



Kick The Can

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As kids we played Kick-the-Can in the neighborhood almost every night in summer. It was the perfect ending to a care-free summer day. The game only ended because of mosquitos and total darkness. Otherwise those games would have gone on until someone dropped from exhaustion.

That was back when you could play outside until after dark and nobody was afraid of their child being abducted. You know, The good 'ol days.

Kick-the-Can has taken on a new meaning to me and my siblings this past year...there aren't any mosquitos, but there is a level of exhaustion!

How are we playing this game now as adults? We are watching mom and dad decline and needing help, but are kicking the can in having a real, honest discussion on what we are seeing.

We have all witnessed our moms cognitive decline over the last three years. Little things like:

Instead of calling the granddaughters' annual Mermaid Camp she said, "You know, the girl fish party."

She forgot how to put together her signature Goulash. She couldn't remember the ingredients. This was a staple dish she made every week to feed our four bellies living on a budget.

Names and places get all mixed up in her head and come out of her mouth scrambled. She couldn't recall JoAnn Fabrics. She practically owns the store. Dad always joked that he should own stock in it by now.

Weird pains coming and going in her leg and feet that makes it hard for her to move some days, but never really gets it checked out.

Then there is dad:

He has major heart issues that require a cocktail of pills daily to keep his heart pumping.

Still gets on a ladder to "trim a branch" even though he could faint at any time.

And, the worst one...he thinks he's a doctor because he can search the internet.

Or the times that he adjusts his own water retention meds based on his schedule so that he doesn't have to run to the bathroom when he has stuff to do.

Here's our dilemma, whenever we bring up senior living Mom and Dad call it "The Old Folks Home". So, there's that.

What's funny about that statement is that they served a senior living community for a decade bringing a church service to the residents every single Sunday. Maybe it is because they are seeing themselves in the memory of the people they served. They are now the age and frailty of the people they go to know.

To us kids it seems as though they are surviving, but not thriving. We want more for them. They deserve it.

But again, we just keep kicking-the-can.

That was until yesterday. The can stopped. Mom ended up at the ER with a swollen foot. Diagnosis was neuropathy. The stairs at their multi-level home was not going to work anymore.

We had to deal with the situation. We knew mom and dad wouldn't think that some changes needed to be made. It was time for us to take the lead on their safety...but it had to be their idea!

Us kids rallied and met mom and dad at their home that evening with dinner from The Trout House – their favorite restaurant.

My brother, Tom, my sister, Lisa and me, Joan, were ready to open up a tough conversation tonight. We were missing Richard, our other brother, who passed away a few years back.

We are a fairly close family and grew up with lots of love. We enjoy seeing each other when we can, but life is busy with work, grandkids and homelife.

We ate dinner, let Mom and Dad chat on about whatever and continued to kick-the-can with the tough conversation we knew we needed to have.

After dinner Lisa and I cleaned up the kitchen while Tom, and Mom and Dad sat in the living room.

It's not the best place for conversation because they love to watch the news...loud. It's pretty much on 24/7. Every time I'm at their house I either turn it way down or shut it off and make a mental note to myself to not do that (have news on really loud 24/7) when I get older. I don't want my viewing habits to become a funny conversation for my kids like it has for me and my siblings.

We were just about done in the kitchen, and I asked my sister, "So, how are you going to approach this subject?" I threw in a smirk just to get her goat.

"Ha, Ha, very funny." She put the dish towel over her shoulder and grabbed a large, wooden spoon and pretended it was a microphone and started singing, "I'm a leaving on a jet plane, don't know when I'll be back again."



I grabbed the spoon and said, “Dream on cupcake, you’re not going anywhere, we are all doing this together.”

Our spoon microphones have been a part of kitchen clean up for as long as we can remember. Singing in the kitchen and music in general has been a big part of our family and our memories.

Lisa and I hugged knowing we were about to start a conversation that was long overdue. It was also emotional facing the fact that our parents are getting fragile and that we only have so much time left with them.

We finished our hug with a tear-filled rendition of “I got you babe”.

We brought dessert into the living room, Banana Cream Pie, Dad’s favorite. We figured a spoonful of sugar will make the medicine go down.

I grabbed the remote and turned off the news.

“Oh, my favorite. Thanks girls.” Dad was happy as a clam. Mom made dessert every night when we were kids, they both have a sweet tooth. Lisa’s husband says that he didn’t know what dessert was until he met our family.

“So, Mom and Dad, we wanted to discuss a few things with you given the excitement of the

last 24 hours.”

They both looked a bit surprised and stared at me like I had two heads.

Thank God my brother caught that and jumped in, “We have been worried about you both for a couple of years. Not just this big house and all the upkeep, but your health as well.”

“Oh, we are just fine.” Mom said with her hand waving in the air.

As usual they went on to say everything was fine and not to worry.

My turn, again. I looked right at Mom, “Well, given the diagnosis of neuropathy, your home is not going to work very well anymore. That’s what we would like to talk about.”

And it began. The back and forth of home care, home maintenance, home therapy, home, home, home. All of the ways they could stay home and “make it work.”

We knew better. So, we pressed until we had a break through.

One question seemed to do it.

My sister looked at my Dad and said, “What do you think would be some great reasons to leave your home and get an apartment at a senior living community?”

He thought for a bit, and we let him. Sometimes a pause is good.

He cleared his throat, “Well, given the circumstances with your Mother, I think having access to meals would be nice, not having to deal with stairs and also leaving the headache of this big yard and home.”

That one question broke the seal. Now we had an open door.

“Exactly, that’s so true Dad.” My sister sounded very positive and helped change the atmosphere.

I commented, “I agree Dad, Mom will have a hard time standing to cook and not to mention the washer and dryer are downstairs.”

And then came our Tom with the winning statement of the night, “You know, it’s great you are thinking of this now. This way you can be involved and select where you want to live. If we wait too long that might not be the case.” And just like that, it was their idea!

By the end of the night, they gave us permission to help them begin to “look” at different communities.

It felt good to stop kicking the can.

The process of change is not always easy, but it is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome.

Helping Mom and Dad transition to a smaller home/apartment and all that comes with that was not easy, but we sleep better at night now. We all have peace of mind. Including Mom and Dad.

It was hard for them to think about giving up all their space in a big home. But realistically all their space was more like all their storage. They didn't use most of their home. All the rooms just housed all the stuff that never was used anymore. So, downsizing really simplified how they truly live. It has been freeing to them.

Their preconceived ideas about living in an "Ol' Folk's Home" went to the wayside once they settled in.

Dad plays piano a few times a week at Happy Hour. Mom is enjoying the different arts and crafts and Ladies Day Out for shopping. They are making new friends and reviving old acquaintances.

It's been really great to see them thrive once again and not just survive. That is worth all the gold in the world.

Visiting them is different now as well. In a good way. They seem happy and peaceful.

One day Dad said, "I wish we would have done this sooner."

I shook my head and just smiled. In my head I was singing..."and I think to myself, what a wonderful world".

