

The Thurston-Mason Senior News

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“The Expert from Out-of-Town”

“For 2 years I have been live-in caregiving for Mother who has mid-stage dementia. Last week my sister and brother arrived from out of state for their semi-annual visit. They both had lots of thoughts about how Mom is doing and opinions about what I should be doing for her.” “Help!”

My siblings ‘visit’ (note I did not say help out) twice a year and still do not see Mom’s tremendous loss of memory or logic. They do not allow themselves to see how this once vibrant woman is now in such tragic decline. But they do give me endless ADVICE on how I should ‘get her out of the house more’ and ‘take her for walks in the park or to play cards at the senior center.’

Well mom has never been much of an outdoor girl, let alone a walker and she can no longer follow a card game. My siblings keep telling me that much of Mom’s trouble is her lifestyle – staying at home, no social life and not keeping busy. Lifestyle, really! Did we grow up in the same household? Our Mother was never very social, dad was. She was fine staying home and raising us or staying home and reading. Dad was the one busy ‘doing’ things. Mom loved being home.

How does a progressive disease without a cure like dementia, get reduced to LIFESTYLE? How



much denial does it take to put a salve made up of the wrong lifestyle – to keep you from seeing dementia for what it is? Our mother is disappearing. Her memories are fading from what is happening now, slowly erasing where she has been in the past 5, 10, and now 40 years. She is now mentally living and recalling events from when she was in her 30s. Her adult children confuse her. In her mind she has school age children who go to band practice and baseball. So who are these adults in her home? Are they cousins or her husband’s friends? She is past recalling names and everyone is ‘hon.’ I like her calling me hon. I find it endearing. My siblings miss being recognized. Yes, that can hurt. But there is work to be done for Mom. Each week it take hours of thankless and challenging caregiving and only then can you understand how Mom is doing now and change your expectations as she changes.

So what do you do with your expert relatives from out-of-town the ones who have more than a healthy sense of denial of how sick Mom is, miss being called by their name, or invoke her lifestyle as the cause of her ills?

Apart from a ‘family-ectomy’, is it time to explore whether they could provide some real help? Do they know what to do if given the chance or they took a chance? Are you OK with them doing things a bit differently from you? Are you OK with acknowledging them when they do help? Is it time for a martyr check?

Maybe it’s time to talk to them about what they’re willing to do. Are there duties, tasks or roles your out of town relatives can do where they live? Can you prepare them to perform duties like Mom’s finances, insurance paperwork, or search dementia resources? Are they able to visit adult family homes, learn about Medicaid long term care services or search YouTube for caregiver videos which would help your Mother?

Perhaps the experts from out-of-town can become the expected from out-of-town.

This article is a service of the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging. For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program, call (360) 664-2168 and ask to speak with a Resource Manager or visit our website at WWW.LMTAAA.ORG