

BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA

by C. Eva Thomson



THOMSON
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

INDEPENDENT, FEE-BASED
FINANCIAL PLANNING AND
INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT

Long ago my Aunt Daisy named me as her power of attorney. Most likely she jotted down my name not thinking it would ever be needed and never mentioned it.

Years past, Aunt Daisy sold her home and moved to a long term care facility in Arizona. One summer she was hospitalized and experienced her first bout of dementia. The power of attorney that she signed long ago sprang into force. From that point on I managed my aunt's financial affairs. Since a power of attorney gives another person financial authority it's only under extreme circumstances that most people relinquish that power to another.

Dementia is a strange state of mind. In the beginning it was difficult figuring out what was what. Daisy loved to order cookbooks, but she certainly wasn't cooking. She'd tell me that she needed them for her research. Hmm. Fortunately her research project ended, so too the books and the bills. Over time she lost interest in books and stopped charging things to her credit card. It was a dilemma. I was managing her hard earned money and these purchases gave her a sense of her old self. Yet the purchases piled up, unopened in her sunny little room. Fortunately her spending didn't jeopardize her financial state. If it had I would have had the daunting task of heading off all orders. No doubt a difficult conversation would have ensued – most likely over and over.

As the years passed her dementia worsened. One Sunday afternoon a caretaker phoned to say that Daisy was inconsolable and had to talk with me. She became convinced that the IRS was coming at any moment to toss her into the slammer for not paying her taxes! I assured that was not going to happen, that each year her tax returns were filed on time and she usually received a refund. We ended the conversation laughing and I promised to send her copies of her tax returns and can-

celled checks. I envisioned that fat package, unopened sitting among all the cookbooks. As the years went on Aunt Daisy spent most of her time in a happy fog. Her concerns about the IRS faded and she rarely spoke of money.

Aunt Daisy was one of the lucky ones. She had three caring nieces who looked after her, lived in a lovely facility, a solid pension, social security and investments to see her through. Many elderly are not as fortunate, especially those with dementia. They can become angry, obstinate or physically violent, making it difficult for the ones who have financial responsibility for them.

When dealing with an irrational person we'd all love a therapist to guide us. When that's not possible here are a few actions that helped when Aunt Daisy was nonsensical. I clearly explained why I was doing what I believed was best for her. She was very smart and sometimes suspicious so I made sure to use simple language – words, not just concepts, confused her. Reassurance- when Daisy was distressed it was usually because something had scared her. It was ludicrous that the IRS was on the hunt for a ninety pound, ninety year old, but to Daisy it was real. When she couldn't calm down I'd suggest we revisit the topic later, often the issue evaporated. If not I'd broach the topic when she was calmer.

Eva Thomson, MBA, ChFC, is a Financial Consultant with Thomson Financial Management.

Securities offered through LPL Financial. Member FINRA/SIPC