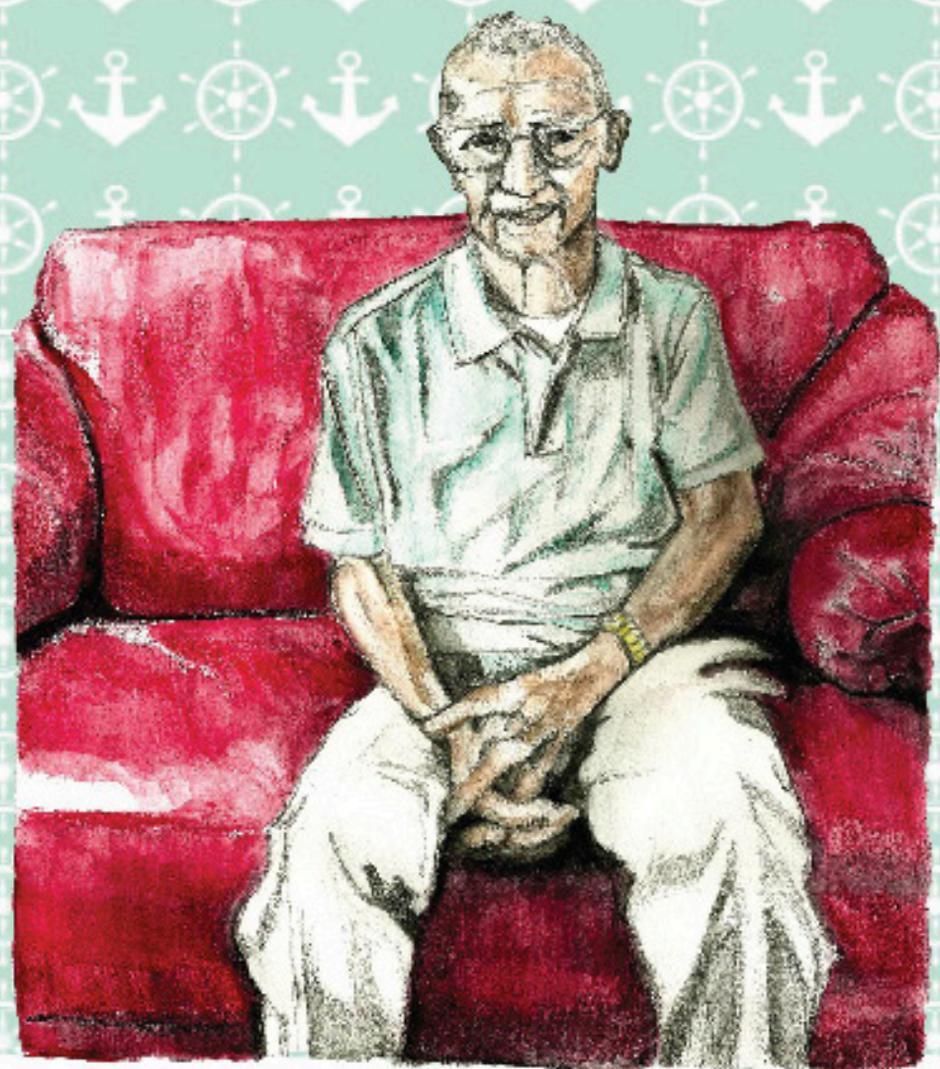


# HERE WE GO JOE

How one family created a final home for a father with dementia with love, honor, and dignity



# CORA DARRAH

# Here We Go Joe

How one family created a final home for a father with dementia with love, honor, and dignity.

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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my husband Jay,  
his sister Mary Beth, and their father Joe.  
For allowing me into a family filled with  
cherished memories.



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# Testimonials

From a marketing director point of view, my job is to try to help families with one of the most difficult, gut wrenching decisions of placing mom or dad in assisted living. Every day, I walk and talk and hug with residents, I feel like I make a difference in their lives providing an ear to a story, a shoulder for a lonely day, or just a good ole fashion hug. BUT, after reading Here We Go Joe, it opened my eyes to see that each resident has their own stories, trials, and tribulations. I thank Cora not only for opening my eyes, but for her insight and compassion in sharing Joe's journey and reminding us all to look beyond the obvious.

Lin Schultz  
Marketing Director  
Croatan Village

Hi, I just finished reading your book. I liked the verses before each chapter. Very well done. It brought back so many Joe memories...His stubbornness especially...but I had to smile several times. A perfect picture of his personality. I remember all the cleaning you did.....a good laugh with some sadness of course.

Sue Bowersock  
Occupational Therapist and Joe's former neighbor

Cora, your book is such a beautiful thing. You not only have taken care of my brother, but I have also found some of myself in him with some of the things he has told you and others. I can understand a lot of his attitudes because I have seen so much of it in my Mother, and I do find some of it in myself.

