



# OUR JOURNEY

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**We didn't know we needed help until our children helped us see the truth...**



# Our Journey

Jerry, my husband for 65 wonderful years, has always led a very busy life. As a corporate pilot for over three decades, he often left me, Darlene, at home managing the challenges of raising our five children. Whenever he was home, he immersed himself in bookwork, tending to the yard, and maintaining our lakeside property.

Our life was vibrant and fulfilling. We cherished our travels, friendships, and family gatherings. Overall, our health remained good, aside from a heart scare Jerry experienced in his thirties, which eventually resolved itself. We were a dynamic couple, making the most of the life we were blessed with.

However, when Jerry and I reached our early 80s, we faced the heartbreaking loss of two of our sons within five years. No parent should ever endure such grief. Each loss was tragic and sorrowful, and I believe our shattered hearts took a toll on our health.

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Fast forward to last year. Now both of us are in our mid-80s, and the increasing health challenges we face have profoundly affected our lives. For Jerry, it's ongoing heart issues, while I have started experiencing the feared cognitive decline, which has introduced a level of anxiety I had never encountered before.

Everything seemed to unfold so quickly. The spacious home we cherished was turning into a burden. Navigating the stairs to the laundry, my sewing room, and Jerry's office was becoming increasingly difficult, requiring frequent pauses to catch my breath. Neither of us wanted to confront this reality. I don't think anyone is eager to acknowledge the signs of aging, but denial doesn't halt the process.

Then, our three children invited us to brunch, and that day transformed everything.

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It all began when our eldest daughter asked, “Dad, have you considered what Mom will do if you pass away, given your heart condition?” This prompted a discussion about my memory loss and how the children were starting to notice the patterns. Both Jerry and I acknowledged that it had become a concern, and I needed to consult a doctor for a diagnosis.

That day, we shared tears and explored the “what ifs” of our situation. We indulged in delicious food while soaking up the warmth of the sun on the back patio as we talked. Most importantly, about this day, we laid out a plan for the next steps in our journey.

Jerry and I came to a mutual decision that it was time to transition to independent living to reduce stress in our lives—and to be frank, in our children’s lives as well. We had been depending on them significantly for various aspects of our daily living and home care.

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Is moving from a large home to an apartment a significant task? Absolutely. We identified what was most important to us and what would fit in our new space, selling everything else. The kids did take a few items for sentimental reasons. Jerry struggled to part with his 20 pairs of cowboy boots, but I chose to let that go. We had bigger challenges to address.

During the packing process, I received a diagnosis of early-stage dementia and significant hearing loss. Initially, the news left me feeling anxious, but I decided to embrace happiness in my situation. I was prescribed a low dose of medication to manage the dementia and fitted with hearing aids. I'm not fond of those little devices and often choose not to wear them.

Our children and grandchildren were incredibly supportive throughout the move. Jerry referred to our new place as "the box." He found it more challenging to adjust to our one-bedroom plus den apartment than I did. Personally, I felt a sense of contentment, its as if I finally retired after decades of cooking and cleaning. To me, it felt cozy.

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Seven months after moving into our independent living apartment, Jerry's health started to decline, resulting in multiple trips to the hospital and emergency room. I also noticed a decline in my cognitive awareness. My doctor increased my dementia medication to what they call "The Gold Package." Since neither of us could drive anymore, we had to rely entirely on our children for transportation to appointments. Everything happened so fast, but fortunately, we had already made the move.

The community we chose also provides assisted living options. Now, both of us are on a care plan to help manage our medications, which had become a daily struggle. It's hard to accept, but the truth is clear.

Jerry receives help with putting on his TED socks and has support for showers to prevent falls. I get reminders about enjoyable activities in the community, like art classes, movie nights, and special musical performances. Meanwhile, Jerry enjoys relaxing in his recliner and watching the news. We also enjoy the desserts they serve here!

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I am thankful for the available services and the sense of security our community provides. Now, I can sleep peacefully, knowing that we are both safe and someone has their eye on us. One lesson life has taught me is that tomorrow is never guaranteed. Therefore, I choose to live one day at a time and cherish every moment.

Another aspect that brings joy to both Jerry and me is that our community includes a memory care neighborhood. When the time comes that I may need additional support, I will have a place to live where I will be well cared for.

Planning ahead is crucial. It also reassures our children, knowing that we are safe and looked after. I hope that sharing our journey can offer you some encouragement.

My youngest daughter once said, "Don't wait for a crisis to move, or the move will become a crisis." How true that is! We are truly thankful that we relocated when we did.

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Last year, Jerry and I had the honor of being featured in a PBS documentary titled "Inside Senior Living." The film captured our relocation, and it was an enjoyable experience to be part of the show. In just a year, we've undergone significant changes. Our journey continues, and this move has truly made this phase of our lives more manageable for both us and our family. God bless, and may you find your journey!

Darlene

