

Women to Women: A Handbook for Active Aging

By Catherine Stewart-Roache and Barbara Yarnell. Hermosa Publishers, 2009. Also available on CD.

Reviewed by Maril Crabtree

Maybe the tide is turning.

For the past couple of decades, we've been deluged with books that proclaim, in ever-more-frantic tones, that with the right food, the right exercise, the right supplements—many of them nothing more than expensively packaged vitamins—we can prevent aging or avoid it altogether.

Women to Women: A Handbook for Active Aging has a different approach, evident even in its title. Instead of denying the realities of time, the authors assert in the first chapter that “This book is for those who are not afraid of the words ‘old’ or ‘aging’ and who aspire to be active old women.”

The authors, a retired physical therapist and a minister in her 70s, offer their own lives as examples of active aging. Catherine, the minister, began noticing stiff joints when she was in her 40s and made a commitment not to go through her later years with increasing joint pain from unused muscles. For Barbara, the physical therapist, being diagnosed with osteoporosis in her mid-50s was “a real wake-up call” and she began researching how she could stay healthy without medication.

The result is a practical 165-page book full of inspiring photographs and tips on nutrition and exercise, all with the goal of empowering older women to “keep on keeping on” despite losses and setbacks associated with the aging process. You'll see women hiking, biking, swimming, and even mountain-climbing. You'll see a picture of Ilse, 87, walking with two trekking poles. (She walks two miles three times a week.)

The book offers many examples of goal setting as a way of achieving a more healthful life. The authors recommend setting a goal “big enough to be challenging, but not so big that it can't be accomplished,” and they warn, “It is unrealistic to have the same fitness goals as a woman of 30 or 40.” They encourage breaking goals into “bite-size pieces” and writing down your progress.

Yes, we've heard a lot of this advice before. But this book goes out of its way to be friendly to its intended older-women audience. The print is large and easy to read, and the photographs are appealing because they show “real women,” not airbrushed models.

If you're feeling a bit discouraged about getting into better shape, this book will show you how without making you feel like you're already impossibly behind. If you're already feeling good about being “an active old woman,” you'll feel affirmed—and chances are you'll pick up some new useful tips.

Either way, you'll know you're not making the journey alone.

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Caregiving Counsel

By Ed Schulte

Editor's Note: Johnson County Human Services, and its Area Agency on Aging, receive many calls from members of the baby boom generation who are helping to care for their elderly parents. This is the last of three installments in which Ed Schulte, an aging information specialist, provides his experience and wisdom.

What advice can you give to adult children caring for elderly parents, with the child assuming the role of lead decision-maker and the emotional pitfalls that can generate?

Communicate adult-to-adult with a senior, rather than assuming a parent-to-child tone. Be respectful. Be kind. Don't try to solve all the problems at once. It will drain you. Start with the most important things.

Understand that your parent's physical and cognitive capabilities may diminish, but there is no set pattern of decline. Your parent may rebound from setbacks and surprise you. Do not be quick to assume or diagnose a physical or mental decline and rush to place a parent in a facility.

You can try different options. Do a trial run with in-home care and see what plan of care might ensure the parent's health and safety at home. Or arrange a respite, rehab, or vacation stay in a facility as a trial run. See what works for the elder's needs and your capacity as a caregiver.

Do not push your parents too hard, even if they pushed and encouraged you to high achievement when you were young. This is different. Many loss issues associated with aging require time to adapt to: loss of income, home, spouse, and health. Wisdom, strength, and experience may come with aging, but allow time for your parent to adapt and respond to the challenges, too. Be patient. Take breaks.

At this stage in their cycle of life, seniors deserve peace, health maintenance, and pain management; the best options for living available to them; and the security of knowing that someone cares about them and will be there for them.

What do you say to the adult children of an aging and ailing parent when they bicker over care?

Whether near or far, find your own way to "share the care."

As an adult child, the best solution will always be to follow your values. Learn more about caregiving and caregiving options, but care with whatever strengths and tools you already bring to the table.

Talents and capabilities, personalities and strong traits, may not be distributed evenly among siblings. Parents may respond better to certain children or respond to them better for different needs—legal, financial issues, emotional support, health care.

If discussion is too challenging, sometimes you just have to do the right thing or help the right way according to your beliefs, values, and strengths.

How about when one sibling lives out of state and others live in the same city as the parent. Do you find it's common for tensions to build between siblings as they take on more caretaking responsibilities?

