

A Dementia Friendly Home: One Family's Creative Approach

by Brenda Roberts, PAC Certified Trainer

Shortly after my husband, Mark, received a diagnosis of young-onset dementia we made the life-altering decision to live with our daughter and her family. Initially, our plan was to sell our respective homes and combine our resources to buy a house together.

As we began looking for a new home our grandchildren started to identify all the things that Pa and the entire family would miss. They asked. "What about Pa's barn and all of his tools?" "Will we be able to have another garden spot?" "Pa's apple trees are just starting to produce fruit and the raspberry bushes are at their peak production." "Will a move mean that Pa will have to give up the tractor and no longer provide 'hay-less' rides?" "What about the fire pit, summer bonfires, and where will we practice archery?"

Thanks to the grandchildren, we realized the importance of our home and its sentimental value for Mark and the entire family. It dawned on me that it was not our house but our property that held the emotional value. It was our little piece of property with the barn, garden, trees, and fire pit that was important to us. When we made this

realization, we knew exactly how to proceed. We would sell our house - just the house. Sell the house and have it moved from the property and build our new home where we could keep what was valued by our family.



Next, we began to design our new home. My daughter downloaded a software program that allowed us to design our own floorplan. She followed the specific requirements I had outlined about what I felt was needed for a *dementia friendly* home which included:

- Separate living quarters for each family with double doors to adjoin the living rooms allowing for privacy as well as supervision. When I leave home I can simply open the doors.

- Since I work from home, my office needed an interior window to allow me to observe Mark.
- The bedroom and bathroom needed to be laid out in such a manner that the bed be located directly across from the toilet stool and be in Mark's line of vision when he woke up at night.
- The bathroom needed to be large enough to accommodate a wheelchair.
- The shower needed to be a walk-in and big enough for two people. It must have two shower heads so that when I need to give Mark a shower I can get in and not be standing in the cold. Of course, the shower head needed to be handheld.

Deciding to join households was a wonderful life-altering experience! I am happy to share that we have lived in our beautiful new home for nearly two years and we love it. Summer nights are spent roasting marshmallows around the bonfire with friends and family. During the winter months the tractor is used for moving snow. Mark and our grandsons spend countless hours in the barn working on a variety of projects. They have built a chicken coop and are raising chickens and turkeys together. A swimming pool has been added in the backyard as well as soccer goals and a volleyball net. Our home has turned into a multigenerational household filled with love and laughter.

