

Living at Home Forever

My dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's about 10 years before he died in 2007 at age 93. It was a slowly progressing disease at first. Fortunately my parents could maintain their regular retirement activities up until the last couple of years, when Dad's flexibility and ability to care for himself really diminished. My parents chose to live at home, not really having the money or inclination to move to any type of retirement setting.

My parent's scenario is typical of a lot of families these days and will become even more prevalent over the next 40 years. The Baby Boom cohort (of which I am a member) and our elderly parents, by choice or circumstance, will be living in their homes until they die. Unfortunately most of our homes are not really set up to enable graceful living as our ability to function in a "normal" way diminishes. Each of us will feel frustrated bordering on angry, just like my Dad did, when we can not really care for ourselves in a dignified way. For Dad, changing a few simple things in his house would have gone a long way to mitigating that frustration.

The nice thing about the changes that were needed for my parent's house is that they actually increased the value of it, if even slightly. Number one on the list was installing a first floor powder room. For obvious reasons everyone liked this concept. Next was things to hold onto. Things like these can be a really sturdy chair or couch, an additional railing for a tricky spot getting in the house or at the top of the stairs, a decorative and sturdy towel bar in the kitchen or bath, stylish grab bars in the shower or by the toilet, some hooks for hanging coats and hats installed 6 inches lower or a non skid mat by the front door.

A couple of years ago I pulled a leg muscle while working. It required a month of physical therapy up at St. Mary's. What an eye opener – first of all there were people of all ages getting worked on and almost every part of the body was involved. For three weeks I could not bend over to tie my shoes unless I lay on the floor contorted something awful. My wish list then (and for the future) was a first floor bedroom 'cause getting up and down the stairs was a time consuming ordeal. Also slightly wider doors to the bathroom, a few more foot stools to rest on, a side table or two, lever style door knobs, and non-slip floors. I also noticed that having windows that opened easily made a difference, as I could tell that my diminished leg strength was affecting my ability to lift things. My kids, who for some reason love dumb waiters, thought there must be a location in the house for one of those – maybe to get their text books or I-pod upstairs!

Not to belabor the point, but going forward, whether we now own a home or will be moving into a different one in the future, most of us will be requiring our homes to help us live full functioning lives as our bodies begin to say otherwise. Making changes to the layout, structure and amenities long before the changes are needed is prudent. Lastly, if we are going to be living in our home indefinitely then the home should be as energy wise as possible. Get an Energy Audit. Years of energy savings will mean a lot of money in your pocket. Contact Tom at tom@tgw-construction.com