

Elder Boom: A Generation's Crisis - Twin Oaks Feels Like Home

by Jennifer Berry Hawes, Post and Courier

Frank holds tight to his wedding vow, “‘til death do us part.” Nothing short will separate him from his beloved Flo. Thankfully, residential care has made that possible. For more than a decade, Frank has cared for his wife, who's now 88, as Alzheimer's disease muddied her memory and sapped her most basic skills. At first, he managed with generous help from Kathleen, a woman who cleaned and helped with other household tasks. Kathleen was like family- so much so that she gradually took on more work as Flo slowed down. But Kathleen aging herself, died.

"When she was no longer there is when Dad realized how many household tasks she had assumed- she was just always picking up and picking up," said their daughter, Jane.

Frank began to hire aides to come to their home and help with basic care-giving. But at \$10 an hour, it proved costly. And some workers were unreliable. At 84, he could not endure alone.

“I couldn't keep up with everything that needed to be done,” said Frank, a retired electronics supervisor.

Everything included dressing and bathing and grooming his wife. He already suffered from heart trouble. And one night, she fell in the shower. He barely could get her up. Frank realized Flo couldn't dial the phone for help if something happened to him. It was time to consider moving into the type of facility known as residential care or assisted living.

But Jane had no idea where to look or what was available. Quietly, she began visiting different facilities in town. One day, “just by luck and the grace of God,” she saw a sign while driving down a North Charleston road. It was for Twin Oaks Villa Assisted Living.

Jane stopped in, unannounced. “It didn't smell like a nursing home,” she first noticed.

And small touches, such as Halloween decorations, made it feel homey. Soon, she took her very reluctant dad for a tour. “We had the hardest time deciding to go to Twin Oaks -or anywhere,” Jane said. “But you can't look at the decision you want. You have to look at the list of decisions with the options you have.”

Once Frank learned he could live in a room with his wife, he decided it was best. The family agrees Twin Oaks has been ideal. Frank still provides a good deal of his wife's direct care, but the facility's staff is there for back up. And the staff prepares their meals and cleans their room. If her father weren't able to live there, “We'd have to look at other arrangements,” Jane said. But for now, Frank remains active in his wife's care.

Outside their unit, he tends his garden - just as he would at their house. Frank has his treasured ham radio. Flo has her china. They hung pictures from each room of their old house, memories of decades spent together. Twin Oaks Villa Assisted Living for Seniors has eased their difficult journey into old age. . . .