

So there's five or six major docs you need to talk to them about now. Find out where they keep them. Take a look at them with your parents and preferably with your siblings. Ask all your questions about these things now, because what I wouldn't give for another day with my dad to ask him all sorts of questions that sadly, I cannot.

Earlier these convos happen ... all the better. Keep it humorous. You are getting them to "yes" on a number of issues. Use all the guilt you can. "Mom, Dad, imagine that the first thing we see after coming home from your funeral is that garage...I mean, c'mon, seriously?" Or "You say you don't want to be a burden, but how can that happen if I'm tied up selling my own home to fund your assisted living?" When I left for NJ in 2013, my parents said they would be fine with me not being in the state to handle their affairs or for the occasional hospitalization.

When I got back a year later, their home started looking like the beginning of an episode of "Hoarders" and things were not getting done. It can happen quickly. So start tackling this now.

Also big caveat here. Most parents are what are known as "unreliable narrators" when it comes to their financial affairs. Treat them like any other journalism source. Leave your outrage and judgment behind. It does you no good here as you work as a forensic accountant or caretaking "fixer." But know that they are going to give you the version of their accounting that puts them in the best light. Just like a journalism source. You've been warned.

## **INSURANCE**

Find out how many policies they have. And know where all documents are. Make copies. Try to condense if you can. Cancel what is unnecessary. My dad for example had a ridiculous accident/disability (as a retired person) policy of some sort that we canceled.

Also make sure they're not underinsured. When they die, you want to pay their debts, upcoming taxes on properties, etc without stress on you. Tell them that. My dad insured himself like it was 1975. Knowing full well that his wife had dementia. I would give anything to ask him WTAH he was thinking when he did that but, alas.

(And know that they will underestimate debt overall. I don't care how financially stable you think they are, they will have not come clean about this).

Make sure their payments on insurance are being made. If they have direct payments from their bank accounts, great, but make sure that bank account can cover them. One missed payment can cancel a policy they've been paying on for years.

Get all the names, policy numbers, and phone numbers for the companies, now.

## **CREDIT CARDS**

How many do they have and how many do they use (you'll find this is two different things). Cancel as many as you can. How much debt do they have? Again, they will underestimate.

## **WILLS**

It's fine if they use a cut-and-paste will but if they have a large amount of property I think it's better to get an appointment with a probate attorney to go over what they want to do.

Make sure both you and your sister have medical and durable power of attorney. They are two different things and this is separate from being an executor of their estate.

Medical means you have the power to make health care decisions. Durable gives you the ability to make financial decisions. My mom's will unfortunately only gave my sister durable, which means I can't call the bank or divvy up assignments with my sister and boy is she not happy about that. I don't think my parents understood this at all.

## **BANKS, PENSIONS/401Ks/BROKERAGE/IRAs, ETC**

Make sure you know where all their accounts are. Find those documents. Ask for passwords now or know where they are. Also password hints. Because you will find they have ridiculous hints you will not know the answer to. My dad's were: the first name of his best man and the name of his first dog. Thank god, I asked him for the answers before he died (lol).

Try to set up an account with them or have them add you in some way. If I could turn back time, I would have forced them to get rid of Bank of America joint checking (terrible online interface) and gone to USAA banking but they didn't like the idea of an "online" bank they could not visit (smh) in person. What account do they use to pay bills via bill pay? Do they have pensions/401k? Where are those docs? Do they have passwords? Get them.

If either one of them was in the military, get their discharge paperwork because you'll need that for VA benefits. And if this applies to you and they qualify for a military retirement, let me know because that is one more morass (the DFAS, the Defense Finance Accounting System). The eight weeks I had to wait before my dad's retirement payments started were among the most stressful of my life. I could write a book on DFAS. The reason we don't close my mom's old checking account is because it took me eight weeks to get the direct deposit started for my dad's retirement from DFAS. Thinking about doing it again gives me hives.

## **DOCTORS/MEDICATIONS**

This one thing was the most difficult and my mom had the most resistance to. She saw it as somehow that I didn't think she and Dad could take care of themselves. I told them I needed to be an advocate and an informed one at that.

Every Christmas they asked me what I wanted and every year, I told them a list of all meds/docs and contacts for docs. My mom actually got angry about this. Now I know it is because she and Dad were lying about mom's dementia, which we suspected but she insisted she did not have according to her doctor. Any insight you get here gives you a leg up to prepare. And what you cannot get enough of ... is enough time to prepare. Trust me on this.

How to talk to them about this? You need to stress that you want to be a good caretaker/advocate and you can't do that if you're not an informed caretaker.

