

It Was My Choice, Not an Accident

Category: Accidents

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | April 1, 2022

As my parents aged, accidents became an integral part of their lives—and mine, as their caregiver. These accidents ranged from falling to losing bladder and bowel control. Each time something happened beyond my parents' control, they lost a part of themselves—of their sense of independence and adulthood. Perhaps Jacques said it best in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with the final lines of his "All the world's a stage" soliloquy: "Last scene of all,/That ends this strange eventful history,/Is second childishness and mere oblivion."

The more accidents that occur, the more the caregiving child becomes the parent and the parent reverts to "second childishness." This was especially difficult for my father. After all, he never imagined that his daughter would be dressing his wounds from a fall or helping him don an adult diaper. Yet, we both learned that it is not what happens but how it is handled.

My mother's situation was somewhat different. Her dementia protected her from many realities of her declining life.

I have no nursing skills. Changing the diapers of my two babies never appealed to me. The sight of blood has always made me queasy. But as my parents aged, I had to adapt to a different world that demanded behaviors and strengths I did not know I possessed. I could not prepare for the accident, but I could teach myself to approach it with composure and, more importantly, with the respect my parents so richly deserved.

Accidents that challenge the parent/child relationship interrupt the routine and structure that I embrace. Yet, they are a part of life—whether they result from a fall off a tricycle or pressing the gas pedal instead of the brake. When they alter the parent/child roles, they become even more threatening.

I cringed—with worry and sometimes resentment—when the nursing facility would call me, saying Ma was again on her way to the ER due to a fall from her bed. Or, Dad slipped in the shower, cut his foot on the drain, and needed an ambulance to take him to the ER since his blood thinner was making it impossible to stop the blood flowing from his foot.

I had no control over my parents' accidents. But, it was my choice, not an accident, that led me to be their caregiver and support during the final years of their lives.

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