

Just Fred... Because Sometimes Family is Complicated

Fred was fiercely independent and private; he had lived on a small acreage just outside of Red Deer for most of his life, running the family farm. He and his wife had always kept to themselves, and that had not changed when she passed away. He didn't see much of the 3 siblings he had living in the area. Though his family loved him, it wasn't always easy; if asked, they would describe him as cantankerous and ant-social, at best. At 81 years old, he was having a hard time taking care of the house and animals, but he'd never had much use for doctors and he didn't need any help, thank you very much!

While Fred knew that he wasn't doing well, he vastly overestimated his ability to care for himself, let alone a working farm. His siblings began increasing their visits, noting how run-down the farm was becoming, Fred's weight loss, confusion, and frailty. After falling while feeding the cattle, Fred was hospitalized for a hip fracture, but continued to refuse assistance when he was released.

Fred had reached a tipping point. He was no longer able to care for himself safely, but was unwilling to accept help. His sister, Anne, called Health Link for advice, and though Fred did not have an official dementia diagnosis, the Health Link nurse thought that she could benefit from the service's expertise in confusion and community supports.

After carefully probing for more information on Fred's symptoms, behavior, and ability to make his own decisions, the dementia nurse advised that there was little Anne could do at the moment. The nurse suggested some ways of approaching Fred that might get a better response and potentially convince him to go see a doctor. She gave Anne some online resources, suggesting her and Fred look at them together. The nurse emphasized, however, that Fred was still legally competent to make his own decisions – until this changed, Anne could not force him to accept help. In the meantime, it was important that Anne take care of herself. The nurse used supportive listening and empathy to help Anne deal with this difficult truth. She also provided some advice on how Anne could prepare for the day when Fred asked for help or was unable to make his own decisions. Anne felt less guilty and helpless knowing that she had done everything she could. The nurse ended the call with one final piece of advice:

“People are allowed to make bad decisions. Even our loved ones, even when it hurts. All we can do is be there for them when the time comes.”