Caregiving comes with challenges and tensions, so family members who are in that role have to find ways to deal with those tensions.

Do not let caregiving become the focal point of your life. Let it be *part* of your life, but you do not have to center each day on the same caregiving issues. Your thoughts, emotions, and personality as a caregiver do not have to parallel the thoughts and feelings of the person you care for—especially true if the parent is not feeling well. By being a happier person and caregiver, you can lift the person you care for out of the doldrums. You can be empathetic and caring, but you do not have to be down and despondent.

The realities of life often place family members in different locations. Most family members didn't move away to avoid a caregiving role; they moved to be employed or to live their best life in a location and environment that supported their talents and needs. You can be supportive from a distance by phone and visit when you can.

When there is disagreement between siblings, try talking informally or with social workers, or get formal counseling and mediation. Knowing the care needs of the parents, and having advance directives such as wills, living wills, and powers of attorney, will help sort out some parts of who does what based on the parent's choices.

Family members all have choices, too, and should be involved as caregivers according to their physical and emotional capacity to do so and related to their parent's need for help or agreement to be helped. After that, other options for caregiving can be looked at.

Any general advice to baby boomers who, if they aren't already, soon will face juggling caring for their own families with caring for an elderly or sick parent?

You build a house according to certain building codes and blueprints, and then that house serves everyone who lives in it. Live according to your values or your personal code and belief system. Let your goals and dreams be your blueprint for living. Recognize that you have choices and the ability to plot a course and adjust it. Be positive, persistent, and proactive, and life can follow a course close to what you envision.

Care for other people while still caring for yourself and the life you want to live. Make your days happy, and you will be happier and more caring toward your family and everyone around you. Help yourself and everyone make the best of every moment.

“Aging” is just another way to say “living.”

Every day is a gift to be appreciated. That's why they call it the present.

**Get ready for the CFL
The lightbulb that uses 75 percent less energy**

By Ron Trecker

As part of the Federal Energy Independence and Security Act, the incandescent lightbulb, used in most homes in America for more than a century, will soon start to disappear.

The act requires new lightbulbs to use 25 to 30 percent less energy beginning in 2012 nationally—starting with the 100-watt bulb. By 2014, other incandescent bulbs, including the 75-, 60-, and 40-watt, will also be phased out across the country. The act

will cut the nation's electric bill by an estimated \$10 billion a year when fully implemented in 2014.

Even though this legislation—passed by Congress in 2007—will affect virtually all Americans, a recent survey found that only 36 percent of Americans know that this legislation will phase out most traditional incandescent lightbulbs. In addition, the survey found that only 19 percent of Americans know that the 100-watt incandescent will be the first bulb to be banned from U.S. stores, beginning Jan. 1, 2012.

And what will replace the incandescent lightbulb, you ask? The answer is the CFL, the compact fluorescent lamp. It is a small fluorescent lightbulb that uses 75 percent less energy than a traditional incandescent bulb and can be screwed into a regular light socket.

Don't let the fact that it is fluorescent turn you off. If the CFL is Energy Star qualified, it must pass extensive testing to ensure that it produces only the highest-quality light.

Incandescent lightbulbs work by heating a tungsten filament, or wire, until it glows. That is what produces the light you see. Unfortunately, 90 percent of the energy used to generate that light is wasted as heat, making incandescent bulbs a very inefficient way to light a home. CFLs, on the other hand, create a chemical reaction among gasses inside the glass tube, causing phosphors to illuminate.

If you are skeptical about CFLs, there's no need to be. The technology has come a long way. The light that CFLs provide is identical to the old incandescent bulbs, the new magnetic ballasts make no noise, and CFLs light almost instantly. The only real difference from the old incandescent lightbulb is that CFLs look different and will save you money.

On average, the CFL will save up to 15 percent of your energy bill because they use 75 percent less energy than a traditional incandescent bulb and they will last, on average, five years.

Lightbulbs are not an impulse purchase anymore. You will be buying an item that will last five years, which means it's worth the effort to purchase bulbs with the Energy Star seal.

CFLs earning the Energy Star seal meet minimum lifetime and value requirements, and are within maximum allowed product start and warm-up times. Manufacturers are also required to label the product if the light output is different than that of a soft white incandescent bulb. If you choose a CFL that is not Energy Star qualified, you might not get the performance you are looking for. Energy Star is a joint venture between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy, which certifies and promotes energy-efficient products.

