

The Caregiver's

Home Companion

"Helping Those Who Help Others"

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This Month Online

Have you ever wondered as a family caregiver what the professional caregivers helping us and our elderly think, worry about, struggle with? You might be surprised to learn how passionate they are in their jobs at all levels, from skilled to professional to ultra-professional.

You now have the chance to stay abreast of professionals through a new weekly column on our website www.caregivershome.com. The column appears every Wednesday and is written by Sylvia Nissenboim, a dynamic, non-stop clinical social worker, personal and professional coach, caregiving support group moderator, multiple-site adult daycare director – and now author of our **Professional Caregiving** column.

Check out Sylvia's perspective and observations on both family and professional caregiving as the two forces in eldercare blend more closely together for the sake of our loved ones. Contact her with your own observations, questions and experiences at ASKsylvia@caregivershome.com

Looking Into the Face of Our Future

How Caregiving for Our Parents Shapes Our Own Plans for and Views of Old Age

By Amelia Fletcher



I have to admit that I am a Baby Boomer. While that's not like confessing to a major sin, it does put me into some interesting statistical company as we edge towards retirement and our own need for care, the type we're providing for our parents now.

According to a study sponsored by GE Center for Financial Learning, "71% of us (Baby Boomers) believe that we should be responsible for our own (elderly) care and that same 71% fear not having enough financial resources for retirement."

To put it another way, as Boomers who often are caregivers, we score an "F" in planning for our own aging and likely need for care. Why is that, when we have seen grandparents age and now even our own parents? Have we turned a blind eye to what we should learn from their situations or are we refusing to see and accept?

Dr. Jonathan Watts, senior pastor at Hewett Memorial United Methodist Church in Albertville, Alabama, explains, "Advances in medicine and the health-care industry have changed the approach to healthcare for the family and in essence have changed the family structure, and we struggle with it."

He continues, "When you look at biblical and ancient cultures, you find that the head of the household was the oldest person and they remained in control until they died. They were revered and their decisions respected. Now, there is a shift in family ties and responsibility and we bookend care with parents and children."

Dr. Watts has observed within his congregations the struggles of active seniors who have had to pass the mantle of decision making to children or friends who are often not close at hand. "There

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The Caregiver's Home Companion is produced by caregivers and professional healthcare workers. While this publication is not intended as a substitute for professionally administered medical advice, the practical suggestions, advice and tips made in this newsletter have been tested or reviewed by an individual or organization involved in caring for elderly other loved ones. The Caregiver's Home Companion also strives to obtain the input of educators and researchers in all branches of medical and scientific research. We welcome your comments and suggestions at editor@caregivershome.com.

Don't Shelve That Summer Vacation!

How to Plan a Successful Vacation For Caregiver and Care Recipient

By Paula S. McCarron



What is your ideal summer vacation? A time for relaxation or maybe a family reunion? Sightseeing or adventure? As a family caregiver, you might be thinking that travel plans are out of the question due to the care needs of your loved one.

But before you toss those travel brochures into the trash, here are some travel ideas that just might inspire you to start packing.

To start, Candy Harrington, author of "Barrier Free Travel: A Nuts and Bolts Guide for Wheelers and Slow Walkers" suggests families list all their "what if" questions. What if the airline breaks Joe's wheelchair? What if I lose his prescription? What if I get sick while we are on the road?

"The best way to combat this undue stress is think up solutions to your biggest 'what if' scenarios in advance," Harrington says. "For example, if you are worried about wheelchair damage, then do some research and find a wheelchair rental and repair place in your destination city before you hit the road."

She says it also pays to learn the law. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed by Congress in 1990, mandates transportation systems, public facilities, employers and others make their services accessible for persons with disabilities.

Harrington explains, "Under ADA, if a hotel offers a free airport shuttle, they must also provide a free accessible airport shuttle. They don't have to own one, but they can contract

for one and they can't charge the passenger for this."

