

## **Family Shaken**

### **Elderly Mom Bilked by Relative**

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Who would have thought that my mother would be a victim of financial abuse not once but twice?

She was 88 years old living on her own, and drew her own income from three sources. I had seven surviving siblings. The closest lived about 15 kilometers from my mother, my oldest sister lived in Toronto, I lived in Prince George and the other siblings lived in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

My mother had made it very clear to each of us that she did not want us interfering with her life, and when we were foolish enough to venture unasked for assistance, we felt our mother's wrath.

To keep contact and to reassure myself that she was fine, I would phone her twice a day -- once in the morning and once in the evening. During one of the calls she told me that one of her young distant cousins had been visiting her. I thought that this was good; most of her friends had either passed or were unable to visit often, so at times I am sure she was lonely.

I travelled to Saskatchewan to visit my mother at least twice a year, once in the spring to help clean her house and once in the fall to get her ready for winter. During one spring visit I found packages of tea, sugar and other supplies hidden in weird places. Some of these items were special items I had sent as part of her Christmas parcel. She laughed it off saying, "I must have placed it there by mistake."

I did not notice any signs of mental loss or confusion, but did notice signs of her not being able to manage her house work and not being to get in and out of the bath. I talked with my siblings and arranged for mother-sitting shifts until we could decide what the next steps would be.

Now, talk about a scary encounter: my second oldest sister and I decided we would be ones to speak to our mother. We were the resilient ones and could survive our mother's wrath. We started looking through her cheque book, monthly statements and cancelled cheques.

We found that my mother would ask people to fill in the information on the cheques, some were legitimate -- and then we found cheques made out to the distant cousin. I asked my mother why there were cheques made out to him. She said that she hadn't given him any money.

Apparently, at first my mother would ask her cousin to help her write cheques; for his trouble, he would write one to himself. Then he started taking food from my mother. We tried to resolve this through legal means, but since she had signed the cheques there was very little that could be done. I paid him a visit and advised him that he was no longer to have any contact with my mother.

As winter approached we decided as a family that we would move my mother to one of my sister's. That lasted about two months. Another sister said she would take her. I would phone my mother and my sister would say she was fine, and when I was able to speak with my mother, she would say she was fine. This went on for the rest of the winter.

In March I received two very disturbing phone calls claiming that our mother was not being properly provided for. I phoned my sister and said that I would be picking our mother up and taking her back to her own home. When I arrived in Edmonton I saw my mother and I was shocked at her appearance, she had lost a lot of weight and her spirits were low.

When we arrived in Battleford she said that she wanted to change banks, so I contacted banks to find out if they had the type of account she needed. She chose one and the bank sent a representative to the house so my mother could sign the documents to open the account. She told the bank representative an approximate amount of funds that she thought was in her account.

She signed an authorization for release of information; I took the signed authorization to her current financial institution so they could release information as to the exact amount of funds in her account. The teller asked me how much was supposed to be in the account. I told her and she showed me the actual amount. I asked if there was another account, and she told me that there wasn't.

There was less than \$1000 in her account. I was so grateful that the bank representative was still there, as he gave us advice as to how investigate what had happened. We were able to get copies of statements and copies of cancelled cheques. Even though we had confirmed that my mother never did sign the cheques and in some instances the abuser had signed her own name on the cheques, no charges were ever laid.

My oldest sister and I took turns travelling to Saskatchewan to take care of our mother. She passed away within a year.

My mother forgave the people who had taken advantage of her but I cannot be that generous.

When the abuser is a member of the immediate family it shakes the foundation of family values, and undermines the lifelong belief that we were a good family.

The amount that was embezzled from my mother does not matter what matters is that it happened. And that no charges were ever laid.

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