

**Testimony by Gail Sokolnicki on behalf of my mother Helen Matulavage:**

**My name is Gail Sokolnicki and I'm the daughter of Helen Matulavage. I have been a nurse for 38 years and the focus of my job is admissions to a geriatric psychiatric unit. My son David Sokolnicki, Helen's grandson works with the mentally challenged youth at a high school level, this brings our background to my mother Helen's story.**

**Helen was a vital senior citizen in every sense of the word vital. She was totally independent in all of her decision making processes and was self-sufficient in caring for herself in her apartment. She also helped those in need that also lived in The Callahan House on 32 Smith Street, Seymour, CT, including the woman that assaulted her.**

**My mother decided to move into The Callahan House in the early 1980's after admitting that she no longer could afford the expenses of the house we grew up in. Since both my brother and I were on our own at that time, my dad passed away in 1971, she did not want to spend time alone anymore so she decided to sell the house and move to The Callahan House. This was a premiere "senior housing" at that time with a safe and healthy environment for any senior making the same choice in life. The grounds were pristine, the hallways warm, welcoming and safe with attitudes that were positive and inviting.**

**Slowly the younger disabled population was filtering in as residents as the seniors passed on and over the last few years the environment declined and my mother and her friends started seeing more "trouble" and more police presence frequently in the building. My mother and her friends pointed this out but they were established, considered this "their home" and didn't want to make trouble and continued about their daily affairs always offering assistance to those that required help, often giving up some groceries and money to help them get by.**

**On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Helen was assaulted from behind in an unprovoked, witnessed attack by a female 30 yrs her junior. My mom and her friend Joan were cleaning up after a social event as they did every Friday evening and were exiting the recreation room to go back to their apartments. The assault caused excessive trauma to her right arm, shoulder and hip, this was her dominant side. The injuries were so extensive that she was transferred to Yale's Trauma ER.**

**I was called by an MD in the trauma unit that described her injuries as life threatening and that I needed to come down ASAP. When I arrived I found my mother with an open fracture of the right humerus with protrusion of the bone and a high risk of infection, a shattered shoulder in 6 places and a fractured right hip in 3 places. The main focus was to reduce the bone but the surgery was delayed d/t blood loss and she required a transfusion before that could happen. She was also on Coumadin which complicated it even more. When asked what happened the MD said she was pushed, knowing my mother and the shape she was in prior to the event, I knew she was NOT pushed but assaulted. My mother and her friend walked the perimeter of the building and grounds daily, weather permitting and in bad weather walked up and down flights of stairs to maintain their exercise routine. My mom shopped via the senior bus 3 times weekly and also shopped for others. She was in great shape for her age.**

During her hospital stay she remained at risk for infection, under went a surgery to reduce the bone but her shoulder was too damaged for any repair and it needed to heal on its own. She also had a second surgery for her hip. She went through a period of post op delirium that was horrible to see from a family's perspective.

She was then discharged to a facility for STR on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, where she was bound and determined to get back to her independence and her apartment and friends but this did not happen. The extent of the fractures in her arm and shoulder caused her to lose most of the ROM and mobility which affected her balance. She lost her dignity and independence requiring assistance with most of her care including showering, toileting and dressing. The day we as a family had to tell her she could never go home was devastating to her and us as well. She continued to have nightmares about the assault and routinely spoke with a psychologist about the traumatic events she experienced. She often asked "why" this happened to her but tried to keep a positive attitude.

She made the best of her life at the facility and I believe she made an impact on those she touched.

Helen was a victim of a vicious impulsive attack and that attack changed her life and the lives of her family forever. She was not able to enjoy life as she knew it prior to the assault and missed her trips to see and play with her great grandchildren in New Hampshire. This was a trip we took as mom and daughter twice a year for a girl's weekend away.

I reached out to multiple parties for help in this to prevent this happening to others but all efforts went to deaf ears. I often asked what if this was your loved one, would it be different?

This is happening every day to someone's loved one, to some senior that is too afraid or too ashamed to come forward and tell their story. Well this is Helen helping them to have a voice. The seniors deserve to be safe. They are vulnerable and forgotten by the government. The system FAILED my mother and also failed the woman that assaulted her. This will continue until someone steps up to the plate and does something to protect them, this cannot continue to happen. This was a travesty and will continue to be one unless something is done to protect vulnerable seniors.

This is not going to bring my mother back. Helen passed away on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 and her Memorial Service was this morning at 10am and she brought me here not to be sad but to continue to fight for what is right so this does NOT happen to others.

Helen passed away to a song "Be not afraid", she was not afraid, but I say we should be afraid, because if this continues on and nothing is done other loved ones will suffer and continue to "be afraid".

Respectfully and with love for Helen

Gail Sokolnicki

