



Sophia LaRusso

My mother, Grace Givens, was an extraordinary woman. Not only did she raise two daughters on her own and send us to Catholic school, but she owned her own business and was able to buy a three-story brownstone where we lived until my sister and I married. She was 60 years old when she came to live with my husband and me, and eighty when we moved full-time to Sarasota.

Eighty was just a number to my mother. The first thing she did upon moving here was volunteer at a day care center in Newtown. When she started getting too many colds from the children, she left and started volunteering five days a week at the J. H. Floyd Nursing Home. Every morning, as she left for the bus, she would say, *"I am going to visit the old people."* My husband would jokingly say, *"Grace, you're an old people."* She would laugh and say, *"But not like them."* It took 14 years for her to become "one of those old people" at the age of 94.

It never occurred to my husband and me that my mother would be in a nursing home. Like many families, we were in denial. My mother still took long walks every day but she was becoming forgetful and we became reluctant to leave her home alone. It was my sister, who was visiting with us, who said, *"Sis, I think it's time for you to realize mom needs more care than you can provide."* I reluctantly agreed and so did my mother.

My husband, my mother and I visited several nursing homes. We all agreed the Pines was the place. My mother's first residence was on the first floor of the Goldstein Pavilion. A month later, she moved to The Garden for a more secured environment. She loved having her own room and, because she was still ambulatory, she loved walking and sitting outside. I spent many hours walking, sitting and, later, pushing her around the campus in her wheelchair.

My mother's first "shock" upon moving to the Pines was being taken care of by a male caregiver. God forbid a male stranger should see her without her clothes or help her take a bath. That lasted two weeks until she got to know him. He became her primary caregiver. He treated her as if she was his mother. My mother often referred to him as *"the son I never had."*

But what amazed me the most about my mother's move to the Pines was that she never asked to come back to live with my husband and me. After thirty-four years, we tried not to take it personally! One day I decided my mother would love a day away from the Pines. So I packed up her wheelchair and took her to beautiful Sarasota Bay Front Park. But, she wasn't interested in any of the sights. In frustration, I asked, *"Well Mom, what are you interested in?"* *"Going Back Home!,"* she replied. So, I packed up the wheelchair and my mom and took her home...back to the Pines.

I tell everyone, "I owe the Pines big time!" because the Pines allowed me to sleep peacefully at night for five years, knowing my beloved mother was in the "best of hands".