After identifying your concerns, it's time to begin your research. In addition to considerations about travel, keep in mind the specific health concerns of your loved one.

You'll also want to check into your loved one's health insurance coverage to learn what special restrictions or guidelines might be in place regarding travel out of your home area.

Books such as "Anyone Can Travel: The Essential Guide for Seniors, People with Disabilities, Health Problems

and All Travelers" by Melba Rous et al (Trafford Publishing 2000) can offer helpful guidelines for all travelers. National health organizations and advocacy groups such as the National Multiple Sclerosis Society and the Alzheimer's Association are excellent sources of information on travel needs for people with specific health conditions.

For learning about your vacation destination, most travel guidebooks include at least some information about the accessibility of hotels, restaurants and popular tourist sites.

It is always wise however to call ahead and learn exactly what is meant by any business using the word "accessible."

You will also want to research the method of travel that you'll be using. Airlines and cruise companies post policies and guidelines for travelers on their websites. Enabled RVer is a website offering tips on how to outfit your vehicle to be accessible and how to locate accessible-friendly campsites.

Additionally, there are a variety of services available to assist family caregivers and their loved ones in their travel goals. Some of the services range from travel escorts with medical training to cruises designed for caregivers and their loved ones to specialty travel agents who promote their services in planning trips for individuals with particular conditions or health care needs.

Is it worthwhile to pay for these services?

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Summertime Pleasures – and Dangers

Tips for Making the Outdoors Safer for Your Elderly

By Ursula Furi-Perry



Time spent outdoors is time well spent at this time of year. Your elderly loved one may enjoy gardening, strolls around the yard and neighborhood, or even a dip in a nearby lake. Fresh air can do wonders for their attitude and emotional well-being, and outside activities may improve physical health conditions.

That all sounds positive, but the outdoors also may be unsafe for our seniors. Possible dangers lurk all around, from insect bites to sun damage and heat exhaustion, from falling to water hazards.

What are caregivers to do to ensure their loved ones will safely enjoy the outdoors? "Prevention is the working word," says Mary C. Fridley, a registered nurse and founder of Gero-Resources.com. "Look around and identify environmental dangers, then make changes or avoid them to keep your loved one safe."

Follow these 11 important tips to help make the outdoors safer for your elderly:

- **Avoid heat stroke, heat exhaustion and sunburns.** "Summer heat can have a devastating effect on older adults," warns Fridley. "The normal aging process puts them at high risk for dehydration and heat exhaustion." Be sure to have plenty of sunscreen and light clothing for your loved one. Watch for signs of heat exhaustion, or more seriously, heat stroke, which include dizziness, paleness, increased temperature, nausea, vomiting, seizures, and becoming delirious or unconscious.

"It is wise to stay indoors on hot days, but if you must take your loved one out move quickly from one air-conditioned environment to the next," says Fridley. Call your loved one's physician at the first sign of a serious heat-related illness.

- **Watch for dehydration.** "As we age, we dry up and dry out," Fridley says. "There is a lack of fluid reserve to pull from, and thirst sensitivity is diminished. Dehydration can be deadly for the older adult." Be sure your loved one drinks plenty of water or clear fluids before taking walks, gardening, or any other physical activity.

- **When journeying outside, take water or other fluids, or even juicy fruit like watermelon or oranges with you.** "Offer these frequently, even if your loved one doesn't ask," advises Fridley. "Dehydration can be deadly for the older adult. Imbalance, falling, and confusion are some of the first signs of dehydration."

- **Check the air quality.** "Lung capacity is compromised as we age, and many seniors suffer from lung diseases like emphysema and asthma," Fridley explains. "Poor air quality not only makes breathing difficult but puts a strain on the heart as well." Listen to your local news or browse weather websites for daily air quality reports, and keep your elderly indoors when reports indicate poor air quality. Similarly, pollen count reports may save your loved one from distress if he or she has allergies.

