

What I Learned From My Mother

My mother, Mattie Lou McTeer Walker Walsh, passed away on Monday, July 24, 2017, surrounded by her children and enveloped in love. She left this world at the age of 94 after living a long, interesting life and enjoying her family and friends. I learned so much from her as I was involved in her caregiving ... in fact, Mom epitomizes the inspiration behind the team at Aging in Place Transition Services. As our website states: *"At every stage of your life, you have chosen housing that fit your needs and conformed to a comfort level and aesthetic that pleased you. Now that you're older, there is no need for that to change. In any case, Aging in Place works with seniors and their families to find the right place for the next stage of a good life."*



I want to share our story and what was done to make the last few years of my mother's life both meaningful and livable.

My Mom was raised in a large family in Fountain City, near Knoxville, TN. Her father was strict, but according to her brother, John, he often hid in the dining room so she wouldn't see him laughing at her antics. Her "antics" followed her throughout her life as she married, had children, and even as a widow in her later years.

So how did she end up choosing her next stage in a good life? With lots of patience and guidance from her family, and also using the knowledge I have gained working with my clients in design and aging transitions for the past years. First, she was encouraged to look at independent living solutions when it became apparent she could not negotiate the stairs in her two story condo home of 30 years. She loved her neighbors and her location and did not want to lose contact with her friends. It was not the home of my childhood, which she had moved from years ago, but it was her home with her husband Bob, and a nest of friends with similar ages and backgrounds. She was very involved in multiple bridge clubs, ladies dinners, outings and community gatherings. It was a hard decision, but she put on her smile and chose wisely.

Mom moved into a lovely one bedroom independent living apartment, where she dressed for dinner like it was an evening out and marched down to meet her new community. I had worked with her and my siblings to make that transition smooth. Now she had a beautiful, new home with all her favorite things and the knowledge that she would be safe and happy there.

That lasted a little over four years, until she fell and broke her knee. Although Mom stepped up and took on PT with humor and determination, it became obvious that she would need more care than her family could provide. Once more necessary choices needed to be made. After downsizing again, Mom moved into assisted living, which I redecorated to become "Mattie's new home." At her new residence, she thoroughly enjoyed the chef and also having people take care of her.

When it was time, we moved her again into the convalescent care facility that was part of her chosen community. She loved getting breakfast in bed along with all the activities and music they offered. She was a social butterfly and took care of all her little lady friends, making sure they made it to activities and meals – always ready to smile and talk to visitors and staff. She was known as "Miss Mattie," "Mattie-cakes" and many other fun nicknames.

My Mom lived a full life right up to the end. Her gala funeral was a testament to that. It was complete with bagpipes and violins, plus a beautiful solo by her opera-trained granddaughter. The main theme of all the family and friends remarks was remembering my mother's laugh and smile, and her love of people and having a good time.

Her last years were ones of meaning and she will be remembered and loved by many. Her pastor sent me a note after the funeral saying: "Miss Mattie is missed around here...that's for sure." It has been a comfort to me that I was able to help her make those important life choices, and she continued to live life to the fullest wherever she was, and that has been the best outcome of all.

