

# On Second Thought!

By Joy Glasser



If only I had known, we would have built a new foundation. One that we made together. With more understanding and less blame, frustration and anger. That was then. This is now, and I hope my experience will help you understand better than I could back then.

Don't we all make up stories that we want to believe? Mine was that my husband Ron was "aging normally." This so-called normal aging meant forgetfulness, moodiness, emotional outbursts, and returning phone calls to people who had not called him. Ron made up plausible stories to explain the things he did that on their face made no sense. Believing him became part of my story, too. I wanted to think everything was just fine. That story kept Ron and me together in the lives as we had always lived. Until it didn't.

You know that inner voice, the one that says, "something might be really off here?" I finally had to listen to it. One day, my story began to fall apart. While dusting off Ron's desk, I found a stack of unpaid bills - three months' worth - hidden away in the corner. Ron, who had always been meticulous about our finances, must have forgotten they were here, I told myself. This time, however, my inner voice erupted with a fury that shook my whole body. It was time to face some difficult facts. Ron was changing. This was real, and it could threaten our security. I had become accustomed to his clever excuses. But that day the reality collided with our perfect story. My life with Ron would change forever.

Looking back now, the pieces of the puzzle were always there. I had seen lots of little things but in those days, I had no way to put them together. His physical a year before had seemed to go just fine. I asked him what his long-time primary physician had said. The report? All good! How could I persuade Ron to see someone about all these confusing events that I myself had tucked away and tried to ignore? In desperation, I called his doctor, Dr. Bryan Post, and told him that I was worried and why. He was empathetic, but more importantly, he had a plan. "Joy, this can't all be on your shoulders," he told me. "It's best that this conversation be between me and Ron. That way he won't blame you. Have him come in again for another 'physical'. I'll take it from there."

What if his physician had dismissed my fears or ignored my concerns? Where would I have turned? Ron's doctor took me seriously, and he also took responsibility. He didn't do the easy thing and look the other way.

I was with Ron when Dr. Post gave him a cognitive screening test (the Mini-Cog). He did not pass. I was standing behind Ron, panic-stricken with tears flowing down my face when the doctor delivered the news. I was horrified but not surprised to see the results of this simple screening test. Deep inside, there was even some relief: I was not going crazy.

I had no idea then what would happen next or what this meant for Ron, for us and our lives together. We found help, and together we did figure it out. If anyone asks, my message now would be: no matter how scary it might be, if you hear that little inner whisper that something might be wrong, you should listen.

Had we listened earlier, there could have been benefits for both of us. If Ron's dementia diagnosis had been made before he was already at mid-stage, there would have been less blame, conflict, and self-doubt. There would have been much more love, compassion, understanding, and support. We could have planned much better for what our future might look like.

Recommendation: Listen to your inner voice.