

Becky Speaks . . .

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF CAREGIVING

He's Dead...

Mom is only living here in the Village for 120+ days and she has desperately been trying to find a new *best friend*. She has been taking the shuttle to Granny Day Care 3-4 days a week now, and she gets all enthused about what to wear, who she might see, what they will do, etc.

She gets these Senior Community Bulletins which contain a calendar each month. She reads it, re-reads it, stares at it, turns pages, (it is two or three sheets stapled together) and studies it as if it is a map to buried treasure. She should have it memorized within the first few days after it arrives, because it never leaves her side. She will pick it up and read it (sometimes out loud) during the most in-opportune times. When something catches her eye, she will stop me in my tracks to tell me about it. I can be carrying trash out to the pail or have an arm full of laundry, yet she needs to read it to me right then and there. She will sit for hours reading it to herself in the evening while I am doing work or watching TV. She mumbles to herself... "No, I am NOT doing THAT!" or... "What the hell does this mean?" or... "Who the hell wants to go there?!" I just let her mumble.

Getting out of the house is really good for her because it somewhat occupies her mind. She needs the stimulation and the gossip to keep her going. She notices what everyone is wearing, where they sit, who they speak with... these are apparently noteworthy because at the end of the day, I hear all about this petty news. I try to listen without being patronizing. I know these details are important to her, but it is such drivel! Sometimes I just nod and grunt 'um hum' as she goes on and on. Occasionally I will catch something of interest that I can repeat back to her.

I will ask questions about the people she meets during her day. The problem is that she can't remember any of their names. She'll say: "Oh, I met this really nice woman today..." and proceed to tell me what they said and did. When I ask, "What was her name?" Mom replies, "I forget. There are too many Rose's and Marie's and Louise'... I just can't keep them straight. That's OK,... they don't remember my name either." She continued, "The other day some *elderly* lady was talking to me, and she called me some other name, so I didn't realize she WAS talking to me until she tapped me on the shoulder." She smiled at her mistake. (I chuckled to myself when she emphasized 'elderly' and thought she must be ANCIENT if you think she is 'elderly!') I then suggested that she talk to the woman who runs the Center and request that paper name labels be available that say Hello, My Name IS... until everyone is familiar with one another. She didn't like that idea at all. My thought is that they would always have to wear them and the Center couldn't afford to keep them in stock. I giggled at the thought!

"Eventually we will know each other." She said.

I am sure they have some other knick-names for her. Rita will be her secondary name. She has relayed stories to me about the coffee kitty, or the exercise class, and how she speaks to the people there, so I can only imagine how personable they think she is. I have already told her to "Be Nice... you can catch more bees with honey, you know." She said, "I AM nice! I just hate bossy people!" Yikes! Yeh, *Hello? Kettle???*

<http://beckyspeaks.facesofalzheimers.org>

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Aunt Maddie has lived here for 28 years now. She was very active in the community until she became sick. She was on a bowling league; a bocce league; participated in the community shows; played cards; had cocktail hour Friday's; went to the pool, etc. She knows everyone except the real newcomers, and her reputation precedes her, because they have all heard about her. She was a Party Animal! Give her a microphone, and she would sing at any occasion. She took requests! Before her legs gave out on her, she was one heck of a dancer. She had tons of friends and was invited everywhere, and went on some cool group vacations with them too.

She has her senior moments, but is still pretty sharp at times, and remembers people by name and face. She always asks me who I saw when I attend a particular community event, and I always tell her they were asking for her. Being her niece has been well publicized throughout the Village. They all know me now. They think I cheated in getting in there, and I am flattered that they think I am too young. (If only that were the truth!)

Mom now competes with her. It is like *one-ups* all the time. She is trying to find out as much as she can about everyone so that she MAY know something that Aunt Maddie doesn't. On occasion I take them out for lunch or dinner together, or as in the case of last Sunday, I brought egg sandwiches over to Aunt Maddie's house after Sunday Mass and we all ate breakfast together at the kitchen table.

My Aunt loves to talk about the old times. Sometimes we sit with tea, and I enjoy when she reminisces. She had quite a social life, and a great sense of humor. This is quite the opposite of her sister. It gets boring for her I am sure when she hears her sister talking about this one, or that one... because she rarely leaves the house anymore except for holidays or medical appointments. It is her choice. She is uncomfortable out of her element.

Sunday was like watching a tennis match. I was at the end of the table and the opponents were across from one another. Mom had the serve. She lobbed one over the table about the Center, and who she rode the shuttle with last week. "Was it Wednesday or Thursday...? Hmmm, I am not sure because I was out so much last week... anyway, I was talking to someone who knows you. She lives here since the beginning like you."

Aunt Maddie returned the serve: "Who was it?" Rita: "I don't know." Maddie: "What do you mean, *you don't know*? Weren't you sitting and talking to her?" Rita: "Yes, I WAS... I am just not sure of her name!" Maddie: "Where does she live?"

Rita: (waving her arm away from her) "Down that way somewhere." Maddie: (Laughing) "That's a big help. I live the furthest down this way, so EVERYBODY lives down that way." I could tell she was mocking her, and didn't really care anyway.

Mom persisted: "She knows you well. You used to play bocci with her and her husband. They know you for years." Maddie: "Well, that describes a lot of people. What does she look like?" Rita: "Old. She has red hair." (By now I am laughing and eating my egg sandwich simultaneously.)

