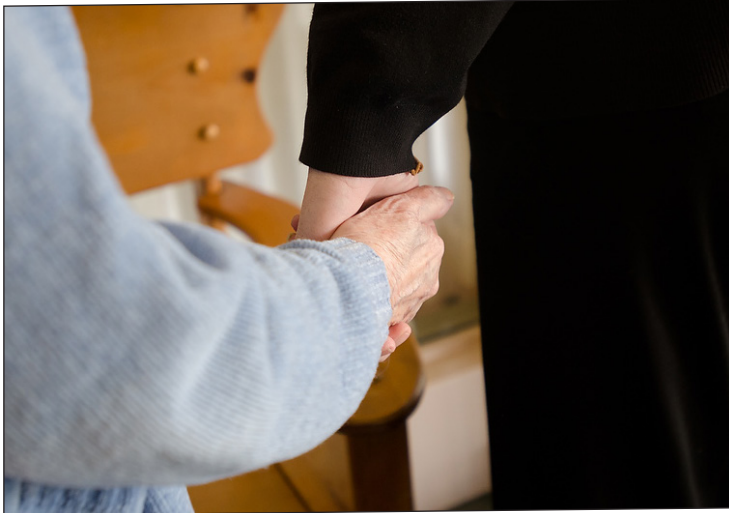


Bringing Nana Home



Lorraine Knight helps her grandmother Ivy Bennett get in the car. Knight is caring for Bennett in her Picton home.



Knight holds Bennett's hand as they leave H.J. McFarland Memorial Home's Adult Day Care Program.



Knight and Bennett leave H.J. McFarland Memorial Home's Adult Day Care Program.



Jan Welbanks, activity worker at H.J. McFarland Memorial Home Adult Day Care Program and Ivy Bennett share a laugh.



(L-R) Lorraine Knight, personal support worker Theresa Letourneau, Ivy Bennett and Care Coordinator Denis Michel at the Knight's Picton residence.



Ivy Bennett and Audrey Bonter, respite worker with the VON play cards in the living room on a Sunday.

January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. As cases become more common, some family members will choose to take on the task of caring for loved ones at home.

Story and photos by Marta Iwanek

It was a warm Canada Day weekend in Picton, Ont., but Ivy Bennett believed she was in England.

Her granddaughter Lorraine Knight had brought her grandmother to her home in Prince Edward County, because her dementia was getting worse and Knight's mother in Toronto just couldn't care for Nana anymore.

On this evening, however, she had reached a crisis point and there was nothing Knight could say or do to convince her Nana she wasn't across the ocean. She was doing everything to stop her from going out the door. Finally, at midnight, Knight decided to take Bennett to the hospital.

"When we get to the top of the hill, you're going to see the sign that says Picton," Knight said to Bennett as they drove. "We're in Picton."

"No, we're not," Bennett kept repeating.

So Knight pulled up right in front of the blue and white sign and put on her highbeams. "Nana, what does that say?"

"Picton."

"See?"

"Well, of course you've driven me here now."

Knight had no choice and continued on to the hospital. Unbeknownst to Knight, Bennett had a urinary tract infection at the time, which can cause the symptoms of dementia to worsen. "It's huge. I've never ever had an experience like that with her in my life ever," says Knight.

There are about 747,000 Canadians who currently have dementia and that number is expected to double in the next 20 years, according to the Alzheimer Society of Canada. Families like the Knights will be forced to make a decision to care for loved ones at home or put them in a care facility.

At the hospital, doctors treated Bennett with antibiotics for a week and there was little change. They said she wasn't going to get better and needed to be put in a long-term care facility.

"I can't explain it but something was telling me that she wasn't at that point yet," says Knight.

Reluctantly, but at the point of crisis, Knight and husband Tony put Bennett into a facility in Kingston, where she was put in the secure wing. It was a bad fall that was the last straw for Knight and she decided she was going to try to bring her grandmother back home. A space at a Picton home opened up for Bennett and she stayed there while healing. During the time, they also had Bennett reassessed as the infection had cleared. The Knights brought Bennett home on weekends, then a few days a week, before moving Bennett to their home permanently last September.

For the Knights, they wanted to give Bennett the best quality of life, which they felt was at home, even if that meant making sacrifices in their daily freedom.

Bennett shows the wedding ring she still wears on her finger. Inside is engraved the date: July 27, 1940.

"Think of everything she's been through and then to just lock her away and leave her some place on her own," says Knight. "She's devoted her whole life to family, family, family."

"I think in the big picture, individual family situations are all going to be different," says Tony Knight. They say they wouldn't be able to get by without the help of personal support worker Theresa Letourneau, who comes by four times a week. The South East Community Care Access Centre has also helped them connect with services like having a Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) respite worker, and the VON Adult Day Care Program at the H.J. McFarland Memorial Home.

"Not everybody can bring a relative home with them," he adds. "People are working, there may be two people working in a family, because you know quite frankly, without Theresa's help it would pretty tough to do it all day every day."

Knight wants to keep Bennett home as long as she can, and she and her husband will keep going until something changes. "I don't know where the cut-off point is," she says. "As long as she's happy that's where my measurement is."

Bennett looks up at her granddaughter, when asked what she thinks of living with her. She's quick to respond.

"Well that's easy, I love her."