



Grassroots Alchemy Letters

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Peter *Why He Still Comes Back* Friendship Cottage

Story by Lynette Johnson

Stories that support eldercare services at Friendship Cottage.

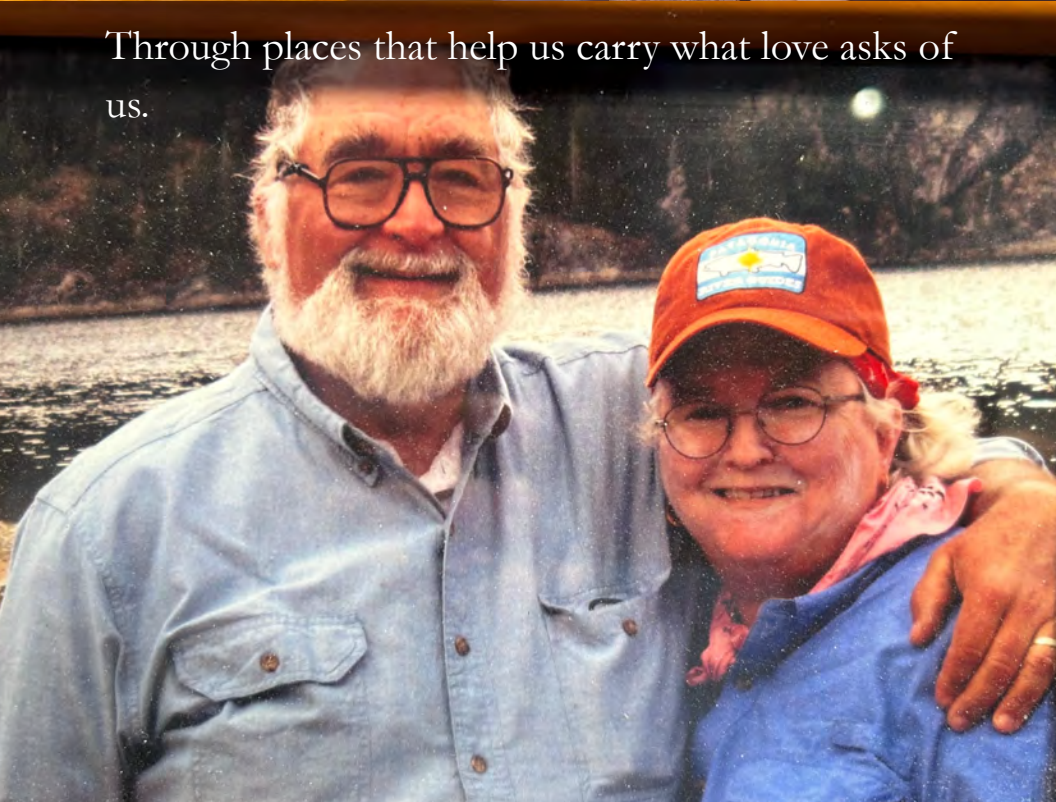


Some lives are built slowly.

Through wood shavings and warm kitchens.

Through families, long winters, and steady devotion.

Through places that help us carry what love asks of us.



WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'LL NEED

A Conversation with Peter

I had the opportunity to spend time with Peter this week over lunch in Blue Hill.

Peter's wife, Judy, attended Friendship Cottage for more than a year before she eventually needed to move into full-time memory care.

Like many families in our community, Peter and Judy did not know Friendship Cottage existed until the moment they needed it.

Peter said something during our conversation that stayed with me.

"I was in need of something I didn't know existed."

Judy had been diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia, often referred to as FTD — a form of dementia that can bring dramatic changes in personality, behavior, and perception.

By the time the diagnosis was named, Peter and Judy had already been living inside the reality of those changes.

Peter's story is not only about illness.

WHAT CARE REALLY ASKS OF US

A life shaped by love, change, and community

It is about a life built slowly and deliberately in Maine.

It is about the inner strength required to care for someone you love as their world changes — and so does yours.

It is about the adjustments that families make day after day, often without knowing where to turn for help.

And it is about the profound relief that comes when a place like Friendship Cottage steps in to help carry part of that weight.

Places like Friendship Cottage don't often appear in the story of a life until the moment they are needed.

