

Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date September 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 offered in Racine County several times a year.

When Home, Sweet Home Must Change

Janet is a 92-yr-old avid gardener and retired librarian. She lives in the large, lakeside house in which she grew up, raised her family, and spent many active retirement years. Now she has dementia, and her daughter Sally cares for her. Lately, she's been packing bags day and night and attempting to leave her house, saying, "I want to go home." Perplexed, her daughter says, "But you ARE home." This upsets Janet, and increases her restlessness. Sally has many sleepless nights and health problems that need attention. She has looked at care facilities, but she says, "How can I make my mother leave the only home she has ever known?"

Bob and Ann are in their mid 70's. They raised six children in a large house, downsized to a condo, then to a comfortable apartment.

Each change has been a bittersweet occasion with nostalgia and relief. "We had many special meals around this table" says Ann tearfully to the young couple buying it. They assure her that they will be honored to continue the tradition.

September is a month of change.

School starts, gardening and lawn mowing slow down, nature changes colors; sweater weather arrives. In Wisconsin we begin to think about winter's challenges and perhaps wonder about our present living situation or that of our loved ones.



One of the most major changes in life is moving to a new residence. These two stories portray some ways such a change can occur in

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The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.
Maya Angelou

Contact:
Marilyn Joyce
Caregiver
Support
Specialist

Aging and
Disability
Resource
Center of
Racine County

262- 833-8764
marilyn.joyce@goracine.org



Home is where the heart is.
Pliny the Elder, 23-79AD
(nearly 2000 years ago!)

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aging family life. Perhaps you are pondering changes for yourself and/or you have concerns about a loved one. Moves bring ambiguous feelings. We'll like not having to mow the lawn and miss our flower garden. We'll welcome less responsibility and feel nostalgic for our families gathered around the Thanksgiving table. We'll feel more confident if our loved one is not alone and we'll worry about others looking after him.

Change is an external event – something familiar ceases, and something new begins. Meanwhile we experience an internal transition from the old to the new, which includes a time of adjustment that has been called a “wilderness period.” To get through the wilderness and embrace a new beginning, we need to honor what’s ended, accept some unsettled time, and embrace the new situation.

Some caregiving families need to have conversations with aging parents about leaving the “homestead” to live in a safer, less demanding environment. These talks can be challenging. It helps to have a communication strategy that doesn’t belittle or offend anyone or become a power struggle. Here are a few suggestions:

- Use “I” statements: Rather than, “If you stay here you’re going to fall and break your neck. You’ve got to move” you might say, “Mom, I am concerned about your safety in this house with so many stairs. I’m afraid of you falling and

losing your independence. I’d like to help you find a safer place.”

- Plan on more than one conversation; changes of heart take time and thought. People need space to come to their own conclusions.
- Accept your loved one’s right to take risks (unless the person is unable to understand their own risk).

When a person moves to a care facility, it’s unsettling to a caregiver. When told that her mother needed rehabilitation, one caregiver said, “I feel like I’ve been fired!” – even though she had been exhausted caring for her mother at home. Some caregivers have problems sleeping and a general feeling of being at loose ends, lacking the familiar routine. This is a wilderness period. With patience, good self-care, and acceptance of changing roles, new opportunities will arise, like spending time with a spouse, grandchildren, and friends or returning to hobbies or other activities. The caregiver’s role will now be to manage care, and work with staff as a team member, and provide meaningful visits with moments of joy for the loved one.

“Please Take Me Home,” says Janet when Sally visits. Sally’s heart does a flip, and she struggles for a compassionate response. “This is your home now” seems hollow. “You have to stay here” sounds like a prison sentence. Sally could tap into Janet’s long-term memories by saying, “Tell me about home.” Or she can give her mother a gentle, heartfelt hug and say, “I wish I could.

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I love you.” Then she can refocus their attention to something pleasant in their surroundings.

As Joan’s story illustrates, people who long for “home” aren’t always referring to a particular residence. Some experts believe that “home” means a place that feels familiar and comfortable. Sadly, dementia robs its host of that feeling as the memory melts away and surroundings are perpetually strange. Many spiritual traditions include a belief in a home beyond this life. Caregivers may sense that

the person trying to get home has a spiritual home in mind and respond accordingly and perhaps arranging a visit from a clergy person or other spiritual guide.

Starting from the comfortable, safe environment we leave at birth, life’s beginnings come with endings and transitions. That’s part of human experience. Like Wisconsin weather, change may be challenging, but it surely makes life interesting.



Home is not where you live but where they understand you.
Christian Morgenstern

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.

You can contact the ADRC for information on Living Options in Racine County 262-833-8777, or ask for a copy of the Living Options Directory. They can discuss care in the home, assisted living, and skilled care options.

Some other resources:

Eldercare Locator

<http://eldercare.gov>
800-677-1116

Information on services for seniors and their caregivers. Resources; fact sheets available on housing and care issues. Request the booklet; *Housing Options for older Adults: A Guide for Making Decisions*.

Moving Assistance

Agencies that assist with downsizing, relocation, and transition. Various services based on the consumer’s needs and wishes. Information from the Community Resource Directory page 72.

Action Organizing Services LLC
<http://www.actionorganizingservices.com>
414-380-7122

Next Step Senior Services, LLC
<http://www.nextstepseniorservices.com>
414-588-1133

Segues, LLC
<http://www.segues.net>
262-442-4200

Transitions Simplified
<http://www.transitionssimplified.com>
414-207-2067

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





14200 Washington Ave
Sturtevant, WI 53177

Caregiver Opportunities



Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Wednesdays -
September 17th - October 22nd
Time: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Lincoln Lutheran Building
2000 Domanik Dr, Racine, WI
Cost: \$10 for textbook and snacks
Free Respite Care available with prior arrangement
Call 262-833-8762 to Register

Support Groups for Family Caregivers

First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon **September 4th**
Alzheimer’s Association Group

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 **September 5th**
Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm **September 9th**
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 **September 13th**
Atonement Lutheran Church
2915 Wright Ave
Park and enter in back of building (on South side)

Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm **September 17th**
Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room
209 N Main St

Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm **September 18th**
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)