Marilyn Kane  
Joe's sister

You write like you talk. I'm still recovering from your UNC scheduling debacles. When you describe what it's like in waiting rooms, and when chemo is administered, I feel like I'm in the room with you.

Christopher Woods  
Family Friend

Dear Cora,

On Friday afternoon I read your book about Joe. My emotions moved from sorrow to rejoicing and all manner of places in between. Some of it was truly heart wrenching and other parts cause me to feel warmth and love. Oh, you did an exceptional job with it; the detail was unbelievable.

Nurtia Bullock  
Family Friend

It was great. Now I'm totally invested in Joe. I need to know what happens. You are a great writer. You went through the same thing my sister and I went through with our mother who died Jan 19th after a 2 year ordeal. We did not have the long distances to travel like your family has had.

We just had to travel from the triangle to Winston. Don't end the book here. When my mom had her stroke Sept 2012, the stroke destroyed her short term memory more than her physical ability. We placed her in a facility like your father-in-law for a 1 month stay to improve her diet. On the first day she fell and broke her leg. She never remembered her stroke or breaking her leg. She did not know why she was bed ridden. Every time she had to go to the bathroom we had to explain to her that she could go in her diaper. She threatened to divorce my stepfather and take him, my sister and I out of her will because we would not help her to the bathroom.

Rick Felker  
Family Friend





# Chapter 1

*You hem me in behind and before, and you lay  
your hand upon me.*  
- Psalm 139:5

Each family will have their own unique experience with the dying process of a parent or loved one. Some families will draw close together while others will be splintered for eternity. How we approach the last months, weeks, or days of a life can define who we are as a family. Will cries of desolation fill the air as the last breath is taken? Or will hands be held and prayers raised for our loved one as they separate from this world and move into the spiritual realm? As I write this, death has not yet come, but is knocking on the door of Joe, my father-in-law. His breathing has become labored and more time is spent in bed passing back and forth from the physical to the spiritual realm.

When I was young, I never understood that when you married, you also married into the family. All I knew at the time was that I was in love and I meant it when I said, "For as long as we both shall live." I never realized that for the rest of my life, I would be embedded into my husband's family, along with all of its complexities. Now, as I look back over these thirty-six years, I can honestly say that I have been truly

blessed to have my husband's family; a family that I now call my own.

Jay and I met in La Grange, North Carolina in the fall of my junior year at East Carolina University. He was living with a good friend, Warren Brothers, a couple miles outside of town. My sorority sister, who was dating Warren, wanted to introduce us. So one Friday evening, Jackie and I drove over to La Grange to surprise them with a visit.

Jay and Warren lived in an old farmhouse located right outside of La Grange. Warren's family had been tobacco farmers for several generations and Warren continued to work the fields with his family. Several years earlier, his family purchased this house that was just down the street from the main farm. This dilapidated house, which Warren called home, with weeds growing up through the floorboards and an old wood heater, was a great house to host parties. So it was not uncommon to find dozens of Jay and Warren's friends hanging out there on any given night.

It was one of those nights with a party beginning to take place that my world forever changed. Many people don't believe in love at first sight, but there is no way to describe how I felt when I first met Jay. I had just entered the side entrance of the house when I saw a young man coming out of a room with just a towel wrapped around his waist. He had dirty blonde hair, blue eyes, and a surfer's tan. A sensation suddenly came over me, similar to the way you feel when you are plunging down the incline of a roller coaster. I can't describe why I felt this way. It may have been his looks, or just the way he carried himself but whatever it was, right then and there, I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.

During that first visit and for the weeks to follow, the desire to be with him only grew. Jay would make the forty-five minute trip to Greenville to see me or I would travel the back

roads of Eastern North Carolina just to be with him. And if we couldn't see each other, we were calling each other every chance we could.

Jay was a hard worker that decided early on that he wasn't interested in going to college but wanted to do something with his hands. He had been a member of the Vocational Industrial Club in high school and had taken several vocational courses at the community college in Kinston. He always had a job either working in the tobacco fields or working for his uncle who owned a heating and air conditioning business. He had lived at home for the first year after graduating from high school and then moved in with Warren. His father wasn't in favor of the move but Jay was determined it was time to spread his wings and become more independent.

Jay loved to surf and with the beach only a little over an hour away, he could be seen driving his green Volkswagen Beetle down Highway 70 whenever he had the chance. Life was good and between trips to the beach or just hanging out together, we were truly enjoying our newfound romance.