If every American home replaced just *one* incandescent lightbulb with a light that has earned the Energy Star seal, America would save enough energy to light three million homes for a year, save about \$600 million in annual energy costs, and prevent nine billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per year, equivalent to the greenhouse gases emitted from about 800,000 cars.

Electricity used for lighting represents about 20 percent of the average American household's energy bill. That makes the CFL bulb a great way to save electricity now that KCP&L has raised electricity prices. You can save up to 15 percent of your energy bill just by switching your incandescent bulbs to CFLs.

The CFL bulb, like everything else, is not perfect. CFLs are made of glass and can break if dropped or handled roughly, just as incandescent bulbs can. Be careful when removing a bulb from its packaging, installing it, or replacing it. Always screw and unscrew the bulb by its base, not the glass, and never forcefully twist a CFL into a light socket. CFLs contain a small amount of mercury that poses no danger if the glass is not broken. If you accidentally break a CFL bulb, place the bulb in a sealed glass jar and follow the disposal directions on the packaging.

For answers to almost any question about CFL lightbulbs, go to the Energy Star Web site below and read the FAQ section.

Sources

Third annual Socket Survey by Osram Sylvania, a Siemens company.

Energy Star: www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

Ron Trecker is a retired professional engineer who worked with Boeing, Jacobs Engineering, and GM. He lives in Lenexa.

Grandma's Summer School

By Pat Kehde

When my two granddaughters were 8 and 6, I volunteered to take over some childcare for my daughter during summer vacations. I figured the two or three days a week would be filled with playing in the house, going to the swimming pool, working at the paint table, building with Tinker Toys, and playing Slap Jack and Old Maid. As a last resort there was the ever-available DVD collection at the local library.

But I got a little bored. Though I'm all for spontaneous play, I thought we could spend some of our summer focusing on a single topic. Because I was a history major and have a keen interest in maps, geography, and travel, I suggested to the girls that we choose a country to study. Not study, really—more a kind of exploration, based on what we could find in books, what was available in the community, and, most important, what kids their age could do themselves and would enjoy.

So, for the past four summers, Natalie, Emily, and I have selected a country to get to know.

The first year, I think we were eating at the local Indian restaurant when we decided that India would be our country for the summer. And indeed, our focus was mostly on food. We found a book on Indian cooking and the girls made several drinks perfect for Kansas summers: a sweet lassi yogurt drink, a cold chai milk drink, and cardamom lemon juice. We made several other foods and breads, including our favorite, the quick-cooking poori, a puffy bread deep-fried in hot oil. Like all things fried, it's so good that we still make it from time to time. Now that the girls are older, we should revisit our Indian cooking and be more attentive.

We also looked at the globe and maps, read out names of places and cities, and watched an Indian movie, which, alas, only held their interest for a while. We had the most fun trying to make and wear saris. If you do a Web search for "sari," you'll find lots

of information about length of fabric and draping technique. So the girls picked out fabric, but unfortunately, winding fabric around a child accustomed to jeans and a T-shirt, and then keeping the sari on, is a trick we never mastered. I think the next time I'm in New York City's Jackson Heights, I'll go into a sari store and ask if children really wear them—and if so, how they manage!

The next summer, our country was Japan. The first step in studying Japan was to go to the public library and find books about the country and craft projects to do. Right away it became obvious that a kimono was a necessary part of our course.

We found fabulous Asian-looking cotton prints, and they picked out two kinds—one for the body of the kimono and one for the obi. I started to sew and learned a lot about the very un-Western construction style of kimono sleeves. When the kimonos were finished, the girls' father made them each a pair of gatas, wooden Japanese shoes raised on wedges of wood, with a sandal thong on the top. They looked quite splendid.

We also visited a Japanese restaurant that had a hole in the floor so Westerners with stiff knees could sit at the low tables. We read some Japanese folk tales and tried to learn a few words of Japanese. And we visited the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art to explore its Japanese art collections. Now that the girls are older, this country, too, could be revisited by listening to Japanese language tapes and music, talking to Japanese students, watching Japanese movies, and cooking more Japanese foods.

Then it was on to France. By now, swimming day camps, summer youth theater productions, and other activities began to make those two and a half days of Grandma Summer School less predictable. Still, we found time to learn a bit about La Belle France.

The first thing we did was visit Au Marche, a Lawrence store that sells many things French. The girls tell me today that that's a strong memory for them: looking at old maps of Paris, smelling the French soaps and French cheeses, and buying French lady fingers (which turned out to be a disappointment, as they were dry and hard, not nearly as exciting as the name implies).

