

A ripple in the waters of life

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Note: The death of a loved one is a very personal experience. The person interviewed for this story requested anonymity, which is contrary to the practice of The Nugget. In this case, due to the nature of the story and in order to protect the privacy of those involved, names have been changed.

Drop a pebble in a pond and the ripples spread out in all directions. The death of a family member can often be like that pebble, with ripples touching the lives of family members in different ways.

Betty's death impacted her two adult children differently, and having Partners In Care Hospice House for the final six days of life helped to facilitate the beginning of healing for both of them.

Following the death of her father, and at his request, Karen sold her business and her home in another town and moved to Sisters to care for her mother, for whom her father had always done everything. Karen's role of caregiver lasted for eight years. It was difficult at times, due to lifelong dynamics between Karen and her mother. Karen said that her mother's philosophy had basically been, "My way or the highway."

Karen's sibling had long ago separated from the family,

even dropping the family name for a new one. During the eight years Karen spent caring for her mother, her sibling would call occasionally, making only one visit in person. The last year of Betty's life, she never heard from her child, despite leaving numerous messages on voicemail.

Karen and her sibling lost a sister in 1977. She and her mother had unresolved issues between them when she died, something their mother had to live with the rest of her life.

Betty had advanced osteoporosis in her spine, and several weeks after a bad fall, in which there were no broken bones, she began experiencing excruciating pain. An X-ray revealed that her lumbar spine had collapsed. After that, she went to bed and stayed there. Her intractable pain made it necessary for her to enter St. Charles Hospital in Bend in order to receive more powerful pain medication and prepare for hospice. After two nights in the hospital, the decision was made to send Betty home and enlist the services of Partners In Care.

Betty left the hospital in a wheelchair at about 4 p.m., transported to her home by medical transport. Hospice had already arranged for delivery of a hospital bed. According to Karen, when Betty saw the bed, she fully realized the end was near.

Betty was home less than 24 hours when it became evident that Karen wasn't able to provide care for her mother. Betty refused to take the pain medication, pulled out two catheters, and became very agitated. Despite the arrival of nurses several times during the night and next day, attempting to turn her mother and change her diapers was more than Karen could do.

"I was totally unprepared to provide that level of care," Karen explained. "Finally, a bed opened up at Hospice House and my mother was transferred there."

Following her mother's transfer, Karen shared that her sense of relief was palpable.

"The responsibility of eight years was being lifted off my shoulders. I could go back to being her daughter, and sit by her bed," Karen said.

"My experience at Hospice House was extraordinary," Karen said. "The staff was there but almost invisible in their comings and goings. They were all a really lovely, kind, and helpful presence. They never hovered but they made sure my mother was comfortable. They were very careful as they planned ahead of time to turn her. I didn't

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encounter a single person who wasn't kind and professional," Karen said of her experience.

One of the nurses who cared for Betty during her six days at Hospice House remains a friend to Karen.

Karen's sibling responded to her phone call and came to be with their mother as she died, spending five days living in Betty's room which was furnished with a hide-a-bed for family members.

Her sibling had made peace with their mother in his own mind, coming to the conclusion that their mother had done the best she could. Being a musician, Karen's sibling played the guitar on numerous occasions over those five days. At one point, though not conscious, Betty raised her arm as if conducting the music.

A Hospice House staff member asked Karen if she would be alright if she wasn't present when her mother died, as she drove home to Sisters

each night to sleep and tend to her dog.

"I spent the past eight years with her, shepherding her to this point. I'll be OK," was her reply.

While Karen was driving home to Sisters on the sixth evening, Betty passed.

"Hospice House did have really good follow-up after my mother's death, even though I didn't take part in it. I had gone through the whole process with her and I felt well-equipped to deal with my grief and loss," Karen said.

Karen feels as if Betty's placement in Hospice House and her subsequent death there after six days, "allowed us (Karen and her sibling) to have an opening." The atmosphere and level of care allowed Betty's children the opportunity to begin healing deep-seated hurts.

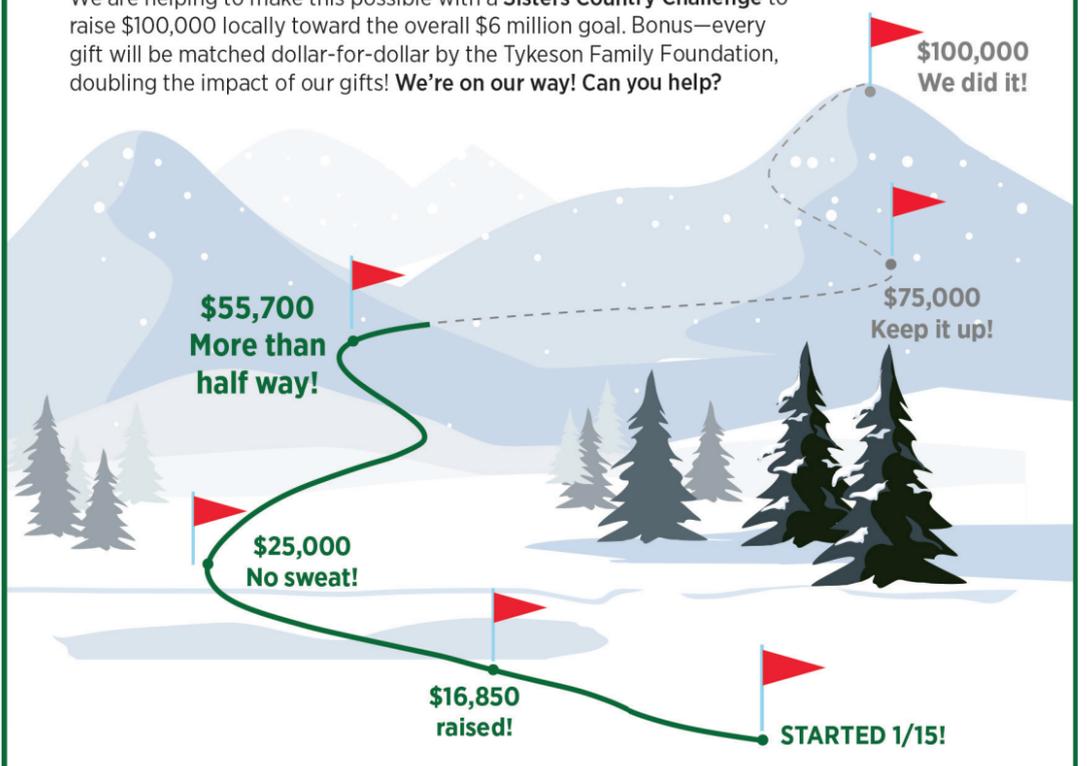
"She (Betty) could only do what she could do," Karen concluded. "Families are not always what they seem."



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Those leading the **Sisters Country Challenge** include: Bill Willitts, Dr. Kevin Miller, Fran Willis, John Griffith, Donna Lipscomb, Rob Corrigan, and Sue Stafford.

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