- **Don't let bodies of water get the best of you.** Swimming pools should be gated or closed off. If your loved one wants to swim, stay around and employ cautionary measures. "A wanderer can succumb to heat exhaustion or drown in a pool or lake very quickly," warns Fridley. Always swim with a partner, recommends Mary Johnson, editor

Timely Tip:

Don't overlook local community groups when you need a break from caregiving. If your loved one is a member of a fraternal organization like Elks, Moose or Eagles, the local lodge members may be willing to lend you a hand. This might take the form of phone check-ins, providing transportation – or even staying with your loved one in the home while you get a break.

Additionally, if your loved one is a veteran, it is possible that they can qualify for adult day care operated by the Veterans Administration. Income level and VA status is sometimes a determining gauge for such VA programs.

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In The News

Coffee as Antidote?

A long-standing dietary “bad guy” and caregiver staple is stepping into the limelight: coffee is receiving a makeover as a possible source for protecting against diabetes, gallstones and even Parkinson’s disease.

“We’re starting to see evidence of some intriguing benefits associated with coffee,” says Harvard Medical School epidemiologist Alan Leviton. Noting coffee’s negative reputation in recent decades, he said few of the early worries were born out by research.

Behind coffee’s improved reputation:

- Three studies have shown that people who drank several cups of coffee daily were half as likely to develop Type 2 diabetes.

- Coffee drinkers are less likely to develop gallstones, according to researchers who found the risk falling 13% with one cup daily to 33% when drinking four or more cups.

- As for Parkinson’s, two long-term studies found subjects had a lowered risk of developing the disease if they drank coffee, and the odds were significantly reduced if they were heavy coffee drinkers. One catch: only caffeinated coffee showed a benefit.

Making the Outdoors Safer for Your Elderly

Continued from Page 3

of The Senior Survival Guide to Caregiving and The Social Security and Medicare Advisor.

- **Make the garden hazard-free.** “Falling is the number one fear of older adults, and walking or working outdoors is always hazardous,” says Fridley. “Balance is ‘off’, so rising from a squatting position while gardening can precipitate a fall. It is best to sit on a sturdy stool and rise slowly.”

- **Survey the ground for uneven patches, holes, or other obstructions.** “Better yet, walk around the grounds with your senior and watch how well they maneuver the terrain,” Johnson advises. “If your senior wants to leave their cane or walker behind, a stout rake or broom might be quite a suitable substitute to lean on while giving a sense of accomplishing the chores.”

- **Make gardening easier for your loved one by keeping tools handy and simplifying the garden according to the loved one’s needs.** For example, Johnson recommends raising flower beds above ground level if your loved one has trouble bending or squatting.

- **Guard against insect bites and stings.** Use insect repellent when possible, and make sure your loved one stays away from dangerous areas, like beehives. In the event of an insect bite or sting, treat the bite topically with ice or hydrocortisone cream, and call your loved one’s physician or a poison control hotline to be safe.

- **Be mindful of your loved one’s health conditions and medications.** “The prescription drugs a senior takes can affect their functioning in the outdoors,” warns Johnson. For example, those on medication for high blood pressure may be more sensitive to heat and sun. To avoid potential interactions and dangers, always check with your loved one’s physician or pharmacist before venturing outdoors.

- **Keep your loved one company.** “Companionship is the best protection for both of you,” says Johnson. A brisk walk around the block can bring several dangers, including four-

Be mindful of your loved one’s health conditions and medications. “The prescription drugs a senior takes can affect their functioning in the outdoors... For example, those on medication for high blood pressure may be more sensitive to heat and sun

legged (and even two-legged!) predators. Keep your loved one safe and sound by your sheer presence. “This doesn’t mean you should hover over (your loved one), otherwise your senior may not-so-secretly wish that you would get lost,” explains Johnson. “Better just to join in the activity and keep them company.”

