

## The Move to Assisted Living

*Tom asked me to write my story of “what the past year has been like” – the year in which I moved my husband of almost 60 years into assisted living. I quailed, as I considered reliving this most physically and emotionally stressful year, but could not say no to Tom, who has done so much for us. Here is my best effort to review the steps one must take, the feelings one meets, the help one needs from professionals and friends and strangers.*



As Bill’s memory loss increased, I began to question how I would manage to keep him at home, as planned. Why not keep him at home? After all, I had worked in the field of aging for many years, and assumed I knew pretty much of what one needed to know, was part of an Alzheimer’s family, and was also a strong person. And with our long term care insurance and his Veterans benefits, plus Hospice, we had lots of help. But with all that was needed from me, my own

health had begun to be impaired, and I to learn more about the long term and sometimes permanent effects of stress. I call it CSO, caregiver stress overload, and it began to permeate our lives.

Bill's fall on the morning of a family vacation caused him to go into a respite care facility for a few days, and I went off on the much needed vacation. When I called later to thank the respite care staff, they told me they missed Bill and had really enjoyed his stay. That must mean that he had enjoyed being there!

The actual decision to make the move was slow and tough. At first I felt guilty for even considering "putting my dearly beloved into a home". But eventually the overwhelming reality of our situations let me know I could no longer continue to care well for him at home. I hoped the comradeship and activities in our chosen facility would be good for him.

Making the decision caused me to question what the good options for him cost, just how much money we had and how much we would need. And that is when I turned to Tom. He and Connie helped me to sort through all of those complicated financial issues I needed to know about. What a marvelous help.

With that info in mind, I was able to begin to search for a good place. It needed to be near our home so that I could go frequently. And it needed to be in our budget. And it needed to be a caring place with a good reputation. I consulted with some friends in the assisted living field and friends who had loved ones in assisted living or who lived in a facility themselves. There are several organizations that publish lists of what to look for.

I learned that assisted living facilities now had memory care units, cost less than nursing homes and provided services such as help with bathing, dressing, feeding, had wellness nurses on the staff, but not medical care.

Our son and I set out to visit the most likely facilities. We saw several that seemed as if they would be good for Bill and met our other criteria, but when we walked into the one we chose, I knew it would be right. It was homey, well designed physically, had hopeful sounding activities and I fell for the CEO and Marketing Director who interviewed us immediately. My son concurred and we began making plans. Choosing an available room, locating furniture, how to make the move, plus all of the steps laid out for us by the facility.

And meanwhile there were the legal issues. Our wills and Durable Powers of Attorney and some end of life documents needed updating and the lawyer Tom recommended for us suggested a real estate trust.

And what about medical help? Bill could continue to receive care at the two excellent VA Hospitals in Boston. But what about after hours? And did we ever want him to have to go to an ER, and possibly have the disorienting experience of an overnight in a hospital? We decided, after a major search of VA services, private pay and Hospice, and how they intersected, or did not, to pay for a Hospice Nurse to come each month or when needed (he had rotated off his previous Hospice service as his issue resolved), and use the VA for daytime care.

That meant that I would get his meds from the VA and sort them into the pill boxes used by the facility. And when he needed meds on an “as needed” basis, we worked out an arrangement to have the VA send them directly, at my instruction, to the nursing station in the facility.

Until Bill moved into his new home, all of this planning needed to be done at the same time as pretty steady caregiving, and often giving instructions to the aides, when they needed it, although we had several aides who needed little or no instruction.

The piles of files and info for each major issue are still on the floor in the living room, as all are still active. But slowly, after a year in the planning stage and three months of Bill being in the facility, they are being whittled down, and I am having some respite myself. The experience is still an emotional roller coaster, helping Bill to adapt to his new home, stay in touch with friends, and stay healthy and relatively happy. The ongoing support and love of our son has been invaluable to both of his parents. And friends have been extremely supportive and loving too. We need that.