

Aoife Foley Entry 344

St Mary's Secondary School, Convent of Mercy, Macroom
Opinion - 2nd Place

We should have talked about Nana

It was her second stroke... the first one had been a minor one, a wakeup call where she made a great recovery. This time it was different. My uncle had found her slumped on the kitchen floor and called the ambulance immediately. What followed that day was a complete nightmare. These painful memories were brought back to me as I sat watching Brendan Courtney's documentary "We need to talk about Dad", this past Monday night. It told the story of the family's battle to access care for his father Frank, 75, who is paralysed as a result of a stroke. Unfortunately, I could not completely identify with this family's predicament.

The following weeks, of Nana's hospitalisation, are just a blur. The consultant informed us that she had had a stroke which had damaged a significant part of her brain. She couldn't communicate, she was agitated, confused, and frightened. She created havoc for nursing staff by refusing to co-operate. This was a complete change from the warm-hearted, caring and gentle grandmother I knew and loved.

Soon, our family were called to the office of the hospital administrator. She explained that Nana could not stay in the hospital and that we would have to find alternative care. The consultant said that she would need 24 hour care and would never again be capable of independent living. I remember family meetings where the possibility of taking her home was discussed. We would take turns we said, anything to keep her at home, which is where we knew she wanted to be. Providing 24 hour care is a big challenge for any family however, and during one of our meetings, the consultant said we were being unrealistic and wouldn't cope.

The administrator explained the details of the Fair Deal scheme which provides financial support to older people for nursing home care. Nana always said she did not want to end her days in a nursing home. The value of her house and her pension along with finance from her family would cover the high cost of nursing home care. Why couldn't all this money be put towards the cost of home care I asked myself? This would have been a win-win situation. My Nana would be at home surrounded by her family. There would have been someone with her day and night to ensure her safety. Unfortunately, Fair Deal only covers the cost of nursing home care we were told.

So, Brendan Courtney's programme and the similarities between his dad and my Nana, brought back a lot of painful memories for us. Nana was moved to a nursing home where she lived for 2 years. She was well cared for but she wasn't happy there. We visited her often and she always tried to come away with us at the end of each visit, it was heart-breaking and very upsetting for everybody.

I admire Brendan Courtney for what he is doing for his dad and all older people. In my opinion, it is now time for the Health Minister to extend the Fair Deal scheme to home care. All the evidence suggests patients do better and are happier in their own surroundings. It is too late for Nana now but the problem is real and growing and something needs to be done... and soon. Mahatma Gandhi once famously said "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members". Right now in Ireland, it is fair to say that we are failing our weakest members and that has to change.

Judges Citation:

It is safe to say that the standard in the opinion category this year was exceptional. However, the entries that really stood out from the crowd are those that touched the student personally because they touched us as a reader. That is exactly what happened with this winner, she took the brave decision to share her love of her Nana and speak about her last days in a nursing home.

Not only that but she made the piece utterly relevant and current to issues surrounding the care of old people by discussing the Fair Deal Scheme and relating her family's experience to the recent broadcast of Brendan Courtney's show, 'We Need to Talk about Dad'.

In this piece, the writer puts forward a well thought out argument, and although she knows changes to the Fair Deal scheme can no longer benefit the person she loves, she puts her opinion forward for other people, other families, other Nanas. A mature and well thought out piece, well done to Aoife Foley from St Mary's Secondary School in Macroom for, 'We Should Have Talked About Nana.'