

TESTIMONY OF JOANNE HOPPER

Before the

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

JUNE 14 2001

My name is Joanne Hopper. I was born in California and raised in Eugene Oregon by wonderful parents on a small country farm. I graduated from high school, went to cosmetology school and had my first hair salon when I was 19.

I met and married my husband when I was 23 years old. We had two children, a boy and a girl.

We had the world by the tail and we decided we wanted a ranch. We moved to eastern Oregon to pursue our dream. We found 160 acres and started building our herd of cows, raised alfalfa and grain.

At the age of 44, in 1981, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. My world tipped upside down. Tragedy in my marriage caused a bitter divorce, but I kept the ranch and finished out seven foster boys and six foster girls. Multiple Sclerosis was slowly deteriorating my body. I fell and broke both hips, suffered a massive heart attack and found myself in and out of hospitals and nursing homes for rehab.

I was at a point where I had to sell the ranch and move to town because I was starting to depend on caregivers, as all of my children were grown and all over the U.S. Multiple Sclerosis doesn't care whether you like it or not, it slowly cripples you more and more, making you depend on caregivers more and more. Some caregivers are excellent and some are horrid.

My son saw this and told me he and his family would like to build onto my home and watch over me. As the end approached, they couldn't get along with the builder and moved. This left me with a debt of another home. I put my home up for sale and went to a nursing home to collect my thoughts and decide what I was going to do.

I had given my son a Power of Attorney that he grossly abused. While I was in the nursing home I kept asking for a telephone to call my daughter. The employees kept telling me I would have to wait until the head nurse returned from her days off. I did not sleep for forty-eight hours waiting for her! I was so upset that after every meal I would throw up. Finally, I was able to get a hold of my daughter. I had to go through proving that I was in my right mind.

I finally was looking at coming home and getting yet **another** caregiver. First, I called the realtor who told me **both** of my homes were in forecloser due to the abuse of the Power of Attorney that I had given my son.

I found a caregiver and was finally on my way home. First off, I sold everything I owned in order to get foreclosure payments caught up part way. The caregiver brought in another caregiver that I didn't know as she wanted to pursue other things.

The new caregiver suggested that we put in a certified family home. I thought how wonderful as she had been on welfare and she would run this home, also providing my care. She ultimately left me stranded on my scooter, left me unattended and walked off. I called a friend to come and help me and Adult Protective Services to see about a new caregiver. Adult Protective Services called the police who ordered the caregiver out of my home.

Because of the Power of Attorney abuse, I no longer have money for groceries, toilet paper, or “anything else”, let alone money to hire another caregiver! Because of the Power of Attorney abuse and caregiver abuse I am no longer in control of my own destiny.

As of this writing, I no longer know how things are going to come out. One day I am way high and the next I am flat on my face.

I am hoping my story will lead to an organization or program that can financially and materialistically aid myself and others through a rough time. I am no longer able to work and through no fault of my own this has occurred.