



# A W I V E S T A L E

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Joyce and John are retired and in their 80's. Joyce is faced with caring for her husband, John, who recently had a stroke. His rehab stays plateaued and only did little for the left side of his body and speech. John needs help with most tasks of daily life. She is finding it hard to keep up and stay positive and healthy herself. Her caregiver stress has raised its ugly head.

Determined to fight the good fight, Joyce hires a bit of in house help and meal delivery service to get a reprieve from the new life they have been handed.

Their children Lori, Dan and Peter all worry about their Mothers ability to handle the day-to-day life; even with some in house help. Their Mother has always been a strong and independent woman and this new responsibility was taking its toll.

How much should the kids get involved? Can Joyce face reality and adjust to her new normal as a caregiver?

*“Caregivers often place themselves at the bottom of their to do list. If you or a loved one has caregiving duties it is essential to pay attention to emotional, physical and mental health. Caring for yourself can be the most important thing one can do as a caregiver and will improve your well-being to perform day-to-day responsibilities.”*

– Anonymous

# A Wives Tale

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## CHAPTER | 1

# Everything is Fine

I've always considered myself a strong and independent woman. After Peter started driving, he's the youngest of our three children, I picked up a job at the local floral shop. It was fun for me to work outside the home again and do something I really loved.

John worked hard for our little family. He made his way up the ladder in the corporate system at the same company. When he retired, I did as well. We traveled and spent many years enjoying the freedom and fun of the Golden Years.

When John had a stroke a few months back I never imagined the change it would make to our lives. I figured like most stroke victims; he would bounce back after rehab. Well, that didn't happen. He was left with a numb right side from his face down to his toes. It effected his speech, walking abilities and basically everything in our day to day lives.

When I say everything...I mean everything. John had a knack for cooking, and most nights we would prepare meals together. Not anymore. He loved fly fishing and making tackle for the sport. With only one arm he had to say goodbye to that hobby. He does not feel comfortable driving anymore, so I am the chauffer to everything, which also means I put his walker in and out of the car. I help him get dressed and undressed, I pay the bills and take out the garbage. I do this out of love and I really miss the once healthy John, but I have faced this like I have everything else in my life...head on.

Today was nothing different except I hired a helper to come in and clean and she started today. I needed help to keep up around the house. I wanted her for deep cleaning the bathrooms and the kitchen floors. It felt good to have a helper. I actually had time to look at a

magazine I had picked up at the grocery store early this week.

The phone rang while I was taking my little magazine break. I answer all of the phone calls now because it is just too difficult to understand John. I picked up the receiver, “Hello...”

“Hi Mom, what you up to?” It was Lori on the other end.

“Oh, hi Sweetie, nice to hear your voice. I’m taking a little break as your father is napping and the housekeeper is cleaning.” I turned the magazine page.

Lori sounded excited, “Oh I’m so happy you are taking a break! You have to remember to take care of yourself. I worry about you.”

“No need to worry. Everything is fine. We do what we need to do when we need to do it...right?” I liked my new made-up quote.

“Did you get Dad to his appointment yesterday with Dr. Hebert?”

I switched the phone to my good ear so I could hear better. My hearing aid was about to go on the fritz, and I had no time to tend to that detail. Glad I had one good ear.

“Yes, everything went fine. Dr. Hebert gave him a new medicine for his heart. He said this one should not make him feel nauseas. So far so good.”

“Ok, good. How was your lunch date with Norma?” Lori was sure asking a lot of questions today.

“I had to cancel. Your father needed a shower and I turned around for one minute to grab the towel and he slipped and fell...Don’t worry, he’s just fine, no blood or bruises. Anyways, I called Norma and told her I needed to reschedule.”

I waited for the response I knew I would get out of her. She’s like the Parent Police, bless her heart. Sure, as the day is long, she will call her brothers as soon as we are done talking and tell them all about the fall. Then Dan and Peter will call. Sometimes I don’t even

want to tell them anything. I like to say, “Everything’s fine” so they quit worrying.

