

Beware of Neighbors

I often hear from clients and their families that they are managing OK, their friends and neighbors are helping out. I am always leery when I hear this statement because of a personal experience that I had with my elderly grandparents. Like most people, I did as much as I could for my grandparents as they aged, but with my own work and family, I couldn't be there to help with everything. They increasingly relied on the neighbors next door, Kate and Joe. They helped take them to doctor's appointments, run errands, and provided companionship. At the time, this was very helpful and I was grateful for their help. I moved to New Hampshire, thinking my grandparents were in good hands and managing OK. Two months later, my grandmother passed away.

Before the wake, my mom and I were searching for one of my grandmother's rings only to find out that somehow all of my grandmother's jewelry had ended up at Kate and Joe's. Only the threat of police involvement recovered some priceless family heirlooms. This was my first indication that Kate and Joe may have some ulterior motives.

Kate and Joe then became increasingly involved with my grandfather. My grandfather's two nieces, Ann and Beth, who had always been distant and kept in touch only by occasional phone calls, stepped in to give emotional support to my grandfather. They also took over his finances as he was getting dementia and couldn't always remember which bills he had paid. Beth decided since my grandfather never drove anymore, that she would take his car. Unfortunately, his dementia had progressed and he didn't realize he was being taken advantage of. On one visit back home, he told me the car was still in the garage, when in fact, Beth had already taken it. Beth even went so far as to move him into an assisted living facility without consulting with my mom, my uncle or myself. We only found out because of a phone call from a family friend concerned that she saw a for sale sign at the house.

Without my family's knowledge, Ann and Beth had sold my grandparents home and along with Joe and Kate, split all of its contents between them and sold the rest. My grandparents were not wealthy by any means, but they were comfortable and had intended for what they did have to be left to their children and grandchildren. We learned the hard way what these neighbors and nieces' true motives were. Because we all lived far away and were nice enough to trust the neighbors and those seemingly well-intentioned nieces, my grandparents' wishes were not honored. After my grandmother passed away, those nieces took advantage of my grandfather's dementia and preyed on his vulnerabilities. Beth had her name placed on all bank accounts and even had my grandfather's will changed, all without our knowledge.

I have precious memories of my grandparents and those can never be taken away. Unfortunately, I also now know that not everyone has your loved one's best interests in mind. I can not stress enough the importance of having the proper documents in place

such as Advanced Directives (living will and durable power of attorney for health care.)
Looking back on it now I wish we would have hired a medical home care agency to assist my grandparents when we moved to New Hampshire which would have provided a better outcome and more peace of mind.