

# ON AGING - ADVOCACY

By Donna Deos

Welcome to the May article of "On Aging." Last month we talked about Transitioning Your Parent or Loved One and just how much goes into that. This month, as promised, I want to talk with you about Advocacy.

My very first online course that I offered was on "Advocacy – how to best represent the ones we love." I started with Advocacy because it is usually where our role in helping our loved ones really begins. Most of us don't even realize we are doing it. Then the next thing we know, we are up to our eyeballs, in way over our heads and feeling unprepared.

So, what is Advocacy? It is defined in Webster's Dictionary as "the act or process of advocating: support." The word Advocate is defined as "1. One that pleads the cause of another; one that maintains or defends a cause or proposal; and 2. To plead in favor of."

Advocates are those who represent us and speak up for us when we need it. It starts off in life as the people who raise you, who guide you and protect you and your best interests. As we age the people who advocate for us and for whom we advocate changes. Also as we and our loved ones age the roles reverse and we often find ourselves as the advocates for our parents. This is why it sneaks up on you. It starts with you attending an appointment with your parents or receiving a call from a well-meaning friend or neighbor of theirs who has concerns. It mushrooms into a part time occupation and sometimes branches into a full time position in many cases.

To best represent the ones we love we need to know them well. We need to know how they feel about important topics. Topics we usually are uncomfortable speaking to anyone about. However, it is critical that we do have these conversations. If we don't know what they really want to have happen – heaven forbid a crisis hits – then we can't do our best in advocating for them and ensuring that their wishes are carried out.

We need to go beyond just finding out what their wishes are. We need to go all the way to finding out why they feel the way that they do. I promise you, when you are



the one facing the moment of crisis and needing to act on their behalf, you will be flooded by emotion. You will be overrun with what you want for them, which may not be at all what they would want, and you need to be prepared to act accordingly. It also will not be a simple black or white scenario so you need to be able to handle the color variations that you end up facing.

If you can't do that, then you should not be their main advocate. Someone else, who can know them clearly and intimately and act on their behalf, should be the one in the lead as their advocate.

This is also a time of turmoil for all family members. Just because you had the conversations with them and are aware of their wishes and why they have them does not mean that your siblings or other family members involved will understand and support you.

To be an advocate is serious business. To communicate clearly and effectively with your loved ones about your wishes and the reasons behind them is paramount to everyone's happily ever after. If you don't believe me, talk to my fellow Bow Times Author, Attorney Ben Kiniry. He can tell you how absolutely important a subject this is and give stories of times when people failed to talk about it and plan for it and things went very wrong.

He can also tell you, as can I, about times where things went very smoothly because people clearly understood their loved ones wishes and were able, as difficult as it was, to honor them and give them the type of ending they wanted.

Now, not all advocacy ends in loss. Advocacy can be a long journey and a very rewarding one. You become very close to your loved one as you get to know them better

and better through the discussions and experiences. It can be an intimate and rewarding journey.

Don't you owe it to yourself and those you love to start and think about it now? There will never be a good time to have these conversations because people prefer to hide from them and pretend they will be fine without addressing them. Addressing it now, when there are no crises happening can be the best time ever. No one is threatened or feeling weak or hurt. Approach it from a place of love, where you are showing them how much you want to support them and what they want. It is a wonderful gift for both of you. You won't have to second guess yourself later and you will both have peace knowing that you are on the same page. They have an ally. You are in their corner to love and support them through anything that can come their way. This is what they need most when they are facing life changing incidents. They need a champion who will ask the right questions at the right times, someone who will respectfully promote their cause and their wishes and who will help them successfully reach their goal – whatever that goal may be, as best as can possibly be done given the circumstances.

If you have no idea how to approach this subject, give me a call or shoot me an email at [contactus@donnadeos.com](mailto:contactus@donnadeos.com). We can talk. I can even come help you have the conversation if that makes it easier for all of you. Just don't put off to tomorrow something that is much easier handled today. You can be the best advocate your loved one could ask for and I can help you get there.

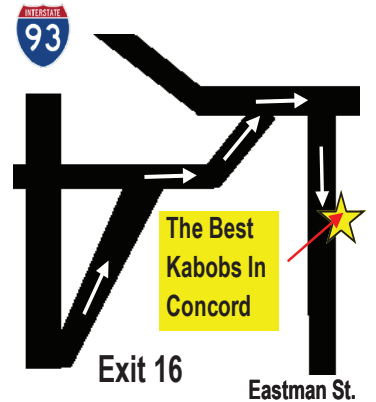
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