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Health & Fitness

Ending Elder Abuse: A Family Guide
Diane Sandell
Lois Hudson
QED Press
978-0-936609-41-6
(August 31, 2000)

Over a decade ago, ninety one-year-old Bessie Jarvis, all eighty-six pounds of her, was severely beaten by an aide in a California nursing home. Within six weeks, Jarvis was dead. This book is a result of one woman's effort to ensure that "no other frail old person would have to experience the terror and pain [Jarvis] had borne." That woman, Sandell, is Jarvis' daughter.

A former businesswoman, Sandell, who along with co-writer and co-advocate Hudson, offers a "general guide" tailored to "complement, supplement and amplify" the available information on elder abuse. The book fulfills all these requirements, offering step-by-step instructions on evaluating and choosing a nursing home and becoming cooperative partners with the facility and its personnel, to name just two of its many features.

The book also presents ways in which one person can help by volunteering, by becoming an ombudsman, or by chairing a task force for an interested legislator. Individual chapters address concerns relevant to families, legislators and government officials, administrators, corporate management, physicians, and medical personnel. A theme throughout holds that individuals must not assume that laws on the books will protect their loved ones. Instead, people must assume responsibility for ending "this social disease" by seeing that laws are enforced and caretakers are held accountable. Toward that end, the book shows how to recognize and report elder abuse and enact a cooperative system to prevent any future occurrences.

What informs the book's insights and solutions, and thereby distinguishes it, are Sandell's personal experiences dealing with the aftermath of her mother's battering and subsequent death. The first six chapters relate the incident at the nursing home and Sandell's ensuing crusade in bringing to justice those responsible. The unfolding story of Sandell's journey toward advocacy in this area is truly compelling, illustrating her contention that one person can indeed make a difference. Sandell's legacy to her mother includes founding a

nonprofit organization entitled NOBLE, an acronym standing for Network Outreach Better Living for the Elderly, which has helped millions of people become proactive in protecting their loved ones.

"To be able to live with the awful fact of Mother's death, I knew I had to realize something positive from it," Sandell writes. As a chronicle of her journey and an invaluable resource to others, this book is proof that she succeeded in doing just that.

Judy Hopkins