

Surrendering to change is not easy

By Ellen Waldman

July 3, 2019

Here's what I encountered in the past month. These are all true, but details are changed for the sake of privacy.

I met a 99-year-old man, recently discharged from the hospital, caring for his wife suffering with dementia. He did not think he really needed any help. He wanted to continue to take care of her in their home on his own, even though she needed total care and he was quite frail.

I spoke to a 60-year-old woman who told me she's extremely sensitive and will need to have exactly what she wants, or doesn't want, if she gets sick. Therefore, she can never go to a hospital or skilled nursing facility, no matter what.

I also met with a woman in her late 80s, who took a hard fall and hit her head, and also has a very serious medical condition. She can no longer take care of herself in her two-story home, but insists she doesn't need anything, won't bring in any help, and won't move into a facility. What's an aging life care specialist (or family member) to do in order to help?

I clearly can't force anyone to make a safer decision. People are willing to take greater risks for the sake of having what they want. I can offer options and better solutions to their situations, but the choices are up to them. What I want to convey is how difficult life becomes for everyone if there is so much resistance to change associated with the aging process. Families often call me for this reason alone. Some might call this stubbornness or denial, but this clinging to how life should be, and what outer conditions must be met, are for sure going to be hard to sustain. It brings up a lot of fear and anger in those suffering and those around them.

In the book "Grace in Dying," author Kathleen Downing Singh states, "Resistance is the refusal to accept what is. Acceptance is the open receptivity to what is." Given these two choices, resistance or acceptance, one wonders which choice might bring greater relief.

Families and caregivers struggle with this daily. Their loved ones will not accept that life has changed, and with that, new choices must be made. I can assure you that no home care company, no facility, and no caregiver can provide you with the life you used to have. I do have some ideas that might be useful if you find that accepting help, or surrendering to change, is not for you.

First of all, consider how practical and realistic your wishes to have it your way truly are. Ask your friends and family for input, your doctor for how medically practical, and your financial advisor for how much you can afford.

If you're struggling with being more flexible around your own aging process and/or disability, consider contacting a professional to help you. Medicare pays for counseling by a psychiatrist, psychologist, licensed social worker, nurse practitioner and others. A wonderful organization I have written about

previously, and which charges no fees, is Age Wise, Age Well (541-857-7780). Their peer-to-peer counseling has been meaningful to many.

Another idea is to visit a few independent and assisted-living communities to see how people there are living their lives. Take a look at Maple Ridge, 548 Main St., Ashland (541-200-0282). It used to be Brookdale Ashland but is now managed by Compass Senior Living, which also manages the Village at Valley View Memory Care in Ashland and other local facilities. If moving is not for you right now, at least you'll have an idea what this looks like.

If you're set on staying at home, consider speaking with a caregiving agency to determine what they can do for you, should the need for help arise in the future. You might call Right at Home (541-414-0800) or Visiting Angels (541-773-5002) and ask for a complimentary consultation. They provide more services than just personal care, such as transportation, meal preparation and shopping.

The whole point is to see where in your life you can make some room for change. Thinking you're going to be an exception to the whole aging process will likely cause more stress for yourself and others. I said to someone recently, "remember, aging happens," and that made her smile. See what reminders work for you.