

Parent Care: Generations pool resources for better life

by Marsha_Kay_Seff

It wouldn't work for everyone, but Gary and Margi Schmidt have found the ideal caregiving solution for themselves and their parents.

When it was no longer feasible for the older couple to live alone, both couples sold their homes and combined profits to buy a 4,000-square-foot home in Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. With the money from the sale of two four-bedroom homes, they were able to pay cash for the hacienda, big enough to provide privacy for all of them.

The older couple has a bedroom and sitting room in one wing. They join their adult children for meals in the dining room and movies in the home theater.

Margi, who has a leadership-consulting company, works out of her home office. Gary, who was involved in aerospace contracts and is retired now, has his own office as well, where he works on investments. So there's usually someone at home.

Until the family moved last August, Gary's dad had been the caregiver for his wife, who has dementia. He balked at moving for two years. Then, heart problems landed him in the hospital, and he changed his mind.

Even so, Gary's mom had to be convinced. Margi says, "It was scary for her; she was familiar with the layout of her home."

Margi, who says the couples share a mutual trust and respect, says sharing a home with her in-laws was her idea.

"This is how you treat the people in your life you love," she says. "I like the idea of people banding together and taking care of each other."

Though Margi and Gary always wanted a big family, the couple was unable to have children. Now Margi has the chance to nurture. "And it feels more alive in the house."

For Gary, "the move seemed like the right thing to do. Dad and I were a little leery about what was to

come, but we figured if we're together, we could handle things as a team."

While the children act as a safety net, Dad still looks after his wife, doling out her pills and driving her to doctors and the beauty parlor.

The situation is working out well for both families, though Margi acknowledges that not all adult children could afford such a big house.

"We know we're really, really blessed."

The house is in the younger couple's name, but Mom and Dad split all the bills. Margi cooks; her father-in-law shops for groceries and acts as the sous-chef. Gary cleans up after meals.

"We know it's going to get much harder," Margi says.

But because the situation is evolving gradually, she believes, they'll have time to get used to it and adapt as things progress.

If the care gets too much for the younger couple, Gary says, they can turn their parents' sitting room into caregiver's quarters and hire a professional.

Someday, Margi's parents might need to move into the big house. For now, they live independently nearby.

I see from spending the morning with Margi and Gary that they've learned to adapt to their parents' changing needs. I wonder how Margi will cope with her own aging.

She says she plans to write letters to herself soon, reminding her older self that when the time comes, it's OK to let others help you.

"Appreciate it, dig it, love them and say thank you."

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