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### **Moving Mom**

By Ellie Kahn

When I last wrote this column for The Jewish Journal several months ago, I had no idea that my mother would soon be living a short bike ride away. Or that her relocation to Los Angeles would take over my life. But transitions, while challenging and stressful, thankfully don't usually last forever, and I'm glad to say that Mom is finally settled in, and I'm returning to my status as a fully functioning human being.

I want to share some lessons learned from the past four months, during which time my unfortunate mother has been moved (without much enthusiasm) five times. This isn't because my sister and I are abusive, merciless people; we simply kept thinking we'd found "the perfect place." Finding even an *almost* perfect place takes much longer — and more effort — than I ever anticipated.

The first place Mom lived (after two years at my sister's home) was an assisted-living facility near my sister in North Carolina. Mom was there for a month, until one morning she shrieked at a sweet elderly woman whose seat Mom had mistakenly sat in at breakfast. The woman wanted her regular seat back. My mother not only yelled, but she cursed at this woman, which was apparently too much for these proper Southerners to cope with.

My sister was called and politely asked to remove my mother that afternoon.

*Rule no. 1: If your parent is agitated, disoriented or stressed, make sure that the place you move them has great tolerance for occasional outbursts.*

According to Dr. David Trader, a geriatric psychiatrist in Century City, this kind of behavior is quite common for elderly people.

My mother was then moved into a psychiatric unit in Asheville, N.C., to be evaluated for a few days. Though fairly traumatic for her, this experience was also the source of some good laughs. I called Mom one day and, when the staff handed her the portable phone, Mom informed me that "another inmate" was in her room. "I don't know what to do with him," she whispered loudly to me. I suggested she take him to the nursing station. I heard her say, "Come on, Joe" and then I listened as she asked people, "Are you a nurse? Are you a nurse?" Finally, I guess someone

answered affirmatively, because Mom said, "There's a man in my room and he doesn't belong to me."

*Rule no. 2: Just because the PR materials and the administrators tell you that they offer superb, personal, constant care, don't assume it's true. Get references of other people with parents living there and ask them about the facility's strengths and weaknesses.*

I started looking at places in Los Angeles for Mom to live, but then my sister called because she found "the perfect place" — perfect because, they told her, "We are very patient here, and give the residents lots of attention, stimulation, and tender loving care."

I flew to North Carolina to help move my mother in.

The new facility had a gorgeous, large room for Mom where we hung some of her artwork and tried to make it as homey as we could. Everything seemed dandy until that night. At 8 p.m., Mom started calling us every 15 minutes, asking where she was, accusing us of "getting rid of her," and pleading with us to come get her. It was tempting. This was torture — like leaving my son at preschool when he didn't want to stay there. At midnight, when the calls hadn't stopped, my sister phoned the nursing station. They had no idea that Mom was so upset. So much for lots of care and attention. We moved her out the next day.

*Rule no. 3: If possible, find the place your parent will live before moving him or her from another city. It might be very disorienting to be in your home a few nights, then moved someplace else.*

We all agreed that small might be better for Mom, and I had a list of places in Los Angeles. While she has always sworn she'd never live in L.A., she thought it would be nice to be near her only grandchild.

Two days later, Mom and I flew west. I wondered how I'd find her a place sooner rather than later. I slept on the couch with two dogs and gave Mom my bed.

For three days, I looked at board and care homes recommended by Jewish Family Service and Elderlink (a fabulous way to find such homes for older people). Every night, as Mom got into my queen-size bed, she said, "Ellie, why don't I sleep on the couch? Or why don't you sleep here with me?" I remembered how much she snores and kicks, so I declined the invitation. Each night, I awoke to hear Mom wandering around the house trying to find the bathroom. She never quite adjusted before I moved her again.

*Rule no. 4: Even though what seems like the best place is 20 miles away, consider traffic and your nerves when you must do a great deal of driving. It doesn't help your parent if you are frazzled when you visit.*

I found Mom a residential care home in Van Nuys, called Shalev Family Home. It was a wonderful place, one of eight that the owners have in the Valley. But driving 45 minutes each way to visit my mother from West L.A. got old rather quickly. After a month, I started looking again.

I'm relieved to say that my mother is now three minutes from my house, at Ayres Residential Care. It's a fantastic place with warm, caring, fun-loving people to watch over her.

And, after more than 30 years of living across the country from each other, Mom and I live close enough to do things I assumed we'd never get to do: walk arm-in-arm through the mall, go to Starbucks for an impulsive afternoon treat. Best of all, I get to watch my 9-year-old son and Mom,

squished into the same armchair as he reads to her, both of them cracking up over a "Calvin and Hobbes" cartoon book.

*Rule no. 5: Always bring something for your children to do when visiting an elderly relative. They'll enjoy themselves more and resent the visit less.*

For my son, the wonderful thing about a forgetful grandmother is that he can read the same cartoon book over and over to her, because she doesn't remember.

At last, I hope, my mother is in her final home.

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