

Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date March 2014

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 of-

“Sweet Cheer” Opening Your Heart’s Windows

Maggie and Frank are a pair of care partners who are bogged down in winterdom. For weeks they’ve been in the house except for errands and medical appointments. The drapes are closed most of the time against the sights and sounds – bare trees bending and snapping in cold wind, dirty snow, snowfall mixed with rain, mixed with pelting sleet, tossed with howling wind, enclosed by fog, and still more snowy mixes. Maggie, the caregiver, feels like she is at the end of her rope. Then the washing machine breaks down, and she manages to find a little more rope! She’s lost contact with her friends. Her children and grandchildren are busy with their own lives, and she feels like she’ll be stuck in this house with its endless, cheerless routines (with only occasional adventures to the doctor’s office, grocery, or pharmacy) for the rest of her life. She finds nothing to enjoy or appreciate. Frank is just plain grouchy and complains from morning till night. He hates his disease, hates being dependent, and hates that his teams never make the playoffs. The food is no good! Why does Maggie urge him to bathe or take medicine? He says she’s too bossy. She

says he’s demanding. They both feel that there’s no light at the end of the tunnel for them.

“It’s Been a Long Winter!” That’s probably the most common recent comment heard in the Midwest and Eastern United States.

Around this time in any given year the caregiving/ care receiving routine may seem like a one-way tunnel with no light at either end. Days may seem to melt together in “same-old same-old”, and cheer is hard to come by.

This is a good time to remember that everything on this Earth is cyclical, and change is constant ...day moves to night to day, summer to winter to summer, joy to sorrow to joy – that is life’s rhythm . Embedded in this process is the hope that joy will come out the winner. We can help to make that



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happen by opening our heart's window and inviting joy in.

Here are some suggestions to start:

- Stand tall with an open heart. Plant your feet firmly, hug your leg bones with your calf and thigh muscles, lengthen your spine from tailbone to top of head, draw your shoulders back, and feel your heart expand as though you are opening a window to a fresh clean breeze.
- Change negative thoughts to positive ones, and carry an attitude of gratitude. For instance you could change "My son only comes to help once a week" to: "I'm glad my son can find time to come every week." Or "I've lost so much to this disease" could evolve to: "I have so many good memories and love in my life."
- Enjoy nature. Chuckle at romping squirrels. Take notice of sunrises and the full moon. Nurture a house-plant. Look for glimmers of light on water or snow.
- Make opportunities to laugh whenever possible. Watch a comedy. (Are the old ones funnier?) Bring up hilarious memories and share them with your loved one. Sing and dance!! (I must confess, I do this with my dog Sam while we listen to "Prairie Home Companion" on the weekend.)
- Take good care of your health. Eat, rest, hydrate, breathe well, exercise, and socialize.
- Expect everything to change because it will! Also expect that you can find some joy no matter what!

In her book Daily Comforts for Caregivers Pat Samples shares her wisdom on inviting cheer into our lives. She

observes that one way people in captivity set themselves "free" is by using their imaginations. Caregiving and care receiving sometimes feel like jail. We have to do things we don't like. And the thought of doing them for weeks, months, or years can be unbearable. It helps to say to yourself, "My mind is not in jail." Cherished memories, dreams, or even playful fantasies can bring cheer into the day.

Pat also reminds us that nature can be a source of cheer. She gives us this affirmation: "I can draw on the wonderful energy of the earth that sustains the plants, and draw in the life-giving energy of the sun. [I will] allow myself to sense the earth's renewing energy seeping in through the bottom of my feet and ...moving slowly ...all the way up to my heart".

Remember, there are little brown time bombs under the snow and soil that are just waiting for the right moment to burst forth into green sprouts that can carry cheer to an open human heart.

One day Maggie slogs through half frozen mud puddles (or through snow, sleet, or freezing rain!) to take out the garbage. She pauses to take a deep breath of fresh air. Suddenly she sees a flash of red, and is treated to a chorus of cardinal songs. "Sweet, sweet, sweet cheer", They seem to say. This quickens her heart just enough to awaken her to the cheer in the present moment. She takes in a nice deep breath of fresh air and begins to let cheer into her heart.

Back indoors she opens a window so Frank can hear the birdsong. She smiles with a cheery "Good Morning." Frank looks at her with surprise. It's been so long since either of them smiled. Slowly their feelings transform and they become aware of good

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things that are still present in their lives. They remember their many springtime walks when they were younger. They feel sad that those days are gone, but they also feel grateful for the memories they share. As care is given and received in their home today, happiness and humor are also exchanged.

No, Maggie and Frank won't live happily ever after! They'll experience cycles as we all do. But they can always invite joy into their hearts with a cheerful thought, especially when they remember the cardinals!

Upcoming Events

Caregiving Relationships classes
March 22 – April 12 10:30 a.m. –
12:30 p.m.
See flyer for details and registration
information

Looking ahead "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" classes will be offered for six weeks on Wednesday evenings beginning April 23rd, from 6:00 – 7:30 P.M. More details will follow. Please call 262-833-8764 or email marilyn.joyce@goracine.org with questions or to register.



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.

Upcoming SafeAssured ID events

SafeAssured-ID's are FREE for Racine County residents age 55 or older, Sponsored by the Racine County TRIAD through a grant from the Racine Community Foundation, the Marjorie L. Christiansen Foundation and the Helen Bader Foundation. Children up to age 18, Runzheimer International.

- Wednesday February 12th 6p.m. - 8p.m. Autistic Children's event at Skate Town, Sycamore Ave.
- Sunday March 2 from 10 -4 - p.m. Racine Expo, Festival Hall.
- Saturday March 22nd 9a.m.-3p.m. Burlington Home Show (booth sponsored by Racine County TRIAD)
- Wednesday April 23 10a.m. - 2p.m. - St. Monica's Senior Health and Information Fair

- Saturday April 26 9a.m. - Noon - Sealed Air Y Healthy Kids Day
- Saturday May 3rd 10a.m. - 2p.m. - Big Brothers/Big Sisters event 3131 Taylor Ave
- Wednesday May 7 11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. - Kenosha Museum 5500 1st Ave

If you would like information about **Living Options in Racine County**, contact the Aging and Disability Resource Center and request a copy of our Living Options Directory.

You can also ask about the **health topic of the month** and information can be discussed or mailed to you.

Call 262-833-8777

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



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Caregiver Opportunities

A **Bereavement Series** will be held at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church from March 4th to April 22nd on Tuesday eves from 5:30-7:30 p.m. A light supper will be provided the first night, and after that participants may bring their own food and eat together before class if they like. A suggested donation of \$10 for the series covers the cost of materials. Please register as soon as possible by calling 262-886-0530.

Mary Finley, Outreach Specialist from the **Alzheimer's Association**, will be available for family consultations on Wednesday, March 26th between 2 and 4 p.m. at the ADRC office located at 14200 Washington Ave (just west of I-94). This invitation is extended to those dealing with **any type of dementia**. For an appointment call Felicia Elias, 833-8761.

Support Groups for Family Caregivers

First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon
Alzheimer's Association Group

March 6th

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

First Friday 12 Noon-1pm

"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group

March 7th

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm

March 11th

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

March 8th

Atonement Lutheran Church

2915 Wright Ave

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

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm

March 19th

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

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm
Alzheimer's Association Group

March 20th

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)