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ONE MOTHER'S DECISION

By
Evelyn Birkby

My friend looked at me with surprise and dismay. "Oh, Evelyn, I think mothers should live with their children when they get past the age where they can live alone. It is my duty as a daughter to have my mother in my home when she is old. She put up with me long enough, now I should help her. I would never let her go to a Home!" She looked at me almost defiantly, certainly disapprovingly.

This was a very good friend and I could speak to her as frankly as she was talking to me. "What if your mother doesn't want to live with you when the time comes that she must give up her own home?" I queried. My friend looked at me incredulously. It had never entered her mind that her mother might not like the arrangement planned by her loving daughter.

And I was speaking from my own experience, for my mother decided *not* to move in with either my sister or me. Naturally, it was not an easy decision to make. In my mother's case she had been living in her own home, completely independent for eighteen of the years since my father died. The first two years following his death Mother lived with me in Waterloo, Iowa. But I was single then and the two years we were together proved to be a period of transition and adjustment for Mother. When I moved into Chicago she decided to come to Shenandoah, buy a small house and re-establish her own home.

With great determination and fortitude, Mother carved her own place in Shenandoah. She was near my sister and later I married and moved to southwest Iowa.

As the years passed it became apparent that Mother was doing a great deal of thinking about the time when she would not be able to live alone and be responsible for her own home.

"I do not intend to wait until I am ill or helpless or reach the place where I need care and then have someone else plan what will happen to me. I am going to be the one to decide where and how and when I shall 'retire'."

"I love you dearly," Mother continued, "But I know I would be happier with my independence. If I lived with you I would try to tell you how to run your house and raise your children and you wouldn't like that! I know I would be welcome to come and live with either of you girls, but I would rather be able to come and visit when I wish and go back to a place of my own when I'm ready." And my sister and I respected her feeling. We knew it was not lack of love but her thoughtfulness of what was right for us all, that helped her make her decision.

Mother knew also, and spoke realistically, about the fact that the older she got the more her patience thinned around children. She needed peace and quiet and a place to be free from interruptions and rambunctious boys.



Mrs. Mae Corrie, Evelyn's mother, enjoys working in her pleasant apartment at Wesley Acres, Methodist home for retired people in Des Moines, Iowa. She is crocheting an afghan in shades of pink, rose and maroon.

How many grandparents can second her motion that grandchildren are wonderful in small doses but in too large a quantity can be very trying?

Mother felt the need for companionship with people near her own age and with similar interests. So she began looking around for the kind of place she would like for her retirement. Since she is a Methodist minister's widow it was logical that she would look first of all at the retirement homes sponsored by the church. The closest, Wesley Acres in Des Moines, Iowa, had the added attraction of being near some of the communities where she had lived during Dad's active years. Des Moines is familiar territory. It is near enough to Shenandoah so she could get back and forth for holidays and visits.

Mother's first trip to Wesley Acres was a delightful one. She came home exuberant. "Everything is planned to make retired people happy," she reported. "The rooms are large and cheerful and the corridors are well-lighted, wide and equipped with hand rails. Each small apartment contains a large sitting-sleeping room, a dressing room and a bath. Larger apartments are available for couples or for individuals who want the luxury of more living space. I can furnish my apartment with my own furniture and really make it mine!"

"I'm so glad each floor has a snack kitchen with a stove, refrigerator, sink and table and chairs so I can entertain guests for lunch, have a tea party or just fix a cup of coffee for myself. A personal laundry room and a pleasant lounge are included on each floor.

"You should see the beautiful main lounge near the front door," Mother enthused. "Beside the comfortable couches and decorative tables it has a grand piano and an electric organ. One of the residents was a church organist before he retired and each

evening after dinner he plays an organ concert. The dining room is just beyond this main living room and has small tables so we can feel like family groups when we have our meals. The long glass windows reach from the floor to the ceiling and look out over the deep woods which stretch back several acres south of the residence. It is hard to imagine that I will be living in the heart of a city with that wooded area so close.