But when they do, they become something far greater than a program.

They become a lifeline.

What follows is Peter's story.

A LIFE BUILT IN MAINE

Family, craft, and the rhythm of years together

My name is Peter.

My wife Judy and I built our life here in Maine.

We raised our children here, built a home here, and spent decades creating the kind of life that grows slowly over time.

The kind of life shaped by work, family, and the steady rhythm of the seasons.

If you had asked me years ago what the future would hold, dementia would not have been anywhere on the list.

But life has a way of introducing realities you never expected.

And when it does, you find yourself learning things you never imagined you would need to know.

One of those things, for me, was Friendship Cottage.

THE PLAN THAT DIDN'T QUITE GO ACCORDING TO PLAN

German, sailing, and the phone call that changed everything

I went to Earlham College in Indiana and studied German.

Partly because I already spoke it well enough to get by — which meant I had time to explore other interests.

I spent time studying abroad in Germany and later worked as an intern for a German photographer in New York City.

That experience helped me discover something useful. I learned what I didn't want to do. Process of elimination can be a very effective teacher.

When I graduated, I was fairly certain of one thing. I was done with school. My plan at the time was simple.

Spend time on my parents' sailing boat and figure out what would come next. I'm grateful my parents didn't rush me on that decision.

For a little while, drifting felt like a perfectly reasonable strategy.

WHERE THE REAL PLAN BEGAN

A small school, many roles, and meeting Judy

That plan lasted until the headmaster of my old school called and asked what I was doing with myself — and whether I wanted a job.

When I couldn't provide a particularly convincing answer about what I was doing, I told him I'd consider it. Then I quickly decided to accept.

Sometimes life doesn't hand you a detailed plan. Sometimes it just gives you a phone call.

Working at that small school meant doing a little bit of everything.

It also brought Judy back into my life.

I had first known her as a student at the same school I attended, two years younger than me.

Later we crossed paths again when we co-counseled at a small Quaker camp in Maryland.

Not long after that, we began seeing more of each other. Eventually I managed to schedule myself in and convince her to keep going out with me.

Judy later began working at the school as well after we were married.

And that's where the real plan began.

SUMMER HOME BEGINNINGS

Cold winters, young ambition, and building a life together

Judy and I eventually decided to make Maine our home. We wanted to be able to invest in a reasonable home and start a family.

Like many young couples starting out, there were periods together which weren't exactly luxurious.

At one point, we lived in my mother's summer home on Newbury Neck.

That period taught us quite a lot about the basics of life.

What winter feels like when heat is more of a suggestion than a guarantee.

What privacy looks like when there isn't much of it.

And how much you can actually live without when you're starting from scratch.

But it also gave us something valuable. Time.
Time to save money for our first house.
Time to begin imagining what our life might look like.

Looking back, those early years were simple, but they were also formative.

They were the beginning of the life we would build together.

THE WORK OF A LIFE

Carpentry, bread, and raising a family

Over time, that early beginning turned into something steadier.

I developed a real love for woodworking. What began as fixing things around the house and boat building, gradually turned into a deeper interest in the finer sides of the craft — joinery, cabinets, and furniture.

Working with wood meant shaping joints that fit precisely and carefully building pieces meant to last. Before long it had become not just a skill, but my livelihood — and eventually my own business.

Judy had her own ways of contributing to the community.

For four years she volunteered in hospice, offering comfort to families during some of the hardest moments they would face. She also worked at a veterinary office, caring for animals and the people who loved them.

Later, she became known locally for her baking.

At one point she was baking forty loaves of bread a day for a restaurant in Blue Hill. Forty.

Which meant our kitchen often looked like a small flour storm had passed through.

In the middle of all of that, we were raising our two children and settling into the life we were creating.

WHEN THINGS BEGAN TO CHANGE

The moments that didn't quite make sense

Over time, we began to notice changes in Judy.

At first they were small things.
Easy to overlook and explain away.

A moment of confusion here. A reaction that felt slightly out of character there.

Like many families, we didn't immediately assume something serious was happening.

Life is full of little odd moments, and it's natural to believe things will settle back into place.

But gradually the changes became harder to ignore.

Judy's personality began shifting in ways that were difficult to explain.