- **Don’t just ask -- talk!** “No one wants to feel that we can’t do as much as we once were able to, or to give up a favorite

activity,” Johnson states. “Thus, a senior may not let you know when they aren’t feeling well.” Johnson recommends frequently asking your loved one what they’re feeling, instead of how. “If you ask what they feel, your senior can describe a symptom. If you ask how, you are more likely to be told ‘fine’ even when things are not.”

- **Offer help frequently, and keep the conversation going.** It may even be easier to spot distress by judging how well and cohesively your senior is talking.

- **Take frequent breaks.** “Pace yourselves,” nods Johnson. “Do one thing slowly and well.” Be sure to call for help at the first sign of distress, and stop activities if your loved one feels weak, tired, in pain, or out of breath.

- **If you’re a long-distance caregiver, do your best to make the loved one’s home safe.** When possible, walk through the garden and outdoor area in person and eliminate dangers. “Having a neighbor or friend check in frequently and report to you is helpful,” Fridley says. If money and time allow, consider hiring a professional such as a geriatric care manager, to appraise and/or oversee the safety of your loved one’s property.

“Take every precaution,” says Johnson, “But spend this time together, and appreciate it as a special time to get to know your senior in a way that may not have been possible before.”

Ursula Furi-Perry is a freelance writer based in Woburn, Massachusetts. She can be reached at perry11@rcn.com.

Having the Right Pet Can Help the Elderly – And Ease a Caregiver’s Load

By Karen Luna Ray

We all know the adage about dogs being man’s best friend, and studies have shown interaction with pets is medically and psychologically beneficial to the elderly, but can the bond between pet and patient also help you in your elder-caregiving role?

To some extent, yes.

“Animals are not surrogates for human caregivers,” emphasizes Alan M. Beck, Sc.D., director of the Center for the Human-Animal Bond, School of Veterinary Medicine, Purdue University in Indiana, “but they facilitate care by giving the older adult a focus of attention, something to talk to, encourage social interaction, and provide an avenue for nurturing behavior.”

So, while the decision of whether Aunt Marge continues to live alone should not hinge on whether she has a companion pet, Beck advises that animals may lessen the burden on the caregiver for the reasons listed.

Still, selecting the right pet to help both you and your elderly is very important. What do experts say are the best pet companions for the elderly? It may be surprising to learn that companion pets do not consist only of cats and dogs.

“The most remarkable benefits to health are for those who own dogs,” according to Beck in *Animal Contact and the Older Person*, presented at the AARP Biennial Convention in 1996. Cats are popular with the elderly; birds, fish and rabbits are also used effectively, especially in assisted living situations.

According to Beck, “Some Midwest and western facilities have goat and llama visitation, with great success.” Dogs encourage walking; birds and fish provide companionship. While fish may not fit the traditional image of companion pets, they also encourage nurturing (feeding), and studies have proven them beneficial in some situations, as shown in an article by Dr. Beck and Dr. Nancy E. Edwards, assistant professor, Purdue University. The article is titled, *Animal Assisted Therapy and Nutrition in Alzheimer’s Disease*, published in the *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 2002. “This study demonstrated that the aquariums held the AD (Alzheimer’s) individual’s interest and resulted in an increase in nutritional intake at mealtimes, an increase in body weight, and a decrease in the



use of nutritional supplements.”

The reduction of stress and loneliness are positive results mentioned in studies of interaction between pets and the elderly. People who own companion pets typically need to see the doctor less often than those who do not interact with pets. “Dogs and cats can affect everything from heart health to emotional sense of security”, says Alexandra Powe Allred, author of *Cats Most Wanted* and *Dogs Most Wanted* (Brassy’s, Inc. 2004). Both books include information on the relationship between animals and seniors.

The loss of a spouse is one of the most traumatic things to happen in our lives. “We know there is often rapid deterioration of the health of the surviving spouse – particularly among seniors,” Allred says. “Those with canine or feline companions fare much better than non-cat or non-dog owners.”

