

**My Two Years
in
Assisted Living**

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Narrative

I was committed to Orchard Park (OP) because my family said I had “early onset dementia” and “would need care for the rest of my life”. It is hard to understand how such a diagnosis could have been made when I was in hospital for alcohol detox on maximum doses of Librium among other medications. Such a diagnosis, if made by a medical professional under those circumstances, strikes me as grossly incompetent. Why my family didn’t get a second opinion on such a life-changing decision is unknown. I can’t find the diagnosis in my medical records.

My sister worked in IT associated with medical care; she has a history of describing symptoms to medical personnel she observes or hears about [hearsay] to get an opinion. I don’t know that happened. She did relate she was conflicted about using power of attorney and did not actually execute it.

After hospital I was in rehab for 6 weeks learning to walk again.

I am told the detox almost killed me, and the doctors urged my sister to execute her power of attorney which she declined to do - I am thankful for that.

Apparently she led the Director at Orchard Park to believe she had the power of attorney to admit me to assisted living as I discovered and relate herein later.

My first apartment at OP (#118, 9/20/15) was a small ‘bedsitter’ with private bath. My clothes were in Target bins in the tiny closet and I had a small “dorm” ‘fridge on a table both which my sister loaned me. I was still learning to walk again, my ‘clomping’ around with the walker and my zombie appearance¹ frightened some residents. I had two rounds of physical and occupational therapy to get back to using a cane. After 6 months or so at OP the med-techs were asking me why I was there.

I had asked to be on a waiting list for a larger apartment with separate bedroom. In April of 2016 one became available (apartment #104). While walking the halls at OP I passed the conference room where I saw my sister meeting with the Director. I invited myself in while my sister was signing a document for me to move to the larger apartment. I asked and got some answers to a few questions about level of care and such. In the same meeting she embarrassed me by telling the Director “we might have to go into savings for that” – odd as she was already using my investment accounts². She could sign checks from my checking account but not from my investment accounts.

After the meeting I took the Director aside and asked why she was meeting with my sister without me. “She has power of attorney” she said. I said, “No, she doesn’t...” She apparently had led the Director to believe she had power of attorney and would bring it at a later date. The Director went to the file room, put her hand on the drawer and stopped, looked at me, and said “You’re right, she doesn’t” as she realized she had never gotten the promised document. The confusion may be due to my sister’s indecision about executing power of attorney as the doctors were urging her to do; I’m glad she decided not to.

1 They were weaning me from the meds the hospital and rehab gave me.

2 She didn’t have authority to sign on that account; however, she was a signature on my checking account. My financial advisor called her and asked why she was “stealing” from me - her words not mine.

While at OP my sister confiscated³ my credit cards for 6 months and took over managing my finances, put me on an allowance, and criticized all my spending, which of course was none of her business. At the supermarket I had to put things back because I didn't have enough cash - very embarrassing.

She did a search of my investment accounts for withdrawals only - then was angry when she found a \$50,000 debit. I had to think on that one, it was an investment transfer made by my financial company on my behalf. For a time she charged me a small fee for 'managing' my finance.

For whatever reason she kept the key to apartment #118 - I never had a key and couldn't figure out why they wouldn't issue me one.

Early in my 2 years at OP I had to sell my car and later my house (7/5/16). My sister was kind enough to handle the sale.

I still find it depressing that my valuable possessions were divided up as though I had died. Mom especially wanted me to have the Edward's long-case clock. And I loved the India trunk which my niece Elizabeth received without even a thank you. Even little things like my Post bamboo slide rule, grandmother's 1918 cook-book and many other small things. I had to replace the toaster-oven and a dining set and later cookware and my Bose radio among other things. During my last of 2 trips my sister took me home my stuff was covered for re-painting the house for sale so it was impossible to see my possessions to decide what I wanted to take with me to my tiny new apartment in assisted living.

It is interesting that while I was at OP with "early onset dementia" I travelled to Romania twice on my own with only my consent.

In April of 2017 I started seeing my regular doctor⁴ again, and I asked about getting an evaluation to get out of OP - she thought a moment and said "Neurologist". On April 4th 2017 I saw the neurologist and got an evaluation that I showed no sign of dementia⁵. I had heard about Watercrest Apartments and confronted my sister with the diagnosis and my desire to move from OP. I gave notice at OP on my own signature, and on August 31st 2017 moved to Watercrest Apartments.

3 "Confiscated" is a nice word for "stole".

4 In Assisted Living you see by appointment a PRN who visits weekly or a doctor who visits every few weeks.

5 "In talking with him today, and given...mental status exam, this is certainly not the picture of dementia...[he] is not demented and is able to make his own decisions from a neurologic standpoint."

Things I don't understand:

- Where did the diagnosis of "early onset dementia" and the statement that "I'd need care for the rest of my life" come from - it's not in my medical record. How could that diagnosis be competently made while I was in detox and heavily medicated?
- How could my sister, who hadn't really been my life for 30 years accept that diagnosis without a second thought, much less a second opinion?
- Was my brother really involved in these decisions?
- Why didn't she let me have a key to Apartment 118? Was this simply an oversight?
- Why did she not use the checking account she had a signature on?
- What business could it ever have been how I spent my money?