We also got books from the library and some language tapes. Every time we drove, we put the tapes on and learned a few words in French. We also cooked a few dishes—un gâteau chocolat and crepes—and we watched the movie "Chocolat," which turned out to be a compelling story full of details about rural French life. Finally, a visit to the Aaxis restaurant in Kansas City capped our summer adventure as we ate croissants, beurre, et patisseries.

The next summer we planned to study Italy, but after a quick tour of the library's collection we were drawn to books on ancient Rome. There seemed to be so much that we could study. We made flash cards of the Roman numbering system, Arabic numerals on one side and Roman on the other. Then I would ask them to make up a number and translate it into Roman numerals. There are lots of excellent books for kids about ancient Rome, and some of the best had maps of Rome and other ancient cities, brief summaries of the political structure, descriptions of the homes and villas, and, of course, the architecture, sculpture, frescoes, and mosaics.

From foam core we made a model of the Pont du Gard with its tiers of arches; this took far longer than the summer months to complete. We made two togas and one female gown, derived from a book of theater costumes. We watched the first few episodes of "I, Claudius," but when Livia got too bloodthirsty and killed Augustus, it was too much for us.

The crowning moment of this summer school was the Roman feast that we prepared and served to ourselves and the girls' parents. Emily found a book on Roman cooking in the adult section of the library and Natalie typed a menu in Latin on the computer, printing one for each guest. She also made and posted signs in Latin for all the rooms in the house and some of the objects, too. The cookbook described the common ingredients available and items that are common to us now but not available then. For instance, Romans used no sugar, only honey. It was challenging to be restricted to the authentic ingredients! Lounging on the floor at low tables with bed pillows for support, with food, wine, and candlelight, we all had lots of fun.

Who knows what we will study next! Summer is coming, and somehow those days seem to get fewer and fewer, so we will try to choose something intriguing and colorful.

Pat Kehde is the former owner of The Raven, a locally owned bookstore in Lawrence, Kan.

Home Front *By Don Carter*

Note: This month's column was written by my business partner, William C. Carter, PE.

Don't replace that water heater if all you need is an anode

Most of us think very little about the large white tank in our basement or closet, but there are ways to make it last for a long, long time. A water heater's average life is eight to 12 years, but it could be 40 or more. Here's how.

Inside the water heater is either a gas burner or an electric heating coil. Water flows in and out from pipe fittings on the top. On the outside are a blow-off valve and pipe and a drain valve. Inside, the fill pipe has a long plastic pipe called a "dip tube" that takes the cold water to the bottom.

Because there are dissimilar metals inside the tank, the water makes the tank into an electric battery. The tank is "glass lined" with a coat of enamel to prevent rusting, but eventually a chip will develop or a thin place will occur in the enamel, and rusting will begin.

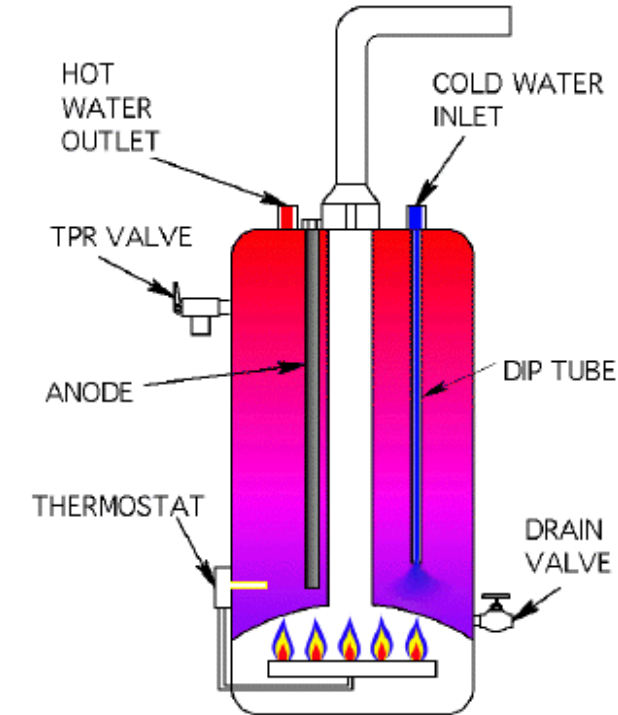
To prevent the tank from rusting, an aluminum or magnesium rod called an "anode" is inserted from the top. The anode corrodes, leaving the steel tank rust-free. When the anode is consumed, rusting of the tank will follow. Most anodes last four or five years, and a year or so less if you have a water softener.

