

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



When the 525 pounds of stuff were deposited in my living room and dining room, I was quite curious to see what was so important at this point in her life. My 90-year-old mother was finally moved to her assisted living facility on February 14, and her possessions had been sent to my home before they would be moved to the facility. I was never quite convinced that she was “assisted living” material, given her recent stroke that left her right side permanently paralyzed, but I went along with it. Within 2 days she was admitted to the hospital, where she remained for 5 days, during which time she demonstrated a progressive failure to thrive. Upon her return to her apartment, she perked up considerably. Nevertheless, her physician felt that it was in her best interest to change her status to hospice care to minimize the anticipated opportunities to return to a hospital setting, which would be inappropriate given her somewhat terminal status. Prior to leaving her home in Florida, she went through her decades of acquired belongings with her daughter and selected those items that she would want with her during her remaining time, recognizing she would be moving from a house to a small, two-room apartment and from a life of the country club to one a bit more sedate.

The first time delivery was attempted, it was thwarted by the fact that the moving van was too large to get into our neighborhood. The solution was to attempt redelivery a week later with a smaller truck. However, after waiting a few hours for the delivery, I was dismayed to note a semi in front of my house with a driver who was quite frustrated since he was unable to get into our driveway. Finally, a few days later, a smaller truck arrived, and 11 cartons were deposited in my living room (5 others full of clothes and hangers had been shipped previously). As her apartment could never accommodate such a load, my wife opened these cartons to perform the triage that was clearly required. Other than a couple of books and a half dozen CDs, a few photographs in frames, a photo album, and a box full of blouses and sweaters, the rest just seemed so incongruous for a woman resigned to her bed and a wheelchair for the rest of her days. Despite the fact that for the past 4 months—and going forward—her debility has prevented her from wearing anything but sweat suits, one box was full of 20 or more purses, many of which were suited only for evening wear;

there were dozens of belts and silk scarves, fancy suits and dresses. Although there is neither a kitchen nor a dining area in her new apartment,

two large cartons were full of silver and porcelain platters, gold-plated tableware, heavy crystal bowls, and a mother of pearl caviar set. The rest of the weight was taken up mostly by very large glass and porcelain ornamental objects and ceramic wall hangings, and a painting larger than any wall in her new living quarters.

It got me thinking: what would I want with me during my last few months of life that would comfort me and remind me of happier times? I would want my laptop not only to connect with the world outside, but to provide a source of music and pictures of family, friends, pets (which I guess are both family and friends), and vacations. I would want my old Martin D35 guitar and my flat-top Gibson Mastertone banjo. Of course I would want a few of my most special fountain pens and a nice bottle of ink with writing paper, along with a stack of the books I have not yet had a chance to read, and a few others that merited rereading. Despite my penchant for wearing ties and braces every day (which could be donated to a charity for underprivileged preppies), jeans would be just fine, plus a denim shirt, a few pairs of funky socks, and a couple of favorite sweaters. Unfortunately, there would be no room for, nor any purpose for, my bicycle, but I would sneak in an old bike jersey (from the Lymphoma Research Ride, of course). I might bring along a couple of small mementos that reminded me of times that were special, of people who appreciated something nice that I had done, or of something I had contributed that made a difference. And of course, there would be that one last bottle of wine that I had been saving for the very special occasion that never came around. But most importantly, I hope that I can have someone who loves me at my side as I find my way down that last road without my Garmin, and from which there is no cycling back.

Until next month...

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce D. Cheson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce D. Cheson, MD