**My Brother’s Keeper, the Story of David Woolcott**

The year was 2005. Louis was involved with a board gaming group that had been together for 35 years. We would meet at Bill’s house on the first Friday night of the month. David was a regular attendee. We noticed that he said he would be there one night, but he was not present. All phone calls to him were not answered. So where was David? We knew that he was retired from working as an employment counselor with the State of California and had Kaiser health insurance. Some phone calls to Kaiser resulted in the statement that Kaiser would not identify where a person was unless we could prove that someone was a relative. My friend Helen said that David was alive, and volunteered to call all the Kaiser facilities in Los Angeles to find out if he was there, just by asking to speak with him. She found that he was located in a rehabilitation facility on Fairfax Avenue in Los Angeles, but she could not speak with him on the phone since they said he could not communicate.

Louis drove over to that facility and met with him there. I was told that he could not move or walk, but I could see him. I went into his room and he greeted by name and said he was so glad that I was there. He said he could walk just fine, but they would not let him. Since he was English, he was having trouble communicating with the staff since they all spoke with a heavy accent that he could not understand. He wanted to get out of there and he compared it to a insane asylum or prison. I explained his problem to a local nurse and she helped him get out of bed and walk down the hallway. He did not have any problem doing this or understanding me. I then checked with the administration, and they said that they could not release him without legal authorization. They then suggested a lawyer that dealt with elder problems and had represented patients there in the past.

I went to the lawyer, who said that he could get him released if a caregiver was arranged for him. I went to a caregiver group that mostly consisted of Filipino workers that could provide 24-hour care and arranged for care. I also got signature permission for his bank account from David so I could properly handle his affairs. The lawyer then arranged for him to get out of the facility and back into his condo on Veteran Ave near the University of California at Los Angeles. My friend Linda and I then cleaned up the complete mess where he was living, and we converted a spare bedroom into a place for his caregiver. The refrigerator was stocked with tilapia and other types of Filipino food. David got along fine except that he could not handle time or place very well.

So, what had happened? David had gone to the Town and Country Hotel at Mission Circle, San Diego, for the annual Dixieland Jazz Festival over Thanksgiving Weekend like he had done for several years. He missed his checkout time and when the hotel investigated, they found him in his room in an “Altered State of Consciousness”. Upon looking at his wallet, they found he was a Kaiser member so they called an ambulance and he was taken to the Kaiser facility in San Diego. After some time there, he was transferred to the Kaiser Hospital in the west side of Los Angeles. After several weeks, they then sent him to the rehabilitation facility on Fairfax Ave. His car was still in the parking lot at the Comvention Hotel, and he still had the keys with him. I took the Amtrak train from Union Station in Los Angeles to San Diego where I transferred to the San Diego trolley which stopped close to the hotel parking lot. I then drove his car back to the parking at his condo. However, he was not in good enough shape to drive, so his car was sold to his friend Robert. The caregiver had his own car for transportation.

So now everything is fine; he is living in his own condo with appropriate care arranged. Then, we find out that Los Angeles County Department of Social Services has intercepted his mail and is trying to sell his condo. What is going on? When I contact them, they say he has no known relatives or friends and he is still incapacitated in the Kaiser facility. After much discussion and argument with various people at Los Angeles County, they agree that they should not be involved, but send a bill for $4000 to David for his care using hourly rates for the case worker who deprived him of his mail and other negative services. The court agrees that these charges are legitimate and he has to pay them. He finally gets his mail back and the County drops their efforts to deprive him of his condo and bank account.

It is better to have some responsible relatives or persons identified to handle your accounts in case of incapacity to prevent the County from taking over your life and your money with conservator rulings.

David said he wanted to visit some cousins in Shrewsbury in England near Wales. His parents had come from there to 250 km north of London which was where his Dad drove Rolls-Royce cars to test them. David had attended the London School of Economics and he also wanted to visit some of the museums in London. Since we had a planned trip to Egypt with Robert and Linda, we took David along and stopped in London for a week. We stayed next to the British Museum, visited some pubs in the area, and went to a Fulham soccer game with another London club, West Ham. David’s family had always supported Chelsea, a large north London club, and we eventually got to see Chelsea in Carson, California, in a summer exhibition game. Before we left for Egypt, we arranged for David to visit Shrewsbury where his cousins still lived. I talked to some of the hotel staff (also Filipino) and arranged for someone to take him to Shrewsbury and take care of him there while we were visiting Egypt. We then picked him up again in London on the return trip from Egypt. He really enjoyed his trip because it was better organized than some of his previous trips to England, and he got to see several of the London landmarks and museums.

As it turned out, we found a caregiver that was willing to take care of David in return for his retirement check from the State of California. Over time, he slowly slipped away from memory and rationality. Eventually, he wanted to go back to visit his Mum in England who had passed away some 40 years ago. The caregiver took him to the hospital emergency room where he passed away.

His gaming friends gathered together to show their respect by sponsoring a cash prize at each of the three Los Angeles gaming conventions each year for the winner of the David Woolcott Memorial Acquire Tournament. Acquire is a classic board game of hotel expansion created by Sid Sackson. Acquire was one of David’s favorite games and he played it very well.

The story should have ended there, but two years later, I received a note from the State of California that my income tax refund was reduced by the $5000 that I owed the state. They quoted a law that allowed the state to collect unpaid debts from an individual tax refund. Upon further investigation, I found that the caregiver had collected David’s January pension from the state, but he had passed in December of the previous year. Since I had previously had co-sign authority on his bank account, the state assumed that I had collected the money. I went to Wells-Fargo where the check was deposited, and they said that David had collected it. Since he was deceased at the time, it must have gone to his caregiver with an automatic withdrawal that had been arranged between David and the caregiver. Wells-Fargo was entirely non-cooperative on privacy grounds in helping identify where the money was deposited. They could have easily noted that I did not get the funds. Since then, many people have found out about Wells-Fargo fraudulent activities.

I went to visit the local California Personnel Retirement (CALPERS) office, and they explained that they could not do anything. I went to a lawyer to attempt restitution, but her letter to the state was met with silence. I then filed a small-claims case against the State of California. When I went to court, the representative from CALPERS asked for more time to evaluate the case. On the next court date, the State conceded that I had not received the money and refunded me the $5000. They did not offer any restitution for my time and effort or the length of time that they had deprived me of the money. The state did not make any substantial effort to get the money returned from the caregiver, claiming that he could not be found. The state lawyer did ask for my assistance in finding the caregiver, since they said he was at fault for my problem. My opinion is that they should have investigated who got the money first, before confiscating the money from me. Personally, I was offended by the Los Angeles County and State of California agencies for their non-investigation of the facts before taking action that is harmful to the well-being of their tax-paying citizens.

*David Edward Woolcott (July 15, 1926 – December 30, 2008)*