

Daughter keeps a promise with help from Council on Aging's Caregiver Support Program

Rachelle and her mother Anna, 76, have always been close. An only child, Rachelle said, "It's always just me and her."

When Rachelle was a child, she watched her mother go off to work each day as a nurse at Good Samaritan Hospital.

Anna also enjoyed bowling and making clothes. She was accomplished at both – she regularly bowled 300 and once made evening gowns for herself and Rachelle to wear on a cruise.

As her mother aged and began having problems with blood clots and strokes, Rachelle watched her stepfather struggle to provide the care she needed. He was proud and would not accept help – though they both needed it.

And so, Rachelle worked during the day and then spent her evenings and weekends helping her parents – cleaning, doing laundry, cooking meals and helping her mom bathe.

Over the next few years, Rachelle's caregiving duties increased as her parents' health declined. It was not uncommon for Rachelle to receive calls at all hours of the day. Every time Anna would have to go to the hospital or a nursing home for care, Rachelle worried about the quality of that care. She made a promise to never leave Anna there longer than necessary.

Rachelle had to make good on that promise when her stepfather was no longer able to care for her mother in their home.

Rachelle retired and began providing 24/7 care for her mother. But as most caregivers quickly



Rachelle (right) with her mother, Anna

learn, caring for a loved one takes both a physical and emotional toll.

In Rachelle's case, her mother's occupational therapist took note of how tired and stressed she seemed. "She told me, 'You look wore out! You're doing everything here!'" Rachelle said.

That's where Council on Aging's Caregiver Support Program stepped in to help. The program supports family caregivers, providing tools to help them better manage their responsibilities, while also focusing on their own needs.

The caregiver support nurse who worked with Rachelle made referrals and connected the family to resources, including adult day care services, so Rachelle could have some much-needed time off.

"I feel so guilty taking time for myself," said Rachelle. It's a common refrain from caregivers. "But my mother loves it there [adult day]. She gets therapy, does puzzles, watches movies and gets to socialize."

"This is a program that is most definitely needed for caregivers. Without it there would be so many more seniors in nursing homes. It's hard work!"

At the end of the day, Rachelle is grateful for the support because it has helped her keep a promise. "She never asked for much," Rachelle said. "This is the least I could do for her."