The anode is replaceable. All anodes have a 1 1/16-inch hexagonal head and can be unscrewed (after partially draining the plumbing system to just below the top of the water heater). Be sure to turn off the gas or electricity before starting any work. Unscrew the anode and replace it with a new one. (It will be *very* tight). If space is limited above the water heater, some anode rods have chain-like connectors so you can snake it in.

To find an anode, you will have to go to a plumbing supply store like Ferguson, or Reeves Weideman. Why not a home improvement center? Most people don't even know

that anodes exist, and sales would be poor. And your plumber probably won't tell you about anodes, because plumbers make a living replacing water heaters. But they will replace the anode if you ask.

While you're servicing the water heater, it is good practice to drain the water heater to flush out the sediment and scale.



Graphic courtesy of
chilipepperapp.com.

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How long 'til the sun goes down?

By Jessica Conoley

“How long do you think until the sun goes down?”

My voice warms with the golds and reds of tonight's impending sunset.

Thoughtful silence fills the front porch before Grandpa announces, “Fifteen minutes.”

I reach to his left arm, taking his large hand in my slender fingers. My other hand works to liberate his metal watch. Removing the watch requires careful attention so I don't catch his papery skin in the elasticized metal band. I slide the timepiece over his wrist and around his arthritic fingers; he holds out both hands, letting me place it secure in his grip.

Flat Kansas horizon stretches the rest of eternity before us. Purples and pinks join where blue used to reside. We watch the sun slide under the split-rail fence and start to fall to the horizon. I hear his steady breath mingle with the buzz of summer insects and the occasional clang of gravel against the bottom of a passing vehicle. My bare toes

wiggle in the dry dirt at the bottom of the porch, the dust refreshing after a day of work, high heels, and corporate America.

His raspy voice stretches across the front porch, finding me on the cement steps where I now sit.

“Honey, there’s nothing wrong with me. I’m just going crazy.”

“I know, Grandpa.”

I stifle a laugh as I turn over my shoulder, looking to his face. In less than half a second, I know my *real* Grandpa is here. His ash-blue eyes register my mom’s front porch, slot me into the appropriate part of his brain as his granddaughter. There is only clarity. I smile; it has been so long since he has seen me.

“I got a new car,” I tell him. “It’s the same color Grandma’s Oldsmobile was.”

“What kind did you get?”

“A Mini Cooper. BMW makes them.”

“They used to make jet engines, for the war. That’s how they got started.”

“The speedometer says it’ll go 130. I got it up to 117 in California. Don’t tell Mom.”

I turn back to the horizon, not wanting to miss the last hot sliver of today fading unrecognized.

Sadness creeps into his voice.

“You don’t need to worry about me telling anyone, honey.”

I catch my breath, trying to decide what to say next. There are a million memories I need to hear again, to make sure I know the stories right. Ninety years of stories, and he’s the only one left who knows them.

“Where’s the red dog?” he asks.

“Back yard. He went swimming in the pond today. Smells awful. During the war, when you were on the planes, did you guys have BMW engines?”

“No, ours were being made over here.”

“What’d Grandma do while you were flying?”

“Who?”

I speak up, slower this time, “Grandma. Goldie.”

“Who?”

“Goldie. Your wife.”

“Goldie...” His voice trails off as he tries to place the name.

We sit and wait, he clutching his watch in both hands, observing the round gold face as the minutes pass. Me clutching his memories, in charge of reminding him of tonight’s chosen time for dusk.

When the sun finally sets, we will compare the clock to the world, and that will be the end of our game. The only prize the memory of our last shared summer sunset.

Jessica Conoley is a fledgling writer and Johnson County native.

**Learning to enjoy
living with a loved one
with dementia**

By Jim Rawdon

While rummaging through a bathroom drawer for a new toothbrush, I recently noticed a little blue suede jewelry box. I had never seen it before. Inside, I discovered a pin recognizing my wife's 20-year membership in the Medical Group Managers Association. Her career began at a regional medical program and a leading medical school. For over 35 years she served as an administrator, business manager, and consultant for medical practices.

About 15 years ago, I began to notice that she would make notes before meetings with the group's board or officers. To me that seemed a waste of time. Always before, she could recall from memory what expenses had been for various budget items. I assumed that bigger groups and larger budgets explained her need for notes.

