

Pittsburgh Boomers

It's About Attitude, Not Age

Dedicated to Area Baby Boomers

Caring Companions Help Families Provide End-of-Life Care

by Nancy Kennedy

When Jean Caputo and Edward Smetak learned that Ed's mother, Mary, had cancer, they knew they were going to need help with giving her the care that she would need through surgery and recovery – but they were uncertain about just exactly what kind of help might be needed. They were told about various agencies that provided home care services, but found to their dismay that most of them asked just one initial question: "What kind of services do you need?"

The problem with that, according to Jean, was that they had no idea.

"This was a situation that neither one of us had ever faced before. The prognosis was unclear and no one could tell us what to expect. We didn't know where to begin. My mother-in-law had resided in her home for 50 years and she wanted very much to remain there, so all we knew was that we wanted to do whatever we possibly could to make that happen.

"Thank goodness for Brenda Metal and her company, Caring Companions! Brenda was the exception among everyone with whom we spoke. She conducted a thorough assessment, both in the hospital and at home, to determine what the needs were. From that, she was able to put together a care plan."

At this point, according to Metal, the company's founder and director, the family and Caring Companions became a team, joining forces to implement the plan and care for the client in her own home, surrounded by all that was familiar and comforting.

Initially, Mary Smetak needed to have help with her therapy, personal hygiene, shopping and homemaking. Jean and Ed were able to provide most of this assistance, but then Mary's condition began to decline and the situation changed quickly. Caring Companions had been providing six to eight hours per day of services, but within two days Mary needed twenty-four hour care.

"The cancer progressed so rapidly and we did not expect that. She became bedridden suddenly and needed complete care. Once more, Caring Companions was right there, ready to help immediately. We were not able to be there around the clock; I had our house and child to care for and Ed had his job. They provided us with coverage as soon as we needed it and I doubt that most agencies would respond so quickly,"



Brenda Metal

Jean says. "Brenda told us she would work with us every step of the way and she kept her promise. I don't know what we would have done without her."

The family had been referred for hospice care and found that the services of Caring Companions perfectly complemented those of the hospice. The hospice staff collaborated with Caring Companions to support Mary and to help Jean and Ed become capable caregivers for the end-of-life phase of Mary's illness.

Metal was pleased with the flexibility and resourcefulness of her staff as they adapted to all the changes that occurred as Mary's illness progressed. Her initially simple needs became more complex over time, as the focus shifted from post-op care and recovery to end-of-life care.

"Families need all the help they can get," says Metal, "when they are emotionally exhausted and trying to manage the demands of caring for their dying loved one. We can be

there as a consoling presence that helps them to hold it all together."

Caring Companions offers non-medical services to older adults, enabling them to remain in their own homes with as much independence as possible. The services include companionship, recreation, meal preparation, errands and transportation to appointments, light housekeeping and laundry and grocery shopping. A key element of the Caring Companions philosophy is consistency of assigned caregivers, facilitating the development of a bond between the client and the caregiver.

"Consistent caregivers allow trust and comfort to develop. It makes everyone feel more at ease, including the family," says Metal.

Brenda Metal started the company two years ago. After some soul searching led her to recognize that she was not fulfilled in her career as an executive headhunter, she chose to create a service that would alleviate loneliness and ease some of the challenges of aging for older adults. She was motivated by her own experience caring for her beloved grandmother.

"Caring Companions is designed to help the older adult plus the family. We know that the family may have enormous responsibilities and that they need support and respite. We are there to provide that in a warm, personal, caring way."

For more information about Caring Companions, call (724) 337-7581.