Eventually we learned the name for what was happening.

Frontotemporal Dementia.

By the time the diagnosis was made, we had already been living with its effects for quite some time.

LIVING WITH THE UNKNOWN

When fear enters the rhythm of a home

Frontotemporal Dementia can bring confusion, anxiety, and a blurring of reality.

Some nights Judy would wake me at two in the morning holding a flashlight to my head and asking if I had been shot yet.

Other nights we would walk through the house together checking every door and window.

Even after confirming everything was locked, the fear often remained.

Moments like that were difficult to explain to others.

During the day things might seem relatively normal. But at night the anxiety would return without warning.

When someone you love is living inside that kind of fear, it changes the atmosphere of a home.

You try to reassure them.

Create calm.

You try to help them feel safe.

But you also begin to realize you're navigating something neither of you fully understands yet.



A LIFELINE WE DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED

Discovering Friendship Cottage

When we first learned about Friendship Cottage, it felt like discovering something we didn't know was available — and also something we very much needed.

Judy enjoyed going.

She had activities, people to spend time with, and a place where she was welcomed just as she was.

For her, it brought structure to the day and moments of connection.

For me, it meant something different.

It meant time to breathe.

At first, I simply rested.

Later I realized how meaningful it was to do ordinary things again.

Cook a meal.

Go grocery shopping.

Run errands without constantly worrying about what might be happening at home.

Those small stretches of time made an enormous difference.

Friendship Cottage didn't just support Judy.

It supported me.

A PLACE WHERE JUDY WAS WELCOMED

The rhythm of support that made daily life possible

Judy attended Friendship Cottage for more than a year.

Over time it became part of our routine.
She looked forward to going.

There were people to see, activities to participate in, and
a place where she felt comfortable and accepted.

For someone living with dementia, that kind of
consistency matters.

For me, it meant knowing she was in a place where
people understood what she was going through.

People who were patient.
And kind.

People who knew how to meet her where she was that
day.

That peace of mind is hard to describe unless you've
experienced it.

It allowed me to keep caring for Judy at home longer
than I might have been able to otherwise.

And it reminded me that we weren't navigating this
alone.

A LUNCH IN BANGOR

The kind of support you never forget

Eventually we reached a point where Judy needed full-time memory care.

When a space opened, we knew as a family we had to accept it.

My daughter and I went ahead to prepare Judy's new room, filling it with familiar things so it would feel like home.

We were advised not to visit for the first three weeks so she could settle in. That was hard.

Anne from Friendship Cottage offered to take Judy there.

She told Judy they were going out for lunch in Bangor.

But what she was really doing was guiding Judy into the next chapter of care.

In a moment filled with emotion, Anne helped carry something that felt too heavy for our family to hold alone.

That kind of kindness goes far beyond what anyone expects.

And it is something we will always remember.

WHY I STILL COME BACK

What Friendship Cottage means to families like ours

People sometimes describe experiences like this as a journey. But that word has never felt quite right to me. A journey sounds like a trip — something you plan, something with a clear beginning and end.

What Judy and I were navigating felt more like learning to live inside a completely new reality. One that arrived differently and required us to adapt day by day.

When I later learned that Friendship Cottage might not be able to continue operating, I knew I wanted to help. I began attending the weekly Friends of Friendship Cottage meetings.