I retired in 2002 and lived just fine on Teacher's Retirement (TRS) alone for 10 years. I already had substantial savings because as soon as I could while working I put 10% and later even 20% of my earnings in to savings whenever possible. I did all this on one paycheck, with deductions for both TRS and Social Security each month. My salary was determined by the Texas Legislature. I waited and bought a house much later than others my age. I had an inexpensive mortgage (~850/mo.) after re-financing a couple of times. By the time I was moved to OP I was comfortably situated from savings invested and inheritances from my parents' estates.

Impressions of Orchard Park

September 2015 – August 2017

Two years, three Executive Directors, three Activity Directors and no change (except rents and fees, of course)

Level of Care

There are far too many residents in Assisted Living (AL) that should be in Memory Care (MC). Maybe as many as a third or more of the total. This slows everything down and limits the activities that can be provided to AL. My understanding is that this is often the families not wanting to admit their loved one needs that kind of care (MC). This is a counseling issue that should be addressed upon resident intake. I have wondered if the high cost (and 6% increase in 2016) was subsidizing care for residents that should be in MC. Service is also slowed because staff are shared with resident care.

After Judy Saenger left in early 2017 there was no resident with whom I could hold a coherent conversation because of apparent dementia.

The med-techs are well-trained and generally outstanding. They are sometimes slowed down by emergencies or residents needing (or demanding) additional care.

The “Dining Experience”

Cons:

Every day, every meal for almost two years: Country Music, usually too loud to hold a conversation.

Drink Service always starts on same side, other side gets theirs after 15 minutes - sometimes the meal comes before the drinks for that side.

Food rarely begins coming out of the kitchen until 30-40 minutes after scheduled meal times.

Service is desultory, plates ‘plunked’ down or almost tossed onto the table, back-handed. Servers rarely wear hair-nets or name tags.

When broccoli or cauliflower are served we get the stems; I assume the florets go out the back door (the staff won’t eat here). (Security cameras were installed because the industrial drums of laundry detergent were also going out the back door).

Condiments that should be expected have to be begged for: tartar sauce for fish, syrup for pancakes, ketchup for fries or onion rings, &c. When a salad is served residents wait for one server to carry squirt bottles of dressing around; if you want Italian or thousand-island it is too thick to squirt out of the narrow spout. Servers don’t care to fix this. Tables are rarely restocked with sweetener, sugar, salt, or pepper.

Staff count residents like chickens to determine how many plates are still needed, yet they serve them one- or two- at a time.

Staff regularly shout across the dining room to each other.

No experience, dining included, would not be complete without blaring ‘walkies’, or beeping ‘walkies’ that need charging.

Pro:

Requests for extra portions are usually honored promptly.

Residents arriving late are usually served promptly.

Privacy

A locked door means absolutely nothing. Even the lowest on the staff has a master key and does not hesitate to use it. Residents are disturbed twice a day for meds on an irregular schedule and three times to have their trash emptied. I have had a care-giver come past my locked door, through my closed bedroom door, into the bathroom while I was on the toilet to remind me about breakfast. Other residents also complain of being disturbed while changing clothes, naked after taking a shower &c. *I was once told this is "a training issue" and I wonder what in the hell in the training overrides common decency?*

Cross-training, staff-to-staff: there is none. Employees are given no indication of which residents do not need reminding for meals, who makes their own bed, &c.

This is especially true of staff coming to Assisted Living from Memory Care, on loan or permanently.

Laundry Service:

Laundry service is much improved over the last year when many clothes were 'lost'. Clothes are returned promptly before breakfast neatly folded. Resident's detergent is used if provided. Residents still check the laundry rooms for missing items – but much less often. Small items that stick to the washers' drums (like washcloths) are still overlooked. I have lost some and collected a few. I have also lost two pairs of trousers and sheets, one was reimbursed by management. The other trousers, well, maybe someone's kid has a nice pair of jeans – I asked the 'concierge' to ask staff to look for them in laundry that came back the same day as mine. Nothing turned up (more likely they just didn't bother to look).

Executive Directors:

Debbie Graham was not a good listener or accessible to the residents.

Dorothea Carter seemed completely artificial in manner to residents and families alike; I often saw her using the copier at night, kids in tow.

Shannon ("pants suit") Reyns was uber-corporate; initially she put on a good show but ultimately turned out to be ineffectual. She did much herself instead of utilizing staff such as Maintenance to do things they did well.

Activity Directors:

Doris Pruess was excellent. The best outing ever, though long, was to see the bluebonnets in full bloom near Brenham. Many residents have photos. The last two Activity Directors were, imho, incompetent:

Bianca Partida's idea of an outing was lunch followed by a resale shop - what she liked to do.

