

My mother is the reason I became a Volunteer Ombudsman with VOYCE. My mother, Georgia Spelts, was a home economics teacher, war bride, and the mother of four children. She was beautiful, gracious, hospitable, full of energy, and loved her life. At the age of 52, a brain aneurysm robbed her of her ability to walk, say more than a dozen words, or turn herself in bed. She could not ask for help.

For the next 13 years, my father visited Mom in the nursing home twice a day while running his business. He talked to her, read her letters, cleaned her glasses, checked her teeth regularly, and made sure she was receiving quality care.

My dad was Mom's best and most loyal advocate.



Sadly, many people who live in Missouri nursing homes don't have someone like my father watching out for them. That's why I became a VOYCE Volunteer Ombudsman.

I learned VOYCE needed volunteers about seven years ago. The role hit home for me. I knew how much visitors improved my mother's quality of life simply by being with her, even if it was just a few minutes.

When I visit residents, I share my photography, which often features wildlife or birds. Residents respond warmly to these pictures, which bring the outside world to them and break the ice

with me, a former stranger.

As Ombudsmen, however, we do more than visit. We ensure residents receive quality care.

Ombudsmen are needed more than ever as nursing homes are allowing visitors again. Residents have been isolated for more than a year, and many have had no contact except for staff. Along with staff, we called, wrote letters, did virtual and window visits while nursing homes were closed to support as many residents as possible through the pandemic. We may never know the true cost of the virus and isolation, but we know that we lost over 3,525 long-term care residents in Missouri alone. It's heartbreaking to think of all of those who died without their loved ones by their sides and all the residents wasting away because of lack of contact with the ones they love.

Now that we can visit again, ombudsmen are working hard to respond to residents' physical and mental needs. Your support is desperately needed to make sure each resident's concerns are handled.

Thank you,

Aneeta Brown
VOYCE Volunteer Ombudsman