During those first months we found a routine that worked for us. Usually, after my classes on Friday, I would go to Kinston to volunteer at an institution for the mentally handicapped. After my volunteer work, I would make the fifteen minute trip to La Grange for the weekend.

But this routine came to a sudden halt when Warren abruptly married another home town girl and started a family, forcing Jay to move back home. I was still living in a dorm and we were having a difficult time with this sudden change. Jay and I discussed the details and we decided to get married over spring break of my senior year.

We were married on March 3, 1979 in front of a packed church filled with friends and family. After our honeymoon,

we moved to a small town about forty-five minutes away from his parent's home. During those early years of marriage, I learned a lot about the family that I would forever call my own.

Joe had been in the military for the majority of his adult life and Argene was a nurse by trade. They had met while she was finishing up nursing school and he was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. Joe served in the Navy during the Korean War conflict and was a part of the Special Forces in Vietnam. While he was away, Argene worked as a nurse at an institution for the mentally ill and raised Jay and his sister Mary Beth.

I can't imagine a couple with such different personalities. Joe was always on the move and Argene loved to sit and do needlepoint. She loved to be close to her family and he wanted to be left alone. Argene could be content for hours sitting around the table with friends and family talking about her past while Joe didn't want to mention his.

New to the family, I had begun to notice friction between Argene and Joe, but I felt it wasn't my place to ask about it. Jay and I didn't discuss it much and it seemed like a discussion that he wanted to avoid.

After four years of marriage, we had our daughter, Sara. I will never forget the long night before her birth and how Argene stayed with me while waiting for my own parents to arrive at the hospital. My mom and dad lived about two hours away and were waiting for the baby's arrival before making the trip to meet their first grandchild. Jay had worked a 24-hour shift and had just laid down before I went into labor. Once we got to the hospital, it became evident that the labor would probably take all night, so he was given a bed to sleep on while Argene sat with me. As the labor pains grew with no end in sight, she held my hand and distracted me with stories about Jay and his childhood.

Several years later, Joe received a job promotion and they moved from Eastern North Carolina to Columbia, South Carolina. They found a three-bedroom patio home that was situated at the end of a cul-de-sac. There were about 20 homes in the complex with very close-knit neighbors. The patio home sat on top of a hill that overlooked the first hole of a private golf course. All of the houses were connected by a brick wall or breezeway. Joe built a nice-sized deck on the back of his house and placed a plastic roof on it to protect them from misdirected golf balls. On any sunny day you could find Joe sitting on his deck or putting around his yard.

About the same time, we also moved to my hometown of Durham, North Carolina to be around my mom who had cancer and was in poor health. Even though we had moved farther apart, we continued to spend holidays and occasional weekends together.

After being a part of their family for several years, I began to see major flaws in Joe and Argene's marriage. It seemed like they were arguing a lot. Typically, when an argument would begin, Joe would retreat to his workshop to work on his latest artistic or handyman project.

Joe was a very talented man. He was always experimenting with different forms of art, either painting, stain glass, or wood carvings, just to name a few. During his last decade, he got involved in making golf clubs and became very active in the Golf Clubmakers Association. In the end, he had a workshop that was packed with almost every tool you could think of and parts needed to make golf clubs. I do believe his purchasing of these types of items was another sore spot in their marriage. Argene was very thrifty with money and Joe wasn't. I remember overhearing many tense conversations about the purchases made for his most current hobby.

As the years went by, I often wondered what kept this couple together. They acted like they didn't even like each

other but neither of them ever mentioned divorce. I later learned that Joe had been given away by his mother to some close friends that lived in the same town. His mother had divorced and she felt she couldn't raise all four of her children. So she gave Joe up. He lived with this family until he turned 17 and then joined the service. I can't imagine the feelings of abandonment he must have felt. He never spoke about this time of his life, but I do believe this experience caused him to have a great sense of loyalty toward his marriage.



## Chapter 2

*God sets the lonely in families.*

- Psalm 68:6

In August of 2002, Argene had a major stroke that ended up leaving her bedridden for the remainder of her life. At first, it looked like she was making progress, but as time went on, she continued to have mini-strokes that left her in an unconscious state. Even though she required round-the-clock care, Joe refused to place her in a nursing home.

About this time, Mary Beth was going through a messy divorce and she ended up moving in with her parents and taking care of Argene. This was a true blessing for everyone. Mary Beth needed a place to stay and Joe had someone to take care of his wife while he continued to work. It was a difficult time for everyone, but the family pulled together to make Argene's life as comfortable as possible until the end. Mary Beth took pride in how she took care of her mother. Even though Argene was confined to the bed for at least three years, she never once acquired a bedsore. I know Jay and his father were extremely grateful for Mary Beth and the excellent care she provided.

On December 31, 2005, Argene died.