This writer’s caregiving experience provides a case in point to Allred’s statement: Bonnie, a small Boston Terrier, was bereft after the death of her owner. She searched the house for her loved one, to no avail. Bonnie soon turned her attention to the grieving spouse, seeking, as well as giving, comfort. Although the husband left behind was living with his son’s family because of his need for assistance, he sometimes felt alone in his grief. Bonnie sensed his need and snuggled close, lending an ear, or lying quietly, unobtrusive, yet offering the reassuring warmth of life. They helped each other through a difficult time. At the same time, Bonnie relieved pressure on the caregiver by supplying the grieving spouse with emotional support.

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Timely Tip

- Pets should be treated for internal and external parasites.
- Keep vaccinations current.
- Dogs and cats should be neutered and house-trained.
- Cats should be declawed and litter-trained.
- Take precautions to keep animals from under foot to avoid falls among the elderly.

In The News "Speed Doctoring"

Good communication is essential in all successful relationships – and that includes doctor-patient.

However, a recent report in The New York Times indicates doctors are quick to interrupt and don't always listen after asking the patient, "What brings you here today?"

Twenty years ago, researchers found that doctors would interrupt a patient 18 seconds after asking. But things have improved (sort of): by 1999, the first interruption came after 23 seconds.

"When communication doesn't work and patients have good outcomes, it's by chance," Dr. Sherrie H. Kaplan, of the University of California, Irvine, a leading researcher on the topic, told the Times.

The lesson for caregivers: ask, ask, ask on behalf of your elderly while in front of their doctor. The reason: only 15% of patients understand what their doctors tell them and 50% leave doctors' offices unsure of how they're supposed to care for themselves.

Planning a Successful Caregiver's Vacation

Harrington says, "If the person indeed is an expert in accessible travel, they are worth their weight in gold; however there are a lot of quasi experts out there. . . . Be forewarned there is no 'official' designation of 'accessible travel expert', so you really need to investigate the training and experience of any person who claims such a designation."

One area where Harrington feels extra expense is justified is the provision of assistance for the caregiver. "It's hard to have a good time if you are exhausted from pushing a wheelchair all day or bathing and dressing someone every morning. Consider hiring a companion to go with you or contact a nursing agency at your destination. . . . Alternatively you might be able to pay the way of another family member in exchange for some personal care duties. It's well worth the investment to be able to put your feet up and enjoy your holiday a bit."

Those words ring true with Susan Alcorn, a 47-year-old woman living in Sicklerville, New Jersey, who has lived life on both sides of the equation - as a caregiver as well as an individual living with

...you might be able to pay the way of another family member in exchange for some personal care duties. It's well worth the investment...

learning to walk once more. She says, "I can't stress the importance of taking care of the caregiver. "Get some quiet time, take in a show, go to the theme park without the stress of taking your loved one with you. Even when caregivers are not "on duty", the concerns for a loved one are always on the caregiver's mind. Taking care of someone else is a huge responsibility. It's physically as well as mentally challenging. Being mindful of that when planning a trip makes all the difference in the world."

Paula Sanders McCarron is a writer and poet living in Jacksonville, Florida. She has more than 20 years of experience in healthcare, including nursing homes and hospice and can be reached at psm@wordbyword.net.

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disability. As she says, "Caregivers often forget about the most important person: themselves."

Alcorn, who travels two to three times a year, has spent the better part of the past 10 years in bed or a wheelchair due to bone disease. She underwent her 51st surgery in January 2003 and is now

Pets for the Elderly

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Service animals (usually dogs), sometimes called assistance animals, should not be confused with companion pets. Guide dogs for the blind or mobility assistance dogs which physically support a person are service animals.

People with companion pets do not have the same rights of access to public properties and housing those with service animals have, however, for information concerning certified in-home companion pets and rights, visit the 4 Paws for Ability website at www.4pawsforability.org. The organization, founded by Karen Shirk, is a training facility. They place dogs with seniors across the country through their Rover Rehab Cell Dogs Program, Pampered Prison Pets for Seniors.

