

Betty – Story of a Nursing Home CNA, Smithfield



My name is Betty, and I have been working in nursing homes for over 20 years. I began in Dorchester, Massachusetts, where I grew up. I don't know why – I was a teenager, and I just popped into a nursing home and asked if they were hiring, and they hired me on the spot. Those were the days when you didn't need to be certified.

Ever since then, I have just loved it. Just caring for the elderly people – it's a challenge, no question, but you can't help falling in love with them. They become a part of your family, a part of your life.

Not too long ago I began working on the [geriatric-psychiatric] floor, and it has been the greatest. There's not one resident that hasn't touched my heart. One woman in particular was really special to me. She reminded me of my mother. When she passed away, that was the hardest thing for me. Oh, we had our problems. When she was aggravated, you knew she was aggravated. She would swing her hips walking down the hall – that's when you knew! A lot of times I was the only one able to calm her down. You couldn't help falling in love with her, though, because she was something special.

You do get burnt out. You get so tired and you work so many hours because they need the help, and you get to the point you say, 'I gotta get done, I can't do this anymore, my body just won't let me.' I remember getting hit a few times, but that doesn't stop me. No matter how many times I try to leave, it just keeps drawing me back.

You get so tired and you work so many hours because they need the help, and you get to the point you say, 'I gotta get done...' [But] no matter how many times I try to leave, [this work] just keeps drawing me back...

I'm lucky that my husband was able to pick me up on his health insurance. I lost my insurance when I cut my hours back, and we looked, but couldn't find anything. It was way too expensive. Even to keep the insurance I had before, I couldn't afford to pay for that on my own. No way. I have an illness that requires all kinds of tests – CT scans and MRIs and all that stuff. I'd never be able to afford any of that, and we would have lost everything. Without insurance, you're doomed, that's how I feel. And it's important that everyone – even part-timers – should be able to get some kind of insurance.

I'm also lucky I work in a great facility where all the staff is just like one big family. We have one aide – her daughter is real ill, and the staff have been holding bake sales to help her get back and forth to Boston. I love it here - this place is like my second home.

To learn more about the Kennebec Valley Organization (KVO), and its campaign to improve long-term care for workers, consumers, and families in the Valley, contact us at 873-5844 or kvo@gwi.net, or visit www.kvorg.org.