I couldn't resist... "Hey, in here they either have white hair or red hair. That's what women over 70 do... they become flaming redheads!" They both ignored me, because they were in mid-volley.

Now I could see Auntie getting annoyed with her. She wanted to stop... but she couldn't help herself. "You only saw her once?" Rita: "No, I see her all the time." Maddie: "And you can't remember her name?" Rita: "I think it is Marie." Maddie: "Marie?... do you know her last name?"

I said, "Oh please, it took 10 minutes for her to THINK her name was Marie, it could take YEARS to remember a last name!" They both cracked up at that.

Maddie: "She rides the shuttle bus with you?" Rita: "Yes, I already said that!" Maddie: Well where does it pick her up?" (I'm thinking... "wait, let me guess - that way!") Rita: "Down the block." So we finally concur after several minutes that it is in Gary Court. Now Auntie is recalling who lives down that street, and trying to think of the *Marie's* in the Village. After awhile, she says, "Ritchey, is her last name Ritchey?" Mom said "Yes, I think that's it." She probably said it just to stop the game, but it escalated from there, and I had no idea what was coming next.

Maddie started to reminisce about the parties, and the events that she went with Marie and her husband Bob. "What a great couple they are, and they are involved with everything in the Village. They are very active." Rita: "He's dead." (Rita figuratively Spiked the ball, and jumped the net!) I had stopped breathing, and chewing!

Maddie: (turning pale) "What??? Bob is dead? (mom nodding confirmation) No one told me!" She looked shaken up. I said, "Mom, are you sure it is Marie Ritchey?" Emphatically, she said "Yes, she told me she is a widow, and she knows Maddie, and her dead husband knew her too." I replied, "Maybe it is another Marie. That is a common name." Rita: "Nope, I am almost positive it is Marie Ritchey and her husband was Bob. She has red hair." (Oy! This is not good.)

Maddie was reeling. I could see she was so upset that no one told her. I offered "Maybe it was when you were very sick and no one wanted to upset you further?" She said "No, SOMEONE would have mentioned it to me. I was very close to them. Why would no one tell me." I noticed a tremor in her hand. LOVE. In tennis and in life. That's what it's all about.

The talked a little more about days gone by, and how badly she felt that she never paid her respects to Bob or his wife Marie. Mom changed the subject a few times to discuss her adventures from the week, but eventually Aunt Maddie was back on it again. I told her that I would find out since I was going to a Residents Meeting, and for sure I would ask someone if Bob had indeed passed away.

We stayed at Aunt Maddies until nearly 1:00pm and I wanted to leave to go home and watch the Giants play on TV. For me, this was all I looked forward to that day. (sigh)

At 3:00pm I left the house to go to the Residents Meeting. The Giants had a very comfortable lead, and I knew that the TV would be on in the recreation hall so that I could keep tabs on any new developments.

The hall was really full. The topics of the meeting were municipal tax increases, maintenance rate increases, and Cost of Living Allowances. There were so many people interested in the agenda that they split the meeting into 3 sessions to accommodate the crowd.

There was an overhead projector set up in the front, and a table for each attendee to sign in upon entering. Once the gavel was slammed, the meeting got underway. A tall handsome man with white hair stood before us waiting for the group to quiet down. He thanked us all for coming and taking time out of our Sunday to learn more about the future of our community. He said, "My name is Bob Ritchey, and I am the Resident Association President." WOW! just like Lazarus! It's a miracle! He's *baaaaaaaaaaaaaak!* MATCH SET POINT! Maddie wins!

I smiled throughout the duration of the hour long meeting, even though the slides were displaying the rate increases!

When the meeting was over, I walked up to the front and introduced myself to Bob. I said, "Hi, I am Patricia Mayer, and I am Maddie's niece." (No last name needed) He reached out and shook my hand warmly, and said "I miss Maddie, how is she doing?" I smiled and said "She is doing fine now. She will be happy to know you are not dead!" He had a puzzled look on his face, and was still holding my hand. I relayed the summary of the morning conversation between the sisters with him and he laughed out loud. He roared! He said "Wait until I tell Marie!"

He said, "Send my regards to Maddie and tell her I am not ready to go yet!" I replied, "Well, when you do, make sure someone calls my Aunt or she will be really pissed!" He cracked up again, as he knows her well, and could imagine her reaction. Then he gave me a hug.

I stopped at Aunt Maddie's house on the way home to fill her in on the Residents Meeting and the rate hikes. As I opened the front door, she greeted me with "Bob's not dead! He is Very Much ALIVE. I called Bunny after you both left."

She continued, "Bunny had dinner with Bob and Marie on Friday! What the hell is your mother talking about??? That's how rumors start!" So, by now I was laughing out loud, and told her about the opening of the meeting, and we were both laughing. She is such a good egg. She was only happy that she wasn't overlooked if Bob had died.

Poor Bob. He just got a glimpse of his own eulogy.

When I got home I told mom about the mix-up, and she simply shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "Who cares." And said, "Well the Marie that I spoke to is a widow!" (point obviously not taken.) "I will have to find out what her late husband's name was."

Moot point. It's not Bob.

I told her how Bob laughed and enjoyed the repartee, and she didn't react.

It was a Great Game! ... oh, and the Giants won too. What a Sunday!