"The basement houses a modern laundry and a fine kitchen. It also has a bright, well-equipped hobby room, a large recreation room and a beauty parlor. A brand new library and a relaxing television lounge are also provided. About 120 people call this their home and they really feel as if it belongs to them."

It was impossible for Mother to adequately describe the beauty of Wesley Acres and the complete consideration given for the comfort and convenience of older people.

After Mother's name was accepted and placed on the waiting list it still took many months before space became available. She filled the intervening time with the difficult tasks associated with selling her house and deciding what to take with her. From the income of the sale of her house Mother was able to pay the room endowment needed for her to enter her new residence.

So many of these new church related homes are going up all over the country you might be interested in a general background of their entrance requirements. At Wesley Acres, Christian men and women of any race or creed who have attained the age of sixty-five are eligible, provided they are congenial and in reasonably good health. While a person must be in fairly good health when he enters, care is then provided for him should he become ill. Nursing, infirmary and a physician's care are all provided after he becomes a resident. All meals, laundry service and the many conveniences offered are provided for every one once he becomes a part of the "family".

Payments are made in two ways; life care, with one single total payment in advance based on life expectancy, or a monthly care agreement. Gifts for room endowments are encouraged, and in some homes required, for the expense of building such a residence is far beyond the income which is received from those who live there or from the sponsoring church groups. In some places these room endowments are for a set amount, but frequently they are based on the ability of the individual to pay. Persons with insufficient income or who have no resources may be accepted as funds from other sources (such as memorial gifts) accumulate.

On August 1, 1960, Mother moved to Wesley Acres. She has had almost one full year's experience in adjusting to her new surroundings. Does she like it? Just listen to an excerpt from her latest letter:

"Everyone here is so friendly and helpful. We are becoming more like a

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MOTHER'S DECISION—Concluded

real family all the time. Whenever I think they have just done all they can to make us comfortable, someone comes along with another idea! Did I tell you that some of us now have our own garden space? It means a lot to be able to get outdoors and dig and plant and care for flowers just as I have for so many years.

"I'm still helping Mrs. Conover choose books to read to the afternoon group of women who do not have keen eyesight. We have twenty to thirty women who come to the basement lounge each day. They do enjoy hearing fine books and selections from the Bible. I frequently go to read individually to some of the women who are not well enough to come downstairs to the reading group.

"The drivers who take us to church entertained us at a pancake breakfast last Sunday. Next Wednesday I am going up town to hear an out-of-town speaker and on Friday afternoon my Senior Citizens Community Chorus sings.

"I'm finding many here who need help in sewing on buttons, mending tears and the like. Some of them cannot see well. In my spare (?) time I work on an afghan or on the quilt I am making for Jeffrey. The days are far too short to accomplish everything I want to do. There is enough here to keep me busy for two lifetimes!"

One day last fall we drove up to Des Moines for a visit with Mother. We picked her up and then went to nearby Greenwood Park to eat a picnic together. What fun we had visiting and sharing our country food. It was evening when we returned to Wesley Acres and as we turned into the long curving drive and saw its friendly lights Mother said, "Isn't it a beautiful place? It was so hard to know if I was making the right decision when I came here, but now I know it *was* right! I'm free from worry and responsibility, I'm independent and I'm busy and happy because I have found people who need me. This is my *home* and I love it!"

Mother has made the right decision for her.

In the front of the Wesley Acres' brochure is a statement which sums up their philosophy very well:

"One's age should be tranquil, as childhood should be playful. Hard work at either extremity of life seems out of place. At mid-day the sun may burn, and men labor under it; but the morning and the evening should alike be calm and cheerful."—Arnold

ABIGAIL'S LETTER—Concluded

to cover school and clothing expenses. I would be most appreciative if some of you who have met this situation would write to me about your experiences and reactions—the mistakes that were made and the successes that were evident.

Thursday is *also* grocery shopping day for me and I must be on my way if I'm to make it back home before the school bus arrives.

Sincerely,
Abigail