“Oh Lord. So glad he is ok. Mom, please, if Dad ever falls again, you need to call one of us kids. We want to know these things. And, furthermore, we don’t want you to feel like you’re in this all alone. We are here to help you.” She sounded upset.

“Yes, Dear. I promise. So far, I am managing. How are the kids?” Thought I would change the subject and ask about Chrissy and Thomas her twins now in college.

“Nice try Mom. I called to talk to you about stress management, not Chrissy and Thomas. They are great and loving school. Thomas has a girlfriend and Chrissy is busy with soccer.”

“Girlfriend? Like the kind he will bring home for the holidays? That little stinker. He’s too cute for his own good.” I liked derailing the conversation, but she went directly to her agenda.

“No, you know Thomas, never gets that attached. He doesn’t want anything serious. Anyways, back to you. I would like you to consider more help than a cleaning lady. You know you can get someone in there to help Dad with showers, right?”

“Yes, but the cost is ridiculous. I can manage for now. Besides, your Father would feel weird having someone else bath him. He’s so private. He hated that rehab stay.”

“Mom, cost and privacy are thrown out the window when it is his safety and your sanity we are talking about.” She went quiet on me.



“I hear you, Dear. I appreciate you and boys concern. For now, we are fine. Everything is fine.”

## CHAPTER | 2

# The Fat Lady Sang

*“It ain’t over till the fat lady sings is a phrase that means a person should not assume the outcome of a situation until it reaches its end, because the circumstances can change.”*

– Anonymous

When I was a little girl a lady named, Kate Smith, used to sing the 'Star Spangled Banner' at the end of American football matches in the 1950s. She was a larger woman. My brother and I knew the game were over when she sang. That phrase has always stuck in my mind. I know it's not politically correct anymore, but those were the days people didn't get their undies in a bundle either. The phrase still holds true today. I don't assume the outcome of any situation until it reaches its end. Well, mine and John's has reached its end.

I don't like giving up and I don't like to ask for help. I was going to fight until the end to keep both John and I home and happy. We loved our house, neighborhood and independence. Every day I would tackle my duties like a linebacker. It's been 7 months since John had the stroke. We made it work so we could stay home together.

Then it happened.

It was bedtime and John was brushing his teeth. He did not see that the rug under him had creased. When he turned to place his toothbrush in the drawer his numb foot caught and down, he went like a lead balloon. This time he hit his head on the side of the bathtub. No blood, thank God, just a nice egg on his forehead. I called the hospital. The nurse told me if there was an egg it was a good sign

on no internal bleeding and to just get ice on it and watch him for the next 24 hours. So, that's what I did.

Of course, I promised to call one of the kids, so I speed dialed Lori.

"Hi Lori, I thought you would want to know that your Father tripped on the bath rug tonight and hit his head."

"Oh no! Blood? Hospital? Is he OK?" She had panic in her voice.

I tried to sound calm.

"No, no and yes. He is fine. No concussion. He does however have a nice egg on his head. Reminds me of when Dan and the neighbor kid, Johnny were playing ball in the yard and Dan got a line drive in the forehead. Except your Fathers did not bleed all over like a gushing fountain. I hate blood."

I picked up the piece of pie I had cut for myself and sat down on the kitchen stool.

Lori let out a big sigh.

"Thank God. That's scary. So glad he's fine. How about you? You Ok, Mom?"

"I'm fine. Just tired from the excitement of it all. He is in bed now with a pack of frozen peas on his head." I took a big bite of the lemon custard pie that had been sitting on a plate before the accident.

"Mom, you know us kids are here for you. Just give us the word and we will help you transition to a community that can help Dad and give you a break. You need to live your life to ya know...You've been brave and so loving. Don't think anybody will think any different of you if you choose to move."

Lori brought up a great point. Little did she know that I was getting tired. I was trying to hold it together. I was getting burned out. I was not living at all. I became the caregiver of John, but have lost myself in the transition.

