

I thought I knew it all.....

Clare Shanley, Executive Director for 20 Years

I thought I truly understood what families experienced when deciding to move a loved one into a memory care community. I was wrong.

When my Brother passed in 2024, I held true to my promise to keep his wife who has Alzheimer's in their home with home care. As time passed, however, her decline and loneliness became more and more pronounced. I turned to the Owners often sharing my worries.

Recognizing my exhaustion and concern, they took me aside and suggested that Helen come to 80th Street for a "little vacation." I was stunned at first because I would be taking her away from the home she knew for over 50 years. With a bit of time I did come to realize that it was a wonderful idea.

Within days of her arrival, my coworkers began telling me how funny she was and how they loved her. Helen, funny? Years ago, certainly—but now? Gradually, I saw that she was genuinely enjoying herself. I could hardly believe the change. When the two weeks ended, she returned home. Before long, however, I would visit to find her reverting back to sleeping most of the day and night and barely speaking or eating. That was when I truly came to understand what families really experience and how much harder it is to make a decision for someone you love deeply than I had ever imagined.

Helen did finally return to 80th Street—to the same room, on the same floor, with the same care managers. Once again, she blossomed and found moments of joy. Many relatives and friends asked whether I felt guilty for breaking my promise that she would always remain at home. I never hesitated to answer, "No, not one bit. I know this is what he would want for her now."

For 20 years, the most meaningful part of my work has been connecting with families and helping them through the pain and heartbreak of deciding to make such a move. I always believed that I knew exactly how they felt, but I was wrong...I did not know it all.

This experience taught me how different it is when the person is a close family member. The 80th Street Residence is unique: residents, families, and staff truly become family. I would not change a thing, and I will always be grateful to the owners for opening my eyes to a better way of life for my sister-in-law at 80th Street.