



Lonely No More

An elderly man's journey from loneliness to revival

By Janice Conrad, JFS Protective Service Guardianship Case Coordinator

Up four flights of steep stairs and down a long corridor, I found the apartment. I knocked on the door, and waited to introduce myself to my new client. An 83 year-old man – we'll call him John – opened the door and readily invited me in even before I was able to explain who I was. I entered the sparsely furnished apartment and immediately noted that John was limping.

I introduced myself and explained that JFS and I would now be his guardian, here to help ensure he receives proper medical treatment and help with his living arrangements. John was agreeable to having a guardian. Edna, his wife, had died many years before, and he made it clear that his children “have their own lives now.”

The two rooms he lived in were over a store. He had lived there for years, but he now found it very difficult to get up and down the stairs. Neighbors had reported that he did not bathe regularly and looked disheveled and confused. John lived alone.

We arranged for John to have a short stay at a local hospital, where he underwent a full medical and psychological evaluation. When I visited him, I found him much improved. We talked of the safety issues at the apartment. John listened and agreed to try a placement at an assisted living

residence, not too far from where he had lived.

“You are my guardian, and you will take care February 2008 and has not mentioned his old

John enjoyed his new home. He liked his new safe. When I visited, he was very happy to see worked hard at a local factory, supporting his but rather took pride in caring for his family.

It was during one of our many conversations for John. He'd had never been to a dentist or they were an embarrassment to him. I



of me,” he concluded. He moved to the residence in apartment since.

friends, being cared for, and knowing that he was “his guardian.” We talked of his life story. John had wife and children. He'd never done much for himself,

that we addressed the importance of finally caring optometrist. His teeth showed years of neglect and assured him that we'd work out a plan.

The next day, Margaret Prunier, our college intern at the time, arrived. Right off, it became clear that here was a good match. Margaret and I discussed goals she would work toward with John. She embraced the challenge and immediately bonded with him. She listened closely to his concerns, and the two cemented a strong trust.

Every week Margaret traveled 24 miles to see John. We arranged John's medical and other appointments around her school schedule, and she took John to all of them. One week he had three teeth extracted. This continued until all the teeth were out. John never complained about the pain and discomfort. He had been ashamed of his teeth for many years and he just kept looking forward to having “nice teeth,” as he put it. Margaret continually encouraged him, telling him how “handsome he'd soon be.”

In just three months since Margaret first arrived, John has flourished. His new dentures have given him confidence and pride. He is quick to initiate conversations, always with a smile. His new glasses enable him to read and see his food clearly when he eats. In the past, John tended to stay in his room. He's now active in social activities and doesn't need to be coaxed out of his room. John is no longer alone.

Recently, John and Margaret visited Edna's grave. She drove him to a florist to pick out flowers. His improved eyesight enabled him to choose a variety that he liked and Edna had loved. At the grave site, John bowed his head, said his prayers and told his Edna that he missed her very much. He then shared with her the news of his glasses and new teeth. “This is my friend, Margaret, who has helped me so much.”

Before leaving the cemetery, he confided to Edna that his life is not the same without her and looks forward to seeing her again. When that day comes, I'm sure John will be smiling his big, bright, beautiful smile.

A special thank you to Margaret Prunier, who is in the masters program at Assumption College, Worcester. She has given untiringly of herself to help John, made possible by her enthusiasm, advocacy and love for him. Margaret, you've made a big difference in a lonely man's life. I, too, am indebted to you.

