

Caring for a Kind Heart

Elizabeth Quinlan feels blessed that her husband Jerry is cared for at the region's newest state-of-the-art assisted living center for Alzheimer's and dementia care.

By Steve Gurney and Lauren Searson

Elizabeth "Liz" Quinlan is a native of Hagerstown, Md. who received her Nursing degrees from Cornell University and University of Pennsylvania. During the Korean War she joined the Air Force as a nurse at Shepherd Air Force Base, where she met New Jersey native Jerry. Although they met in 1952, the couple did not get married until 1968. Liz recounted the story of when the "romance got started."

"Both my parents were very ill and, since my father was born in Greece, Jerry came up on Greek Easter with this beautiful tray of all these food specialties he'd gotten at a Greek restaurant in Washington," she said. "He was so kind and he said, 'You know, Liz, I know both your parents have been ill and you're tied down. I'll look after them this afternoon and you can go and visit some friends or whatever you want to do.' Of course I didn't go, but I was just sort of overwhelmed that anybody would be that kind. And that's really the essence of Jerry, that he's always been so kind to everybody."

After they married, the couple settled down to focus on their careers, hobbies and travels. Several years into their retirement, Liz noticed Jerry's behavior started becoming slightly erratic. It was particularly evident the day Jerry approached her and asked how she felt about giving up their car. Actually grateful since it left them with unnecessary expenses, she told him that would be fine. Then according to Liz, Jerry responded saying, "Well I think I'm going to do it because I get lost coming home."

Similar incidents led the couple to see a physician. When the diagnosis revealed Jerry had dementia, Liz made sure to help and care for him at home. "I really wasn't able to talk about it," she said.

During a trip to the dentist, she found a magazine article describing a drug that helps Alzheimer's and dementia patients. Liz then approached the receptionist asking if she could make a copy of it, revealing that Jerry had Alzheimer's. "When I finally said it, the tears started to come and I couldn't stop crying," she said.

That conversation opened the door to her discovering a vast amount of resources at IONA Senior Services. Liz learned about their renowned Adult Day Health Care Center and support groups, where Jerry thrived and eventually participated five days a week.

As his condition progressed, it was clear that he was going to need more assistance, so Liz began to look at their options. "The Methodist Home of Washington, D.C. had the

best reputation for nursing care, so that was the first place I went," she said.

At her first meeting, she learned the Methodist Home was building a brand new community in Chevy Chase, D.C. called Forest Side that would be exclusively devoted to Alzheimer's and memory-related disorders. After visiting a few other options, she was excited for Jerry to become one of Forest Side's first residents and filled out an application.

Today, Jerry is in the hands of compassionate caregivers and staff, leaving Liz much more confident about his well-being. The state-of-the-art community features four "neighborhoods" within the building. The focus of the caregiver for each neighborhood at Forest Side is to be engaged with the residents in all aspects of their day, from dining and afternoon teas to activities and neighborhood strolls.

According to Liz, Jerry has "deluxe accommodations" at



"The essence of Jerry is that he's always been so kind to everybody," said Elizabeth Quinlan of her husband of 43 years, whom she met at Shepherd Air Force Base during the Korean War.



Although Elizabeth initially cared for Jerry when he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, he eventually needed more assistance, so she moved him to Forest Side where she is confident about his well-being knowing he is in the hands of compassionate caregivers.

Forest Side and she was able to bring many of their treasured items to decorate his spacious apartment. She has also enjoyed spending time with him on her visits in one of the several tastefully-decorated rooms throughout the community.

The philosophy at Forest Side is that each resident's interests are respected and taken into consideration regardless of their cognitive ability. Alexis McKenzie, the community's executive director, said, "We look at the likes and dislikes of the resident and do our best to build their life around those

preferences. We interview each of the families, like the Quinlans, and we found out that Jerry had written a book. It is through this time spent with the family and resident that we gain firsthand knowledge of the gifts and talents each individual brings to the table."

Along with this individualized support, the trained staff understands the challenges of memory loss and has great sensitivity for their residents and families. They encourage and understand each resident, assisting them to make every opportunity as successful as possible. This care and attention at Forest Side extends beyond just the residents' needs as Liz has learned during particularly emotional visits. "When the tears come, the staff will be right there to help and comfort me. They could not be kinder to us," she said.

Although the challenges they face can be frustrating, Liz shared some words of wisdom for others in this situation. "When you look around the world, you see the poverty and the problems so many people have. I look at the wonderful care Jerry gets at Forest Side and I think that I'm blessed." GRL



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