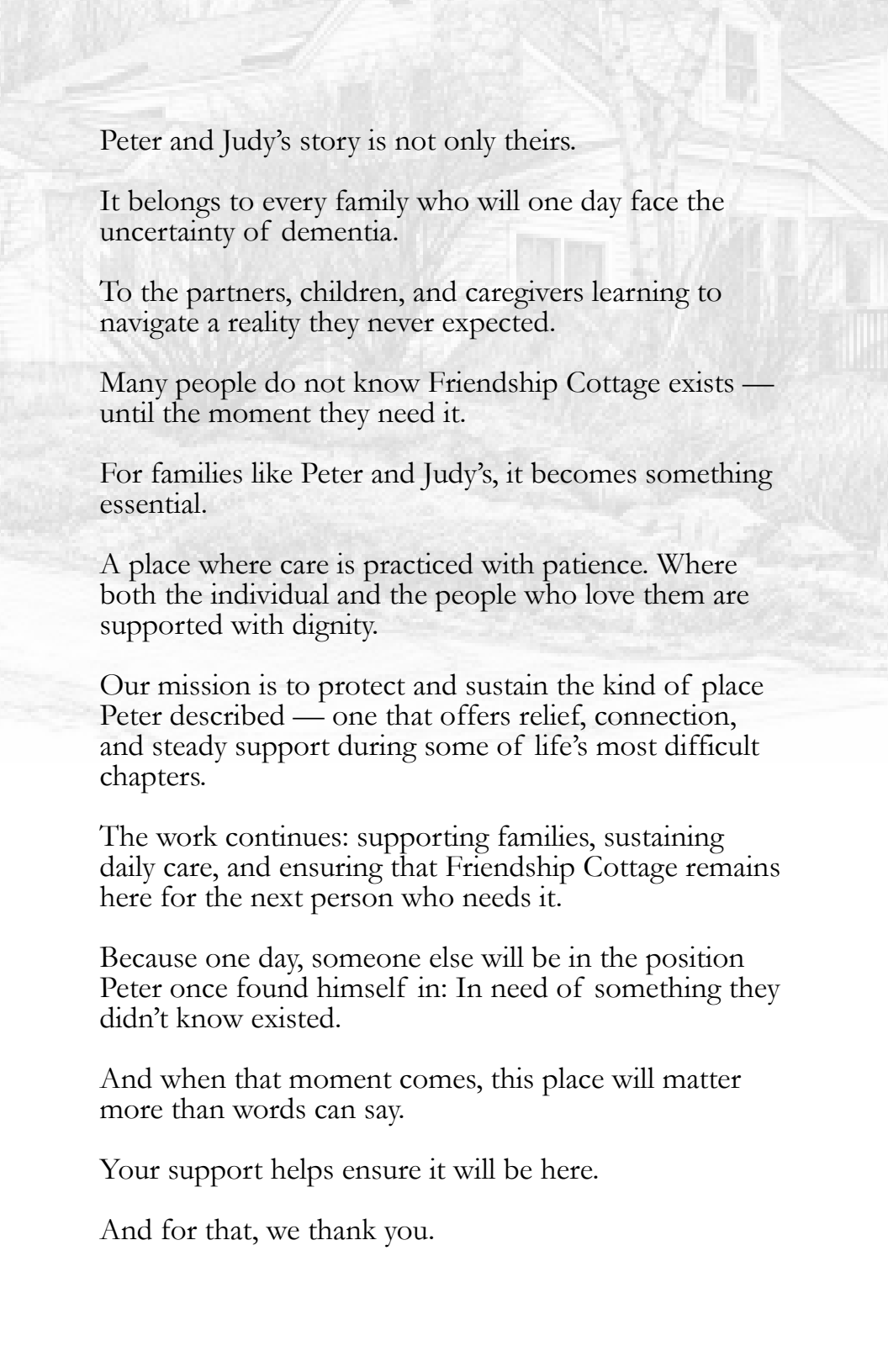
One of the challenges this organization faces is that many people simply don't know it exists. Until the day they need it.

Friendship Cottage gave Judy a place where she was welcomed and cared for.

And it gave me the support I needed to continue caring for her at home for as long as possible.

Places like this hold communities together. I still come back because I want people to understand just how important that is.

And to make sure it will be here for the next family who doesn't yet know they will need it.



Peter and Judy's story is not only theirs.

It belongs to every family who will one day face the uncertainty of dementia.

To the partners, children, and caregivers learning to navigate a reality they never expected.

Many people do not know Friendship Cottage exists — until the moment they need it.

For families like Peter and Judy's, it becomes something essential.

A place where care is practiced with patience. Where both the individual and the people who love them are supported with dignity.

Our mission is to protect and sustain the kind of place Peter described — one that offers relief, connection, and steady support during some of life's most difficult chapters.

The work continues: supporting families, sustaining daily care, and ensuring that Friendship Cottage remains here for the next person who needs it.

Because one day, someone else will be in the position Peter once found himself in: In need of something they didn't know existed.

And when that moment comes, this place will matter more than words can say.

Your support helps ensure it will be here.

And for that, we thank you.