Also, as your parents become more incapacitated, regularly review their meds to make sure they're not being overmedicated.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS/BIRTH CERTIFICATES**

Know where their social security cards, birth certificates are now. Know if they are getting social security. What is the amount? Does it decrease (probably) when one of them dies, etc.

## **REAL ESTATE/ASSETS**

Are they paying on their house/cars/boats/recreational vehicles? Get all those docs and deeds if the mortgage is paid off. What about the insurance on the house? Is that being paid?

Do they own unimproved land? Find out where and get those docs.

Guns and other collectibles. if they own a lot of guns or collectibles (get rid of them now) because they are a pain to sell. Thank goodness a friend of my dad sold like 37 hunting guns my dad owned (smh).

Do they own mineral rights or oil and gas leases? Then get all the addresses where they get payments from. Do this now.

Get them to realize that the house they bought 30 years ago is not worth more now because they refused to update it during that time. Lol. This was a long, ongoing discussion with my mom, who was convinced my sister (who has a real estate license) and I were rubes about accepting the real estate agency's assessment. Yeah, that 1980s kitchen, no one wants to see its kind anymore:). On the other hand, if they're able to update that home now, you do so because when it is sold, it will help with their eldercare expenses. (Wish I had made them do that).

## **HEALTH INSURANCE**

Find out if they have health insurance in addition to Medicare (retirement plans). Typically, a lot of docs bill the additional before Medicare but that is not always the case.

## **FUNERAL WISHES**

Discuss this now. Cremation? Burial? Know it. Prewrite their obits. (You'll be surprised how funeral/memorials are a lot of work and having that done helps you when you are stressed and grieving).

## **DEMENTIA**

If either of your parents (75% of patients are women, FTR) is at the start of a dementia diagnosis, get (or better yet, consult a probate attorney) them to sign over any surviving executor duty for their spouse to you and your sibling. That makes it easier for you to handle the other parent's estate if they die before your parent with dementia. If you need more tips on dementia, ping me.

## **THEIR POSSESSIONS**

Get them to downsize now. They cannot take all that stuff with them and no, you will not want that 1971 cutlery set (unless you do), that old credenza or those wine glasses. Just get rid of it now. When you're home next, get them on do not call lists, cancel junk mailings, get rid of stuff they don't need. Attack their garages and attics. NOW. Clearing it out after they are gone is a major emotional chore. Get them to Marie Kondo it. Scan those family photos. Make it a Christmastime project.

## **GETTING THEM OUT OF THEIR HOUSE INTO SOMETHING MORE MANAGEABLE**

Men are more resistant (I have found through my own experience and through friends) to the idea of moving to a smaller place or a retirement community) but their lives will be so less cluttered and less stressful if they do this one thing. Realize for men there is more identity in homeownership/possessions. For older women, there's more chores, emotional labor in keeping said house, tidy.

Emphasize that doing this will help their wives tremendously. If they're physically able, go visit some places with them. Look for aging-in-place models of communities. That way they will have peace of mind if one of them deteriorates faster than the other, they will be kept close in a rehab/assisted living/nh on site close to them.

## **YOUR SIBLING/S**

Get on board with them and come up with a plan. Present a united front. Doesn't matter if you are best friends or not. Leave those old wars with one another at the door. This is about caring for your parents. Divvy up tasks. Have frank convos now with your parents about what happens if their estate runs out of money and their care is coming out of your pocket.

I cannot emphasize how important it is to eat the disagreements with your sibling now and just power through this together. Yes, they're irritating. So are you. Move on.

## ODDS/ENDS

Say your parent/s is/are not exactly tech savvy. And they're scared of apps but you don't want them driving. But you can't be there to take them to every appointment. I cannot endorse this company enough. [Go Go Grandparent](#). For a small per mile service fee, plant GGG's phone number in their phone and they can "call" Uber/Lyft. They're actually calling Go Go Grandparent to set up the ride. Your parents will love the independence it gives them and you'll love the peace of mind knowing you don't have to leave work to pick them up and then work in the clinic lobby waiting for them, before driving them home.

Also, you get a text when they pick up your parent, you also get informed of the license plate of the vehicle/name of driver. You get a text when they have arrived. For a few short years when my mother could still handle a cell phone this was a godsend.

About driving. Have that convo now. About giving up their cars and to quit pestering you to renew their licenses. They may fight you but they too are scared.

If you can afford, Favor and other delivery apps are so helpful now.

Start researching home health care if you want to keep them in their home as long as possible. Medicare will cover some things like physical therapy but **you need to research it.**

If they're still in their home and you/they can afford, buy them weekly/bi-weekly cleaning service.