

Patsy and Lois Ginese: Love Conquers All



Patsy and Lois Ginese have shared nearly 30 years. In 1985, they became one of the first couples having developmental disabilities and living in a group residence to be married in New York. "Our families and friends didn't want us to get married because of our age differences," remembers Patsy. "But we wanted to marry and so we did."

The decision to get married is one of many choices Patsy and Lois have made for themselves. "We've also decided where to work and where to live," says Lois.

Finding the Right Job

Lois enjoys being in the community, so she found jobs at Reader's Digest and at local nursery schools. She has also been a counselor's aide at My Second Home in Mount Kisco. Patsy, on the other hand, prefers the familiarity of Westchester Arc, so he found employment at the agency's

Katzenberg Center in White Plains.

"I wasn't completely satisfied with the commute and Lois felt the same way, so we decided to look for jobs more convenient to our home," says Patsy. "We told our counselors we wanted to move and kept reminding them until that happened." Now the Gineses work at the agency's Ann Manzi Center in Mount Kisco, where Patsy is a production aide and both substitute as switchboard operators.

"I like working there because I can stay close to my friends and help them be self-advocates, too," states Patsy. "I can also help other consumers I work with take responsibility for their quality of work. And speaking of the word 'consumer,' I don't like that term. Yes, Lois and I and some of our friends receive services from Westchester Arc. But we work at the Ann Manzi Center, which means Westchester Arc receives services from us, too."

Building a Home

After getting married, the Gineses moved into their own home. "We've actually had two apartments," notes Lois. "I didn't like the way the landlord maintained the first one, so I convinced Patsy to work with our counselors on moving. It took a little perseverance, but we got what we wanted."

Like most couples, the Gineses enjoy spending quality time at home. "We take turns cooking dinner, watching tv, hanging out and reading. Home is where the heart is and as long as I'm with Lois, I'm happy," emphasizes Patsy.

Service Coordination and Retirement Issues

When Westchester Arc wanted to change the Gineses' service coordinator, they took a stand. "Patsy and I really like our service coordinator. He really knows our likes and dislikes and works with us to get the services we need. We fought to keep him as our service coordinator and were successful," says Lois.

These days, individuals with developmental disabilities are leading healthier, longer lives. With that comes the need for additional services for seniors.

"We're having trouble finding the right programs to support people with our particular needs," says Patsy. But we know that there must be lots of others in the same situation. Now we're advocating for services that are needed as people with disabilities get older. The most important thing about advocacy is to always speak up. Tell others what you need. If you are determined and you put your heart into it, then anything is possible."