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The Day My Home Visit Turned into a Pleasant Surprise



Nicholas Pollak / February 22, 2010 /

OP-ED (<http://www.thefrontpageonline.com/category/op-ed>)

I recently received a call from a friend having a problem with his elderly stepfather. His stepfather's son said his father was aging rapidly and appeared to have a severe case of dementia. The son said he was combative with people who came into his home to help. He also should not be driving. He was a danger to himself and others.

The son had arranged an appointment with a doctor who recommended that he be banned from driving and placed in a retirement home.

The son was leaving soon to retire in Arizona. He would be a 24-hour drive or a three-hour flight from his father.

He would feel better if his father acquiesced and just went to a home where he would be taken care of with his one-room apartment, tended to by the staff around the clock.

I agreed to help.

When I drove to the man's house to assess his condition, the son had already had his father's doctor contact the DMV to suspend his license. One tire was deflated to make the car inoperable.

A Dealbreaker?

However, when the son advised his father of what had happened just the day before my visit, his father threw him out. He told him to never come around again. The father felt the doctor's visit and diagnosis had been a setup.

The father's frustration level was high. He completely resented his son's interference and the loss of his independence by having his driving privileges revoked.

When I arrived, the gentleman was not home. He was helping his lady friend come home from hospital where she had just completed a minor outpatient procedure.

I waited. He drove up in his girlfriend's car. He pulled into the driveway, happy to see me, helped his friend into the house and came back out to park the car in the garage, without a problem. He was smiling, happy, alert, lucid.

From the information I had, I expected a frail old man, barely able to walk or remember anything.

I was pleasantly surprised. He was overall active and mentally alert. His handshake was firm and so was his eye contact.

During my visit son showed up.

"I saw your car parked outside," he said. "I thought I should come in to make my case with my father one more time."

The son dutifully reminded his father again that his license had been suspended, that he could not drive and that a beautiful one-bedroom apartment with medical and domestic help would really be the best for him.

The Truth Comes Out

The son ended his presentation by saying:

“I love you dad. I will support you in whatever decision you finally make.”

With that, he left.

I talked with his father for quite some time.

When his combativeness was raised, he explained that he really had not been combative in that the physical therapist who had been coming to see him no longer came. He did not require physical therapy any longer.

The cleaning people annoyed him because they kept moving his “stuff” around. His stuff never was where he could find it.

He insisted he enjoyed cooking as well as keeping himself and his own house clean.

It was obvious to me both were well cared for.

He enjoyed trips to the market, to restaurants and the movies.

He was thoroughly enjoying retirement. He did appreciate his son’s attempts to take his driving privileges away and to put him in a home.

Candidly, he said when he no longer could care for himself, he would acknowledge it.

I suggested he would like to look at his situation from a different perspective.

Rather than seeing his son and other professionals as the enemy, he should look at himself as a respected, valuable senior citizen. After a lifetime of service as a fireman, he was entitled to help from certain state agencies. His son was only trying to ensure his

continued welfare.

By the time I left, the father understood.

He accepted the loss of his driving privileges. He could remain independent by using the local “Dial-a-Ride” services or by calling for a cab when he needed to go out. He could have a cleaning lady two or three times a month.

It was clear the son was concerned for his father’s welfare. He just wanted to make sure his father was okay when he moved out of state.

But the son also had jumped the gun in trying to push his father into something his father did not want.

Studies have proven that senior citizens are better off remaining in their own homes as long as possible.

Life expectancy is prolonged. Most importantly, the elderly will be in a familiar, comfortable environment.

The difference in costs between home and a nursing home is over 60 percent.

When it comes time for us to look at issues regarding our aging parents, perhaps we should bear in mind the following by an elderly man in frail health in a wheelchair to his obviously healthy son:

“Where you are, I once was. Where I am, you will be.”

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