Well, the fat lady did sing this time and I think I knew it was time to change things up or burn out trying to keep the plates spinning. I wasn't sure how to start, but I wanted the kids in on the conversation. It's a slippery slope. I feel like as we get older, attempts to hold on to our independence can be at odds with even the most well-intentioned "suggestions" from our children. We want to be cared about, but fear being cared for. Hence the push and pull when a well-meaning offspring steps onto our turf. But I needed them to step onto the turf this time.

*"One of the scariest things to people as they age is that they don't feel in control anymore."*

## CHAPTER | 3

# We're Not That Old

*“Do not pick arguments. Do not make a parent feel defensive. Plant an idea, step back, and bring it up later. Be patient.”*

– Anonymous

The kids came over on Sunday. We talked about many options. John is reluctant to move to an “Old Folks Home” as he calls them. He remembers his mother being placed in a nursing home and hated visiting her there.

The kids assured us that assisted living is not a nursing home. I think to John and I; it is a matter of losing our independence. That is a hard pill to swallow.

Especially when your mind still feels young. It’s just our bodies that are showing signs of aging. Well, to be honest I do slip here and there with my memory. Like telling Lori a story two times and forgetting to tell the boys altogether. John’s memory is a bit rusty now since the stroke.

The boys helped with a few things around the house that I was not able to get to. Lori helped me with laundry and got us signed up for a new meal delivery service. We all talked about the decision that will need to be made in the future.

Lori had done some research and shared what she found out.

“The staff are available 24-hours a day, so if you need assistance with escorting, eating, bathing, and incontinent care, medication

management or dressing, they are there to help. It looks to me that assisted living makes life simple and gives you comfort. They also have apartments that have a personal emergency call system. I liked what I saw on their website.” Lori seemed pleased with her findings as did the boys. I think they were happy that she took the lead.

John’s only response to Lori’s pitch, “Did you find out pricing?”

Lori sat back in her chair to answer her Father.

“Yes, and you will be happy to know that your Pension and Social Security will cover the rent. Cares are sold separately.” She seemed pleased to know the answer.

“Do they throw in a knife set for \$9.99?” Johns attempt at humor made the boys laugh.

Lori chuckled, “Real funny, Dad. But, seriously, you and Mom will be able to live independently and only buy the cares that you need. Mom will be able to do what she wants. They have all kinds of activities and clubs to join. They even have a chef and all your meals are covered with the rent. Not to mention, utilities laundry and internet. It’s a nice set up. It’s not for “old” people like you think.”

“I would like to see the place, but only to look. We won’t promise you anything. This is a huge decision. I can’t imagine living in an apartment after living here for 53 years.” I wanted to make sure the kids knew we would not be moving in next week. Seems so overwhelming. I just look around this home and think, “where in the world would I start to pack and sort?”

“I know this can feel overwhelming, but us kids are here to help. Well, at least I am, those two Bozo’s are useless...” Lori laughed at her own joke. The boys acted like they didn’t even hear her.

We ordered Chinese takeout, and had a lovely dinner together. My Fortune Cookie was playing tricks on me. It said, “Good news is just around the corner.” That would be nice. I could use some good news.

Before Lori left, she set me up on my iPad with the website for that assisted living she was talking about. I thought I'd take a peek after John went to bed. I may even need a bowl of chocolate ice cream to drown my sorrows.

John was off to bed and I no sooner sat down to relax when the fire alarm over the stairway began to chirp. I was not in the mood for this. That fire alarm requires a ladder to remove the batteries. How did we miss that one when replacing all the alarm batteries a month ago? Ugh. I will need to call Dan.

"Hi Honey, I am sorry to bother you so late, but it looks like we missed one of the fire alarm batteries in the stairway. It's about to go ballistic. Can you help or should I call Peter?"

"I'll be right over, Mom. Don't get the ladder out and don't do anything until I get there." He hung up so fast I didn't even say goodbye.

Dan took care of the alarm and all was well. I felt bad about having him drive all the way back here to help. By the time he left I was exhausted. No ice cream or surfing the net for me tonight. Off to bed. Maybe tomorrow will bring me the good news the Fortune Cookie was predicting.

