My sister Mary Jane's struggle with dementia began when she was seventy years of age and continued from 2010 until her passing away in June 2017. This is Mary's story.

Mary's memory problems were not obvious during our telephone conversations. "Hi, sis, how's it going in North Carolina?"

"Everything's good, but I don't like driving at night after choir practice."

Her three children and brother-in-law Ken confided with me that Mary experienced serious memory lapses. I began traveling frequently to Mary's home to visit and to accompany her to doctor appointments.

Mary took many supplements that purported to improve memory. Mary was always a bit head-strong, but stubbornness became more difficult to deal with. "Mary, those supplements may interfere with the prescriptions that you take. Have you checked with Dr. Stevenson?"

"Doctors don't know everything."

Her mood changed if interrupted; she was comfortable doing only one thing. She played on her computer, ordering unneeded items and giving personal information to strangers. On one occasion, she boasted, "I was very proud of myself. A guy I didn't know called me on the phone and I remembered my social security number."

Repetitive stories were common. Her spatial perception was problematic, especially with driving. Eventually, she had her driving evaluated and her license was suspended. Mary made poor decisions about finances. In 2013 she donated $21,000 to charities that her income could not support. Excessive shopping, forgetting to purchase home owner's insurance, mismanagement of her rental property — such behaviors caused concern for her family. She went from one task to another and sometimes wandered around her house. Several inches of mail cluttered counters and tables.

Our family recognized the need to provide support for Mary's well-being. After consulting with Mary's children, Ken and I hired an attorney to complete Mary's estate planning.

A change in Mary's home situation was needed. After interviewing representatives from companies that provide companion assistance in the home, Mary strongly stated, "I don't want strangers in my house."

Mary and I visited several retirement communities. She agreed to spend a trial week at Kingston, an independent retirement apartment, but only if I stayed with her. After several days at Kingston, Mary surprised me when she said she wanted to move there. I insisted that it had to be her choice to move and no one else's.

With help from Mary's kids, all went well with the transition. As was expected, Mary made new friends and joined activities at Kingston. Her memory and self-care continued to deteriorate requiring more day-to-day assistance.

In 2016, Mary moved to Sunrise Assisted Living Residence in Michigan to be near her daughter Emily. She loved being close to Emily's family in Livonia and near our brother Tom and his wife Elaine. I remember with great fondness my visits with Mary in her apartment at Sunrise.

Sadly, after a short Hospice stay, my big sister and protector passed away on June 30, 2017. I will forever miss my good-hearted sister. Love you, Sis!

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