

Grounded at 76

For months I had growing concerns over Dad's ability to continue to drive. Dad was forgetting simple directions and routes that he had driven for years. His ability to drive in traffic or park the car appropriately at the mall was totally compromised as his judgment and perception dulled. At the onset of Dad's dementia, Mom, as often as possible, would accompany him and act as the co-pilot on his normal daily trips to get gas, pick up a loaf of bread or make a short trip to the Church. But a new behavior was emerging; Dad would simply take the car without Mom's knowledge.

Dad loved his car. A 1984 white Oldsmobile with a mere 40,000 miles recorded. He cared for that car as if it were a living being.

The day that I dreaded had arrived. It was time for Dad to surrender his car keys.

My first chore was to convince Mom of my decision. I firmly and boldly sat her down and told her of my concerns and my action plan. She was aghast "I can't do that! It will kill him! You know how much he likes to drive." Over Mom's objections I knew the keys had to go! If Mom couldn't do it I had to. No one said being the adult child was going to be easy.

Dad was scheduled to be hospitalized for a short stay so his medical team could conduct their annual health evaluations. "Perfect," I thought. "I'll make the doctor tell him!" Dad's generation believes everything a physician says. They wouldn't think twice about doubting a doctor...they're figures of authority! Yes, even the best of caregivers can become chicken and look for the easy way out. Having difficulty making decisions, taking action? Play the doctor card or get some other authority figure (Priest, Pastor, Rabbi, Attorney) to do it on your behalf...it's great! The decision is delivered by a neutral party and it's not your fault. It's flawless!

I phoned the Doctor's office and explained my dilemma and she agreed to be an accomplice to my plan. Much to everyone's surprise and relief, Dad took it pretty well or so we thought. He handed his keys over to me as the Doctor looked on.

"The doctor knows best. You know what this means? Your Mother will have to drive everywhere now." There was a brief pause. "Have you ever ridden with your Mother? We're going to be killed!"

About 2 months after confiscating Dad's keys, I received a phone call from Mom.

"Hi Mom. What's up?"

"I haven't slept all night! That's what's up!"

"What's wrong?"

"You're going to be very angry with me. Your Father took the keys off the dresser and went for an hour and half joy ride yesterday."

"What?"

"Oh don't worry he's fine. He's home safe." she said in an almost sarcastic tone. "I'm the one!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well you know that pound of chocolates you gave me last month?"

"Yes"

"You remember that I agreed to eating only one piece a day?"

"Yes"

"Well with all the stress yesterday I totally lost it and ate the entire pound! The entire pound! The sugar and caffeine kept me up all night. Oh Lord, you know what that stuff does to my digestive system! I was up and down all night! Oh sweet Jesus, I thought I was going to die!"

I knew how upset Mom was and it was not the time for a lecture. Questions like, "Why were the keys on the dresser? Why didn't you hide them?" were of no value. A little humor was in order.

"Well Mom thank God you're just a chocoholic and not an alcoholic! You could be calling me from the police department's drunk tank!"

Mother, being a teetotaler responded, "Well if there's a blessing in this entire event, that's it!"

That evening I went to Mom and Dad's to hide the keys and have yet another little talk with Dad. Once again we had to 'hide the keys'. This time was a little tougher than the first effort. I couldn't hide the keys just anywhere...Mom would forget where I had hidden them and that would have only added to her already heightened stress level.

I again reminded Dad what the doctor had told him. I looked for some type of positive feedback, a sign that he understood and agreed. With Dad's lips

tight and sort of twisted, his blue eyes slightly squeezed closed and his hands folded in front of him, Dad's only response was "You're Mother is such a tattler tale!"

Contributed by Tom Begert-Clark, President/CEO of Even As We Speak® (www.evenaswespeakonline.com) He is a Life Skills Trainer, Consultant, Motivational Specialist and Humorist. He is the Author of "Rosie John Doesn't Live Here Any More...One Family's Journey In Eldercare"

About the Author

Tom Begert-Clark has been involved in working and assisting the senior population for over 25 years as a HUD Service Coordinator and Senior Housing Specialist, Developer and Director of SCOPE Adult Day Care Center, Director of Franchise Support for SarahCare® Adult Day Services, Inc., Senior Pastor, Licensed Pastoral Counselor and is President /CEO of Even As We Speak®.

He serves as the President/Past President of the Ohio Association of Adult Day Services in 2005/2006. Tom has participated with the Ohio Department of Health and the American Red Cross Cleveland Chapter.

Tom was instrumental in developing and implementing the Disaster Planning for the Elderly pilot program in Cleveland, developing policy and procedures for HUD services coordination for elderly residents in Ohio.

He is the author of "Rosie John Doesn't Live Here Anymore...One Family's Journey in Eldercare" which is available through AuthorHouse™ and Amazon.com. The book is a hearth-warming and humorous look as Tom and his siblings cared for their aging and ill parents. The book is dotted with tips and suggestions for those who are traveling on their own caregiver journey.

At 53 Tom left the 'corporate world' to utilize more fully his abilities as a Life Skills Trainer, Consultant, Motivational Specialist, Author, and Humorist. He is an internationally recognized speaker known for his humorous and powerful approach to business, personal and organizational growth. He has designed and presented workshops, keynoted and training events for national, state, regional and local companies, organizations, religious communities and agencies.

Tom recently relocated from Northeastern Ohio to the Fort Lauderdale, Florida area and loving it!

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