## CHAPTER | 4

# Choice, Chance and Change

*“Sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same!”*

– Anonymous

After breakfast and helping John get ready for the day, I finally sat down to take a look at the assisted living community on my iPad. The landing page had a picture of two older adults that looked happy and enjoying a meal. They didn’t look too old. I clicked on the apartment selections. No need to even go further if they were small. I don’t want to feel like a prisoner.

I was pleasantly surprised at the various size and layouts of the apartments. My favorite was the two bedrooms with a patio. John could have his tomato plants and I could enjoy the weather. I also liked the idea of facing south for more sun exposure. I think I would use the second bedroom as our extra TV room. Sometimes we watch different programs at night, and it would be nice for John to have the bedroom TV and I the other. Just a thought.

John came and sat down beside me. I turned the iPad in his direction.

“I like what I’m seeing, John. Some of these apartments have lots of room. This is one I particularly like.”

He put on his readers and took the iPad from me.

I asked him, “So, how are you feeling about all of this? We have not really discussed this subject since the kids were here.”

He replied, “I guess I am warming up to the idea. I do feel both torn and relieved. Does that make sense?”

I agreed, “Yes, perfect sense.

He continued, “It’s a big decision. However, I worry about you more than I do myself. I could live anywhere, but I don’t want to live without you by my side. I want you to be happy, Joyce. You deserve it. This stroke has thrown us for a loop. I am so sorry.”

He clicked on the Activities Tab at the top of the website and I leaned over to see what he was looking at. He handed me back the iPad and sighed.

“I don’t mind looking after you, John. I love you. Never apologize. We have been through many difficult times in our lives and this is just another bump. We always work things out. Where you go, I go. Period.” The iPad had a picture of ladies painting by watercolor. That looked fun.

I set the iPad on the end table next to the sofa. I needed to get lunch going. I was especially tired this morning. I’m having a hard time falling asleep at night. Seems I toss and turn more than sleep these days. I’ve never been one to take a sleeping aid, but I may need to pick some up.

“So, Joyce, why did Lori pick this assisted living anyways? I know she said there was plenty of them around.” John was correct, Lori did say that this was her favorite.

She started looking right after John had the stroke. We were not sure what the outcome would be. So, to be ready she toured a few and this one was her favorite.

I replied, “I think it was several reasons. I know that the care levels, in case we should need more support in the future, was a big factor. She said the staff was friendly and the feeling in the community felt right. She also liked the layout; not too big and not too small.”

John laughed, “Like Goldie Locks looking for a bed.”

“Ha. I guess. I trust her judgement. She has a few friends with their parents living in assisted living. She did her research. The boys said they will handle the packing and moving and selling of the house if she handled this and our medical issues.” I stood up and stretched my arms over my head to get the blood flowing.

We knew it was time to decide. We just needed to pull the trigger. I was hoping to get another holiday in our home before we moved, but it wasn’t looking like that was going to happen.

“I guess it’s time we toured the community. Should I call Lori to set it up?”

John hesitated, but said, “I think we should look at this option and see how we feel when we visit.”



## CHAPTER | 5

# I'll Take "Aging" for \$500

*"There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age."*

– Sophia Loren

Lori set up our tour for Saturday at 10:30, so the boys could be with as well. We met at our house and all rode together in Dan's big SUV. I have to admit I was both excited and scared to go and visit this place. I think John was feeling the same way. He was quieter than usual on the drive over.

When we entered the community, we were greeted by a very nice concierge. She had a welcome sign on her desk for us...I thought that was a nice touch.

Our tour guide, or I guess the sales gal, Beth, greeted us so kindly and brought us all back to a beautiful conference room to talk. We talked about what happened to John, caregiving, what we would like in a community, what type of apartment would work and what kind of care John could get. She asked lots of questions.

Beth handed John and I a couple of floor plans and said, "Well, from all that we have talked about so far, these are two of the apartments I would like to show you, both face South and have two bedrooms. I also want to show you, Joyce, the activities center being you would like to get involved – you will see all the different things we have to offer. Also, for you, John, being you asked about the food,

we will meet Chef Alex when we have lunch together in the assisted living dining room. How does that sound?" Sounded good to me. She definitely listened to our wants and needs.

