

August Caregiver of the Month: Hilda Akins!



Eldest Sibling Cares for and Outlives Two Younger Siblings

Native St. Louisan Hilda Akins, 92, is the caregiver of her family. The eldest of four siblings, she cared for her 90-year-old sister, Muriel, who suffered from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, for five years before Muriel died a few weeks ago. Before that, Hilda cared for their younger brother Virgil, who had dementia and died around five years ago. And if Hilda's youngest brother, Charles, had survived World War II and needed care, she probably would have brought him into the fold, too.

That's who Hilda Akins is—she answers when family calls. No easy task for a woman whose posture is so stooped from osteoporosis that she looks at the ground when walking rather than straight ahead.

The call for help came when Hilda was living in the San Francisco Bay area, where she worked as a nurse's aide for hospitals and nursing homes. Though Hilda was a 40-year resident of the Bay area who absolutely loved the people and the snow-free climate, she moved back to University City, Missouri, into Muriel's house, to help care for brother Virgil first and then Muriel.

“For my age, it was tiresome, but it made me closer to them,” Hilda says. “My mother kept us close around her and protected us when we were babies after our father deserted us. I wanted to keep them close around me; I didn't want them to go to a rest home.”

Hilda had partial help with Muriel, a former beautician. Five days a week, for five hours, a nurse's aide came to help lift, transfer and bathe Muriel.

During those five hours, Hilda allowed herself to pursue her own passion—the University City Senior Center. “It's what kept me going and still keeps me going,” she says.

Every Monday through Thursday at 8:30 a.m., Hilda boards a bus that takes her to see her friends there.

“I bring a sandwich with me,” Hilda says. “There are about six of us. They are very trustworthy and nice to me. They help me in and out, off the bus, and get me water and coffee. We play bingo and converse. Estella Hines is one of them; she's my best friend. She had her 84th birthday yesterday, and we celebrated. I can't wait to see her every day.”

That is, every day except Fridays, Saturday and Sundays, when the center is closed. On those days, Hilda rests and watches her favorite TV shows—the news and police stories. And dreams about Monday, when she can go back to the center.