



The National Guardianship Association (NGA), together with the Florida State Guardianship Association (FSGA), presents the following article. Written by a professional guardian, this article addresses the misconceptions of guardianship, highlighted by recent media interest in the process, and details the thankless work done by guardians across the country.

NGA and FSGA are both education-driven membership organizations, dedicated to providing guardians with the [Standards of Practice](#) and [Ethical Principles](#) necessary to perform their duties with integrity.

Guardians really do care a lot. Ignore what you see in the movies.

By Pam Wiener, RG, Ph.D.

Generally, the public is aware of guardianship because of Britney Spears or because of Rebecca Fierle, a Central Florida guardian who was arrested last year and charged with malfeasance. Now, Netflix has released a movie called “I Care a Lot,” which centers on a fictional guardian in the Fierle mold.

Fierle was a professional guardian who allegedly disregarded input from a client’s loved ones, resulting in his premature death. In addition, she purportedly received payments from a hospital system to serve as guardian to hundreds of individuals. She has resigned from all her sanctioned and apparently unauthorized cases.

“I Care a Lot” looks like a spellbinding thriller, with Peter Dinklage, Dianne Wiest and Rosamund Pike providing star power. It may prove to be a compelling, gripping movie, but it is not authentic.

Nurse Ratched does not reflect the caring, self-sacrificing nursing profession. Richard Gere’s nefarious legal tactics in “Chicago” would get a real attorney disbarred. Steve Martin’s sadistic, nitrous-oxide-huffing Orin Scrivello in “Little Shop of Horrors” is certainly not representative of the dental profession. Similarly, Pike’s portrayal of guardianship is a performance designed to engage viewers and generate an emotional response, but it is not rooted in reality. All of these are examples of art created to tug at viewers’ emotions to make the respective films more captivating.

The National Guardianship Association (NGA) and the Florida State Guardianship Association (FSGA) want the community to know that our members work hard to care for some of the country’s most vulnerable citizens. As professionals, we follow a code of ethics and statutory guidelines, caring for individuals and managing their property after they have been deemed incapable of doing so themselves. Typically, our clients have serious chronic mental illness, dementia, a developmental disability or traumatic brain injury.

Once deemed incapacitated by a court of law after being evaluated by licensed mental health professionals, physicians and others, clients are nurtured by guardians who work to heal and enhance their quality of life with the goal of ending guardianship whenever possible. When clients are afflicted by a dementia of some kind, which is irreversible and fatal, we make sure they are safe, cared for and living with as much dignity as possible. Clients do as much as they can for themselves, but guardians are responsible for making important decisions, managing their affairs and maintaining safety. All of this is under court supervision.

Guardians cannot spend clients' money without court approval. We are not allowed to benefit from property sales. We are randomly assigned many of our clients and may not "fish" for prospects. In fact, that's against Florida law. Almost all professional guardians have pro-bono cases. And our cases, and our actions in those cases, don't play out the way they do on your streaming service.

In real life, this is a more typical assignment: I became the guardian of a woman in her 40s around Thanksgiving Day 2016. She had not bathed since that June, had been wearing the same yoga pants and T-shirt, and spent her days isolated from her family, curled up in bed. Her live-in boyfriend insisted he was administering her medications faithfully. It was a long process to get her medications changed and engage caregivers to work on hygiene and dental care. She now has a psychiatrist, a dentist and a primary care physician. She is considering employment and has a positive relationship with her family. We are still working on cultivating interests and living independently, and her medication is still managed by others. But she is happy and stable.

In 2017, I became the guardian of a woman in her 60s who was living alone in filth. She had pulled out her plumbing and her teeth, and had alienated her family with bizarre behavior. She verbally abused me and my team when we brought her groceries. This woman now has all her rights restored. The guardianship was terminated in 2019. She rents an apartment, works in retail and is flourishing as an artist. Her family advocates for her when needed.

These simplified descriptions involve arduous work in collaboration with our clients. Family members can play a key role. Professional guardians work with everyone associated with the clients, including their religious institutions, to make sure clients gain strength, independence and enrichment or education as much as possible.

In anticipation of the release of "I Care a Lot," NGA and FSGA want the public to know that we strive to preserve the dignity of people in need of support and care. We make sure that their assets are preserved, used only for education, care or other essentials for their benefit. We make every effort to facilitate family relationships if that is the client's desire. We do not terminate or corrupt them. For more information about our good work, check out the [NGA](#) and [FSGA](#) websites or contact your [local guardianship association](#) and invite a speaker to your next meeting.

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