We walked past the pub area and there were quite a few residents in there playing Jeopardy on a huge screen, I thought that was interesting. I heard one of them say, "I'll take Aging for \$500." I just thought that was funny. I thought to myself, "I wouldn't pay anyone for aging." Beth explained that everyday several fun events or activities happen in the Pub as well as the Activities Center. John liked that they served beer and wine.

Both John and I loved the first apartment Linda showed us. The kids seemed to like it as well. Peter brought his tape measure and wrote a few things down. It was hard to imagine bringing my furniture there, but Beth assured me that many of the residents felt like that when they toured and they found that it was not that hard to pick and choose what to bring and they also felt happy making the decision.

I could tell John was getting tired. It was a lot of walking for him. I'm glad we went to the dining room to eat lunch. John looked relieved and I needed coffee; make that a double expresso.

Beth introduced us when the chef came to our table, "This is Chef Alex. Alex, this is Mr. and Mrs. Johnson and their children, Lori, Dan and Peter."

Chef Alex had on his white uniform and chef hat. He looked young, but everybody does these days.

"I'm pleased to meet you all. I'm so glad you stopped in today. We have two entrees that I have prepared. Beef Stroganoff with sautéed Morell Mushrooms and also broiled Cod Filet over Jasmine Rice with Lemon dipping sauce. Of course, the soup is made fresh every day. Today I made Tomato Basil. Each entrée comes with soup and salad.

My mouth watered when I heard fish was on the menu. I never

make that at home. It sounded wonderful.

Chef Alex clasped his hands behind his back, “I would love to answer any questions you may have for me.”

Lori spoke up, “Thank you, Chef Alex. If Mom or Dad did not care for the two entrees of the day, what would they do?”

He handed me the “Anytime Menu”.

“Glad you asked! This is the Anytime Menu in which you may order at any time. We aim to please!”

The menu had many options to choose from in all varieties. Hamburgers, chef salad, egg salad, personal pizza, chicken sandwich, liver and onions and much more. Even desserts!

We had a lovely lunch and I watched other residents come and go as they had their lunch. Everyone seemed happy. Many had walkers. I thought that probably made John feel better.

“So, from what you have seen and experienced today, do you think you would like to live here?” Beth was looking right at John and I.

Peter blurted out, “I would!” He thought he was funny. It did get a chuckle out of John.

I nodded my head in agreement, “I can see us living here. I think we need to take some time as a family and talk a bit more. I do like that apartment.”

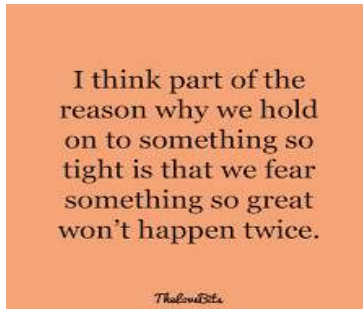
“OK, well, if you like that apartment you can put down a deposit to hold it. That way it’s yours. It’s no obligation and money back if you change your minds. How does that sound?” Beth had such a cute smile.

John turned to Beth and said, “I would like to put the deposit down today. She likes that apartment and that’s what counts.”

John surprised me. I think he surprised the children as well.

Deep down I knew it was the right thing to do for us and for the children. I decided that change is what you make it. It can feel like death or life. We choose.

I choose life.



The End

# Your Notes

We hope that in reading Joyce and Johns journey you were inspired to follow in their footsteps and begin exploring assisted living options for the future.

Feel free to contact us anytime to schedule a visit. We can help you picture what your next chapter might look like at one of our Northstar Senior Living Communities.

Here are a few questions to help you get started:

List what is important to you in an assisted living community:

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What does the “right feel” look like to you?

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What kind of activities do you want to see for you or your loved one?

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List and you and your families biggest challenge about moving into assisted living:

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List all of the great reasons to move you or your loved one into an assisted living community:

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