

Broken Hips and Lonely Hearts

Seniors Today Face a Deadly Sort of Solitary



By Jesse Mae Rayer
September 21, 2023

One year ago, my grandma Jones fell and broke her hip. My mother recalls it, sighing as wipes down the kitchen table.

“She was carrying a massive pot of soup out to the garage,” she says. “Fell right there, stayed the whole night. Somewhere in there, she talked about hearing people at the door— hoping they’d come rescue her. They never did.”

Grandma lived alone at that time. She fell at night and laid there for many, many hours. In the dark. Hip broken. Alone.

I look up at my mother and try to imagine being in a situation like that. I do not know if many young people can.

My mother continues.

“Honestly, I think she was making those people up. Just hoping.”

However, we were incredibly lucky that my uncle Jack had a routine of calling at 8:30 AM every morning ever since my papa died in 2011. When grandma didn’t pick up the phone, he knew something was wrong.

Uncle Jack has now passed away, so we can no longer rely on his calls. Although he was walking, talking and driving until the end, Grandma is not in the same circumstances. If she had not fallen back then, if that event had not alerted us to this worry, made us put measures in place—and with no uncle Jack to call her-- what would happen then?

Although falling and breaking your hip is one of the more known dangers to senior citizens, it is not the only one. One of the greatest threats to our grandparents— and one, by nature, often overlooked— is *loneliness*.

According to the Journal of Gerontological Nursing, over sixty percent of seniors face chronic loneliness. Through various factors, like the death of a spouse, loss of workplace community, the spread of their family, or illness/disability, they end up alone in their homes.

Although less easily dramatized, and harder to fix with surgery, social isolation can be a deadly issue to face. The U.S. surgeon

general says that loneliness can be as “... deadly as smoking up to 15 cigarettes daily.”

Loneliness can let people backpedal into bad habits. It can make it harder to sleep, increase stress, increase susceptibility to disease or injury and make life more difficult. Loneliness is a multifaceted problem with no easy cure.

Over sixty percent of our vulnerable seniors face this. What does that mean for their quality of life?

It might not be a fall. It might not be complete and total quarantine. Seniors in the US face challenges at nearly every step. If you or someone you know is dealing with troubled senior care, consider going to the National Council on Aging or National Institute on Aging websites and using the resources there.

If you are in the correct relationship and have space for it, **call your grandparents.** It might just save their lives.