Joy Carroll's experience with teaching pre-school and kindergarten was glaring, and she seemed to get her ideas for outings from things on her way to work or brochures like "great things to see in Houston" (she is not a native). Highlights include a lunch outing at Wendy's (some of us could walk there, and we can always order a burger anytime at OP dining off-menu and one to Dairy Queen. Woo-hoo. Include her ridiculous outing to the tea-house in Pearland where she met, sat and ate with her friends, or the long bus trip to walk a long block to the exhibit of two cars decorated with spoons and pennies. When told about the bluebonnets trip she is reported to have said "the residents wouldn't be interested in that". Many residents recall that as a special trip.

There is no continuity:

I gave away a Half-Price Books credit slip because we never went back so I could redeem it.

The “After-Dinner Walking Club” on the activity schedule was copied from a former resident’s activity two Activity Directors ago – it vanished with the resident. Often what is on the Activity Schedule is a fiction.

Resident’s Handbook:

Almost another fiction. Given out only once, upon Doris’ leaving, residents had to sign for their copies. Badly copied many times and so almost illegible. A quick download and a laser printer or trip to QuickCopy would have produced legible copies cheaply.

Facility:

Internal Computer Network (LAN): excellent WiFi signal except for in the dining room (possibly due to signal multi-path); throughput is outstanding (56 mbps down, 6+ mbps up). Internet access is unreliable, several times it has been unavailable for weeks to almost a month.

Fire Control System: Seems to have been frequent leaks into resident’s rooms considering young age of the building.

Cable TV: ComCast in Manvel has a dismal channel lineup, and delivery to the rooms is poor, as can be seen from the collection of private satellite dishes on the south side of the building. Cable TV is delivered to the building on what looks to be a high-quality pressurized cable or fiber connection. The snowy picture and ingress interference to the apartments is likely due to sub-standard CATV inside wiring installed when the building was built. The Owner would best serve residents in its facilities with a proper inside distribution system.

Financial Impact

Summary:

Payments to Orchard Park	\$99,319.65	<i>from ledger entries</i>
Estimated Property losses	\$52,473.61	
2106 Eton Drive @ \$1,600/month	-\$36,800.00	<i>from original retirementspreadsheet</i>
Total Impact	\$114,993.26	

SOURCE MATERIAL for Summary:

Property losses	Estimated	<i>actual amounts no longer available</i>
Toaster Oven	\$270.00	
Label Maker	\$60.00	
Farbarware cookware	\$70.00	
Bose Radio	\$500.00	
Medical Trans.	\$800.00	
Furniture	\$1,000.00	
Multimeter	\$134.00	<i>Replaced valuable analog multimeter</i>
Tools I forgot	\$200.00	
1k/month to supplement income	\$23,000.00	
2017 Honda Accord Hybrid, used	\$27,939.61	
Sale of Acura TL to Carmax	-\$1,500.00	<i>"frame damage" a stock Carmax excuse</i>
Total Estimated Losses	\$52,473.61	

Inestimable value of items given away as if I were dead:

- Grandparents' India Trunk - niece Elizabeth
- Grandparents' long case clock - sister JoAnne
- The first Mac computer in Houston
- 1918 Fannie Farmer Cookbook
- Kitchen stool I antiques, sentimental value

Payments Made to Orchard Park:

copied from original ledger entries

Year	Date	Transaction	Rent
2015	09-05	Orchard Park check 2087	-\$500.00
	09-08	Orchard Park check 2088	-\$2,052.50
	09-05	Orchard Park check 2089	-\$3,645.00
	10-04	Orchard Park check 2090	-\$3,645.00
	11-01	Orchard Park check 2091	-\$3,645.00
	12-04	Orchard Park check 2092	-\$3,645.00
2016	01-03	Orchard Park check 2093	-\$3,645.00
	03-01	Orchard Park check 2094	-\$3,495.00

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	03-12	Orchard Park check 2095	-\$804.00
	04-05	Orchard Park check 2096	-\$4,495.00
	05-03	Orchard Park check 2097	-\$4,505.00
	05-31	Orchard Park check 2098	-\$4,495.00
	07-04	Orchard Park check 2099	-\$4,495.00
	08-01	Orchard Park check 2100	-\$4,495.00
	09-01	Orchard Park check 2101	-\$4,269.00
	10-11	Orchard Park check 2102	-\$4,784.88
	11-15	Orchard Park check 2103	-\$4,674.70
	12-07	Orchard Park check 2104	-\$4,534.70
2017	01-06	Orchard Park check 2105	-\$4,776.37
	02-06	Orchard Park check 2106	-\$4,784.70
	03-03	Orchard Park check 2107	-\$4,924.70
	04-05	Orchard Park check 2108	-\$4,784.70
	04-05	Orchard Park check 2109	-\$4,784.70
	06-05	Orchard Park check 2110	-\$4,705.00
	07-05	Orchard Park check 2111	-\$4,734.70
		Total Payments to Orchard Park	-\$99,319.65

