

Minding the Light

The story is a familiar one to associates attending the *Life Care Journey: Just the Beginning*. A young woman from the State of New Jersey fell in love with a lighthouse keeper. She didn't like his choice of careers, for she was deathly afraid of water. But she loved him, and the lighthouse where he worked was on the mainland – she didn't have to cross the water to get to it. So she married him and moved into the living quarters of the Light at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. It is the oldest continuously operating lighthouse in the country.

Shortly afterward, her husband was transferred to the Robbins Reef Lighthouse in New York Harbor. This one was located on the water. A person had to go by boat to reach it. On the morning that they moved in, it was a dark, lonely, rainy day. She looked all about her, and all she could see was water. "I'm not going to stay," she announced to her husband. "I don't like all this water; I'm not going to stay." Her husband entreated her, saying that the officials who had sent him there were depending upon him to keep the light going. Ships might crash on the rocks and lives could be lost. Stay two or three more days, he said, and perhaps a transfer could be arranged. Reluctantly, she agreed, and one by one the days passed, and one by one more suitcases and trunks were opened and she stayed on.

About three years later, her husband became very ill with pneumonia, and she knew he would have to be taken to the hospital on the mainland. While he was being admitted, he turned to his wife and said, "Now, dear, I know that you want to stay with me, but someone has to keep that light burning. Otherwise, lives could be lost. Just go on back and take care of it, and I will be all right."

She did so, and a couple of nights later, she looked out across the darkness of the water and saw the light of a boat approaching. When the operator came into the living quarters of the lighthouse, he said, "Mrs. Walker, I am sorry to have to tell you that your husband is worse." She answered, "No, he is not worse; he is dead." And he was. She buried him in a cemetery on a hillside overlooking the harbor. The responsibility of the lighthouse was now hers alone.

In an interview with one of the New York newspapers, she told the reporter, "Every morning when I get up to start my day, I look across the water to that grave on the hillside for my inspiration, and it is as if my husband were standing beside me, whispering into my ear, 'Mind the light, Kate, mind the light. There are people to be saved; mind the light.'" At the time of that interview, Mrs. Walker was 71 years old, and her husband had been dead for 33 years. And so, a career that began very reluctantly wound up to be one of great public service. Even though she faithfully kept the light burning, sometimes vessels – primarily fishing boats

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caught in a storm – crashed into the rocks. Kate Walker is credited with launching her rowboat and saving the lives of at least 50 people.

The point of the story is this: Every associate in Life Care Centers of America – no matter what his or her job may be – is a keeper of the Life Care lighthouse, just as surely as was Mrs. Walker. Because, you see, in each community where we operate, there are people who live in a dark and lonely and confused world, who have nowhere else to turn except toward that beacon of hope they see emanating from the Life Care lighthouse. So if our centers are lighthouses, what is the light coming from them? The answer, of course, is love. If you do not have love for the residents we serve and for those with whom you work everyday, then you should look for another career. It is love, and the service that mandated by it, upon which this company was founded, and upon which daily operations are based.

Wednesday, Forrest Preston, Life Care's chairman, and the board of directors appointed me to be the new president of Life Care. It is my prayer – and I ask you to join in it with me – that I can be a worthy keeper of the light.

And I am proud to say that I work in a company filled with lighthouse keepers. You inspire me daily with your professionalism, your commitment and your compassion.

--Beecher Hunter