Pet ownership is not feasible for everyone, but Allred suggests therapy animals as a solution. "Some animal contact is better than none," she says. Visitation with therapy animals isn't limited to nursing homes. Persons living in their own home or with a caregiver can call the local animal shelter or veterinarian to inquire about availability of pet therapy in their area.

"One of the worst mistakes in pet selection is

seniors choosing large dogs for protecting the home, only to find they are too much to handle," Allred says. She suggests small- to medium-size dogs make excellent guard dogs or companions. She encourages enlisting the help of a veterinarian or professional dog trainer in breed selection and temperament.

Another problem centers on well-intentioned family members bringing a puppy to a senior's home without considering the destructive behavior and housetraining that comes with puppies. "For this reason, cats are easier to care for," Allred says, suggesting that the search for a suitable pet begin at an animal shelter. With luck, you may rescue a pet that has had some degree of training.

What is Dr. Beck's best pet recommendation? Do dogs really rule? He advises, "The living circumstances, animal experience, and activity level all influence the choice. There is no best fit or Rx approach possible."

Karen Luna Ray is a former caregiver and freelance writer living in Oklahoma. She can be reached at karenray@1starnet.com

Caregiving for Our Parents Shapes Our Own Plans

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is a crisis of the spirit as parents who have been dynamic become frail and confused by disease or medication,” he observes.

What are those children learning about themselves and their own aging? In an unscientific poll of 50 people ranging in age from 25 to 82, several interesting and common threads emerged.

The first theme follows true though all age brackets: As they observe their parents and grandparents requiring more care, they have to the letter, felt that putting papers and financial plans in order is extremely important, and the majority of the participants had actually put their legal papers and medical directives in order in addition to informing close family members.

Some have even prepaid for funerals. Rose Johnson, military wife and a long-distance caregiver to several family members, expresses her thoughts this way: “In our age of legal papers and regulations, it is so very important to have papers in order. Also to have the type and quality of care you want and directions as to what to do with your remains in writing.”

A second common thread in the survey was that most feared nursing homes and institutional care, while realizing that their own care would probably evolve into that stage. Ron Aday, of Middle Tennessee State University, testified before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging in May 2003 about the need for senior centers of the future to evolve to meet the unique needs of the Baby Boomer generation:

“As the graying of America continues, changes in attitudes and policies toward aging will be necessary. Americans will want to grow old with the highest levels of health, vitality and independence. For this to occur, the concept of health and well-being must include the ability to function effectively in society, to exercise self-reliance, and to achieve a high quality of life. Social policy can no longer be construed in the traditional manner of medical care of illness management.”

To aid in this transition, Partners in Health has designed a video to help active older adults become functioning partners in their own healthcare. The 30-minute video empowers older adults with the skills needed to communicate effectively with their

healthcare providers by making practical suggestions for working with doctors and pharmacists and how to communicate perceived “embarrassing situations.”

In the 21st Century, many of us resist aging. The surge of requests for cosmetic surgery is one indicator. Another is the array of ergonomic products readily available, designed to make everything from opening a bottle to gardening easier on those aging hands and knees. MIT’s AgeLab, along with six commercial partners, are inventing products to enhance our lives as we age. For example, Dava Newman is working on a bio-suit for seniors that would improve circulation, control temperature, and protect fragile areas like hips and knees. Joseph Coughlin, an MIT faculty member, says, “Everyone talks about aging being a hot topic and a hot market, but at the bottom line, a lot of us are fearful of aging.”

But according to Coughlin, we are not going to be old the way our grandparents were. We’re not even going to accept moving to Arizona and Florida. He also observes, “The fastest growing internet users are women over 50 seeking healthcare information. We have managed to add 30 to 40 years to our life spans,” Coughlin says, “But the problems are now that medical science, engineering, nutrition, sanitation and physical fitness have extended our lives, we as a society have not even begun to think about how those extra decades will be lived.”

