

Family Council

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Frances W. - My father's "six month stay" has lasted 10 years.

Bernice T. - I can't accommodate him, and he has nowhere else to go.

Frances W. - My mother died 10 years ago, and my sister and I agreed that my Dad should live with each of us for six months out of each year. This would vary it for him, and give us a half year of privacy in-between his stays.

I took the first period, and within that time Bernice and her husband sold their home and moved to a tiny apartment. Thus, when their turn came there was no space for a guest. Bernice offered to make it up to us with a financial contribution, but I refused. I didn't need money. I needed another comfortable place for my father to occupy.

After that, matters became extremely trying. Dad is a strong-willed person. My husband and I humor him, but my children tangle with him every day. Now they're 20 and 16, and it would be best for all concerned for him to go to a home, or else for Bernice to find him an apartment near her own.

Bernice T. - I made my bargain with Frances in good faith. But my husband's business was going sour, our two children were married and had left home, and we felt that under the circumstances we should sell the big house. It was expensive to maintain, and we had no further use for it. We found a ready buyer, and I was eager to use some of the profits to help Frances finance my father's care. But she was indignant and wouldn't even discuss the matter.

Now I gather things have come to a pass where she must open the subject. I still want to contribute some money toward a companion or any other comfort for my father. He's in good health and shouldn't be in an old-age home. As for his disposition, my children find Grandpa easy to be with. Maybe Frances's kids goad him to battle. I can't possibly place him near us. We're in a crowded neighborhood, we can't move now, and there are no empty apartments, anyway.

The Council: Again, the same old sad recurrent problem of Home versus "home" for an aged parent. And one phase of it strikes us as a bit fishy. Namely, how come the welcome gets worn out about the time the grandchildren no longer need a sleep-in babysitter? While Frances's children were six and ten it was mighty handy to have Grandpa around and be free to run off at a moment's notice. Nevertheless, Frances is entitled to a respite and her Dad to a round of fresh (not just sassy) faces. The arrangement has stalled. Everyone except Bernice has tired of it. And it's quite possible that the older man is behaving in a trying manner, part of it due to the explosive domestic set-up, part possibly due to a personality change setting in with his advancing age. The latter can be verified or discounted by a physician.

May we suggest a step-by-step procedure along the following lines? Frances will brief her children on being respectful and kind. At the same time, she will engineer schedules so that the two generations do not come too often in close contact during the next few weeks. In that time she will watch for the propitious, quiet moment in which to outline the true situation to her Dad. In the total configuration of the household, he must see himself as a guest rather than a chief. As a guest, he must think of leaving eventually.

Meanwhile Bernice will look into meeting her responsibilities. The best solution, of course, would be for her and her husband to acquire a larger apartment, with quarters for her Dad under her own roof - a solution she claims was impossible 10 years ago. Has she been avoiding it in the interim? If no such housing can be obtained, then it's Bernice's assignment to find a place near her home in which to settle her father. It can be a furnished room or a shared or private apartment. Its main attraction will be its proximity to her, so that he can enjoy her filial interest and familiar presence.

Everyone should profit from the change. Off their neck, he'll look sweet and wise to the grandchildren. Above all, he'll be years away from a Home, still cared for by his own rather than by strangers.

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