

2018 Caregiver of the Year: Joan Mitchell!



Faith, Family, Love

Joan Mitchell began caring for both of her parents three years ago when they needed assistance with various things. At that time, Joan's parents lived 30 minutes away which required more time out of her day to go over to their home to help them out. After a year of driving back and forth from her parents' home, Joan could see that her parents were struggling to live on their own. Joan's father, 80, who has dementia and Parkinson's disease, was the primary caregiver for her mother, who has Alzheimer's, very poor vision, and diabetes which required insulin injections four times a day. The Alzheimer's caused Joan's mother to become obstinate with her father and the situation became dangerous for the both of them. It wasn't until Joan, a registered nurse, took off work for a week to care for her parents full time, that she realized they needed full time care.

Joan, the DPOA of her parents, began doing research on facilities; however, her parents were not ready to give up their independence or their home. She found herself in a balancing act doing a lot of the running. In January 2017, Joan's mother fell down a flight of stairs which resulted in both of her parents moving into an assisted living apartment. Her condition continued to deteriorate and she ultimately ended up in skilled nursing care the summer of 2017. Later in November, Joan's father moved into the same facility.

In March of 2017, Joan's father experienced an adverse reaction to a new dementia medication which caused him to become aggravated. After doing some research, Joan realized that the medication was causing her father to exhibit unusual behaviors. Over the course of the week, Joan closely watched over him and had staff withhold the medication on three different occasions. As a result of altering her father's medications, she began to see drastic improvements in his mood and behavior. Joan took her father home over Easter weekend where he continued to not receive the medication and continued to improve.

Joan ultimately decided to quit her job and move her father in with her and her husband, where he continues to do well.

In addition to making sure her father's activities of daily living needs are met, Joan takes him to physical therapy (PT) two to three days a week. She also does PT with him at home on the days he does not go see the therapist. Joan's father enjoys walking with their dog around their fenced in back yard. She has to stay close by as he is a fall risk. Joan recently purchased an outdoor swing so they can sit together and enjoy the warmth and beauty of nature.

At least twice a week, Joan and her father make the hour long trip to Tuscumbia to visit her mother. They go out in the community where they eat lunch or visit her aunt. Sometimes Joan will bring her mother back to her house so she can have the feeling of being home for the day with her husband. Joan's parents have been married for 58 years so it's important that they continue to foster that relationship. When they cannot be there in person to visit her mother, Joan makes time for her parents to have phone calls. Joan laughs, "They get along better now than they did living in the home together." Joan's two sisters, Pam and Deb, live close by and are able to help provide support to Joan and foster the relationship between their parents.

Joan has a positive outlook on life, is very energetic, and is always willing to help anywhere she can. "Faith is why I do what I do. Faith is where I draw my strength from - it's why I value my aging parents and grandparents. It was instilled in us as children." Joan's parents exemplified this value and strength when she was a child. She watched her parents be the caregivers for her grandmother and great grandmother and the time has come for her to do the same for them.

Joan's Follow Up Story

Joan's father entered the nursing facility in August due to a significant decline in his health related to a medicine change for his Parkinson's disease. Joan was no longer able to care for him at home. Joan's parents are in the same nursing facility on the Alzheimer's unit and reside three doors away from each other. Joan went back to work as a private duty nurse. Joan stated her father was only home five months, but she wouldn't change a thing. She appreciates having the opportunity to offer him a better quality of life for those few months. She stated she has very good memories of the time they spent together at home and it was an uplifting experience. Joan visits her parents weekly when her schedule allows.