Another universal comment on aging from the survey concludes that we fear not having enough financial resources to obtain the care we will need and want. As caregivers, we struggle with the paperwork of insurance and government and try to “work the system” in order to achieve an acceptable level of care for ourselves and loved ones. If anything has had a continuing impact on our observation and handling of our aging generations, monetary worries have.

None of us want to be a burden. The enigma is that only 7% of us have actually purchased long-term care insurance. Dr. Christopher Hayes, an independent advisor to the GE Center, states, “Clearly, Boomers aren’t looking for help from others and want choices and autonomy in their old age, but

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...we are not going to be old the way our grandparents were. We’re not even going to accept moving to Arizona and Florida.

In The News

Starbucks in Hospitals? Heresy!

Tired of that old “cup of Joe” served up in hospitals while visiting your loved one?

There’s a novel idea moving forward in Canada, where the Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon will soon be outfitted with its own Starbucks coffee shop.

The Saskatoon Health Region says it is buying the Starbucks franchise as a revenue source to boost funding for patient care.

“The business case is strong for a very healthy return, which is making it worth our while,” Sandra Blevins, vice president of the health agency told The Associated Press. “It’s a brand that people are receptive to and one that’s having success other places.”

Blevins says the agency will pay about \$35,000 (Canadian) for an operating license from Starbucks and expects an annual profit of about \$100,000 from the 5,000 daily hospital visitors once it opens in September.

The profit, minus 7% royalties to Starbucks, will be used for patient care, she said.

Caregiving for Our Parents Shapes Our Own Plans

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Timely Tip

Self-esteem is just as important for the well-being of the elderly person you care for as it is in shaping the personality of a young child.

As often as you hear your loved one tell the same story over and over – and grow totally tired of hearing it – remember that this story is obviously special to them, and retelling it helps rekindle a sense of self-esteem

Being the total caregiver made me very aware . . . sleeping with that baby monitor by my ear and the amount of time and all that is involved. . . . BUT still I would not trade anything for that time.

few seem to know what options are available, with even fewer actually planning now for the future.”

Yes, I’m aging and unwilling to accept the wheelchair, practical haircut and shoes my grandmother did in her latter years. I shutter when I remember her that way. Yet, if I push those visions back, I can recall a strong and independent woman with a sense of community and personal pride. When I think of her little slicked-back hair bun and soft food, it makes me go kicking and screaming into my own aging. But being a caregiver also has softened the edges of my truth.

C.B. Brierty, a vivacious real estate agent on Alabama’s Gulf Coast, responded to one of the survey questions in a very poignant and eloquent manner. It seems to sum up each of us as caregivers and human beings: “Being the total caregiver made me very

aware . . . sleeping with that baby monitor by my ear and the amount of time and all that is involved. . . . BUT still I would not trade anything for that time. It made me know that if and when I need care, my children should get that opportunity to care for me. It will help them much more than me.

“Personally, I don’t want to be a burden on anyone, but they need it. It is a blessing, and I know that it will be desperately hard on us all. I want them to be patient, to realize that I will be doing the best that I can as I revert back, stage by stage, and I will only need to be loved, fed, and kept dry again, but we will make the most out of every day.”

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The Caregiver’s Home Companion

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Upcoming in July

- Suicide among the elderly is alarmingly common. What we can do to recognize the symptoms of contemplated suicide and prevent it in our loved ones.

- Caregivers who anguish over crucial medical decisions for their loved ones, including when and whether to prolong life, can be helped greatly if their elderly state their wishes in a formal document. An elder-law attorney explains living wills and health care proxies.

- Weight gain and weight loss – a common problem for caregivers and their elderly. A dietician tells us how we can successfully tackle the problem and achieve proper weight maintenance.

- **How I Cope:** If I knew then what I know now – lessons learned in caregiving’s school of hard knocks.