking at me from the back seat of the car; her tear-filled eyes seemed to question what I was doing and why I was doing it. I felt comfortable with my decision to put her in a safe place and to ease the life of my aging dad—but I also felt profound guilt. As long as Ma was there, saying goodnight to her after each day's visit drained me. Even now, I question the goodness of my intentions.

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