

# Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date August 2013

## The Powerful Caregiver

*This column is named after the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers," a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year.*

## Weeds In My Garden

By Debra Mickelsen ATR, CRS, CIRS,  
with Marilyn Joyce

*Deb Mickelsen is an Information and Assistance Specialist at the ADRC. She organizes mountains of information and uses many other talents, recently giving this newsletter a beautiful makeover. Deb has been a family caregiver during several periods in her life. She wrote the following essay about one of those times.*

"It is hard being in that middle place – the place where you are taking on multiple roles. You're a wife, mother, daughter, granddaughter, caregiver or grandson, son, husband, father, caregiver. Many of us forget to give ourselves the title 'caregiver' thinking that giving care is just part of what we do in other roles. Caring is what we do, but at what cost? If you are also trying to play the role of a good employee, it can be more than trying.

I had for many years prided myself on having a wonderful vegetable garden, enjoying every part of the process from looking at the seed catalogs in the depth of winter,

feeling the cool wormy soil for the first time in the spring to beginning preparations, all the way to harvesting. My least favorite part is weeding, but eventually I learned some important lessons from that process.

One day in my carefully balanced life, there came along a health crisis for my dad, and grandma's placement in a nursing home. It became more important to get the family basics accomplished and to be there for dad and grandma than it was to have a clean house or a great garden.

I remember the stress of running from goal to goal and not having much time for self care or thinking, and I was certainly trying not to feel much at all. My fondest desire was to have a totally boring day! (Umbrella drinks on the



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beach would have been all right as well, but weren't even in the realm of possibility at the time.)

Things settled down after a time, as they eventually do, and I finally had a chance to look over my garden. With a sinking heart I wondered how I would ever re-establish order from the disarray in front of me. Then I remembered someone in a support group saying: 'Break things down into smaller more manageable tasks.' Well, weeding was my task, and it certainly looked monumental. I decided that all I could give the project was about a half hour a day. I stuck to this, and truly the job eventually got done.

Along the way what started out as almost a self-imposed punishment (for whatever I perceived my failings to be), actually became a time to treasure. The family could do without me for such a short time, and I got to have some quality time for myself. I got to thinking about weeds - who decided they were lovely, some so tenacious that they would try to take along the fragile growth of the food plants that were my goal. Did perfection matter, or was good enough, well, good enough? I do know for sure that the fresh air, sunshine and time spent in nature was a help for me. I also know that I developed more acceptance of what is rather than what I thought things should be."

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Among the tall, threatening weeds, Deb found hidden gifts! Other

caregivers, too, have spoken of gifts they have found along the way. Some are not fully recognized until after the caregiving is over, though, so it's good to stop and look at the blessings along the way. Here are some gifts caregivers have found:

- The opportunity to give back to someone important in my life
- New skills like organization, planning ahead, and decision-making
- Learning how to communicate my needs and concerns more clearly
- Strengths and skills I didn't know I had like sensing what my loved one needs
- New friendships with other caregivers
- Learning to find more joy in small pleasures
- Learning more about myself: my strengths and limits; how to ask for and accept help; and how to take care of me
- Finding that I can laugh, even in a difficult situation

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"These days I have less of a garden," says Deb, "but I still enjoy it, and I let the weeds get just a bit bigger before I am out there pulling them. For you, it may not be garden tasks, but if you can find just a bit of time doing something that takes you out of the ordinary you may come away with some gifts, as indeed my weeds were a gift."

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Are there gifts lying along your path? Perhaps they are wrapped in the camouflage of mundane tasks or hidden under rocks of responsibility. Sometimes a gift glistens in the sun and you readily appreciate it. Other times you have to search through mud puddles. And sometimes you make your own gift just by choosing to smile or laugh and appreciate yourself.



## Events for Family Caregivers

Coming in September:

### Powerful Tools for Caregivers

This life changing course will be held 6 Tuesday afternoons from 1 to 3 PM beginning September 10th.

Contact Marilyn for more information. 262-833-8764  
marilyn.joyce@goRacine.org



## Community Resources

This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the Community Resource Directory available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (262-833-8777) or [www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com).

The **SafeAssured ID Program** is a service provided to adults over 55 as well as children in Racine County. It provides families with a media ready ID kit including a mini CD containing streaming video, digital voiceprint, fingerprints, and general physical information that can be shared with authorities in the event that a person would be missing from home or family. There will be opportunities to enroll in this free program at the following events:

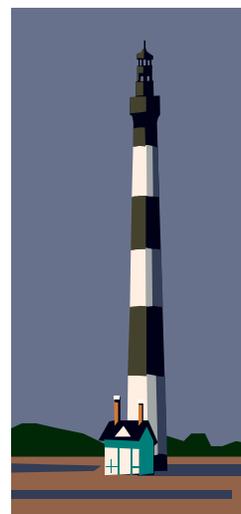
- **Sunday August 4th Waterford Safety Day 11 AM - 4 PM**
- **Wednesday - Sunday July 24th - 28th Racine County Fair 10 AM - 10 PM**
- **Wednesday August 28, 2013 Senior Empowerment 4th Annual Fair at Fountain Hills apartments**

### 10 AM - 2 PM

- **Saturday September 21, 2013 Mad Hatter Tea Party Burlington Senior Center 11:30 AM—til close**
- **Saturday September 28th Yorkville Elementary School Family Fun Fest 12 PM - 4 PM**
- **Sunday October 6th Town of Raymond Safety Fair & Pancake Breakfast 8 AM - Noon**
- **Sunday October 13th Open House @ Burlington Fire Dept 165 W Washington St, Burlington**

People can also enroll any weekday at the Volunteer Center of Racine County 6216 Washington Ave Suite G, by appointment. Contact Dave at 886-9612.

*May I have...  
Serenity to  
accept the things  
I cannot change,  
Courage to  
change the things  
I can, and  
Wisdom to know  
the difference.*



**Aging and  
Disability Resource  
Center of Racine  
County**

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## **Sibling Leadership Network**

Many people are caring for their siblings who have disabilities, perhaps in addition to older relatives. This role in life comes with many challenges and virtually lifelong responsibilities. The Sibling Leadership Network provides information and support for sibling caregivers. It connects sibling caregivers with each other, as it can be very affirming to know that you are not alone in this role. To find out more or join the Network, visit [www.siblingleadership.org](http://www.siblingleadership.org) or call (312) 996-1002.

## **Support Groups for Family Caregivers**

**First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**August 1**

**Alzheimer's Association Group**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Lincoln Lutheran Office Bldg, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor

**First Friday 12 Noon-1pm**

**"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group**

**August 2**

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

**Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**August 13**

Yorkville United Methodist Church

17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

**Second Saturday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**August 10**

Atonement Lutheran Church,

2915 Wright Ave

Park and enter in back of building (on South side).

**Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**August 21**

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room,  
209 N. Main St

**Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm**

**August 15**

**Alzheimer's Association Group**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Ave  
Park and enter in back of building (on South side)