Looking back, I realize that, unknown to either of us, her intellectual capacity was declining.

That was the first change in a continuing series of shifts in her mind. Those shifts require shifts in me and in my way of dealing with her. They can be very difficult, but with patience and thought, living with someone with dementia can be enlightening and even enjoyable.

My wife has always been a positive, good-natured, and highly skilled person.

Now, though, she asks, "Did I feed the dogs yet?"

If I answer, "You just did," she may cry or react with anger, saying, "I guess I should just quit talking!"

Through 40-plus years of married life, my wife and I seldom argued. We disagreed on various things, but never faced any disputes where agreement was out of reach.

I have a longtime friend who works regularly with persons with dementia. Recently I explained to her about the frequent problem of dealing with my wife's depression and anger, and asked how to prevent them. With pursed lips and half a smile, her reply was, "The first rule is, get used to always being wrong."

Three years ago, we downsized to a retirement community. This January we took our first real vacation since our move. We went to Rockport, Texas, on the Gulf Coast, and rented the cabin in which we had stayed three times before. During those four weeks, I learned and relearned several principles for enjoying married life in spite of a spouse's diminished mental capacity. I suspect these principles could be helpful to other aging couples or children of aging parents facing similar challenges.

Maintain a connection with the immediate past. Two weeks after arriving in Rockport, I went to buy groceries. When I returned, my wife asked, "How long have we been here?"

When I told her two weeks, she cried and mumbled, “I don’t remember anything before two days ago.”

I began reminding her of things we had done—driving along the coast, going to church, watching pelicans plunge into the canal and egrets wade along its banks. She had faint memories of a few of those things.

So I gave her my daily calendar and told her to write everything she could remember since leaving Kansas City. Each morning after that, I would ask what she remembered from the day before and suggest that she write those things down. During the remainder of our vacation, she could look back at what we had done. That day-to-day connection seemed to calm her anxiety.

Prepare for new and different situations. I should have prepared my wife for unfamiliar surroundings to ease her comfort with them. On previous vacations, we took lots of pictures—of the cabin we use, its dock, sail and power boats moored on both sides, and the Rockport area. Next year, for a couple of weeks before we go I’ll show her those pictures and take them along for her to look at as we travel. When we arrive, it won’t seem a totally new or strange place.

This practice can also be employed to refresh memories of family members and friends with whom we haven’t had contact lately.

Compliment and reinforce remaining memory. Complimenting a person with diminished memory when he or she remembers something from the day, days, or weeks before can reduce angry responses and hurt feelings.

“See, your memory is just impaired, not completely gone,” I’ll say to my wife.

Also, learn to accept the person’s forgetfulness without making replies that may emphasize it. If my wife asks whether we’re going anywhere today, I answer, “Yes, I believe you have a doctor’s appointment.” I’ve *almost* trained myself *not* to say, “Yes, like the three times you asked before, you have an appointment with the doctor at three.”

Eliminate decision making. Another helpful practice is to eliminate the need for persons with memory impairment to make decisions. After my wife’s father died, I repeatedly suggested going back to western Oklahoma to see her only sister, who had been ill. Several times I suggested calling Marcy, her niece, to ask whether her sister was well enough for a visit.

After several months, I decided we’d go. On the day we left, I asked whether she had ever called Marcy. She replied, “No, I don’t know her.”

I said, “She’s your niece, your sister’s daughter.”

She answered, “Yes, but I don’t know her.”

When she saw Marcy, she quickly recognized her.

In that case and others, I found that instead of asking her to make decisions, it’s better to make decisions myself and assume her agreement. On our trip, I’d say, “Let’s go drive along the bay,” or “I’d like some Mexican food. How about that place on the way to Corpus Christi?”

Suggesting and assuming cooperation without ordering or commanding usually gets agreement.

Take advantage of professional help.

Psychological help. A psychologist can often provide coping assistance to the patient with dementia and the family caregiver. Visits with a psychologist help persons with dementia verbalize their feelings and can show the caregiver helpful skills to employ.

Writing down what my wife had done on our vacation each day was her psychologist's idea, not my own. When we got home, I saw that the memory book included far more than a written record of activities. It included sections for pictures, maps, schedules of daily activities, recommended exercises, and coming events (such as her 50-year high school reunion this Easter). The idea for using pictures before future trips came from seeing that section in the psychologist's memory book.

Psychiatric help. Persons with dementia experience angry flare-ups and frequent depression. My wife is a classic example. An accountant by training, she did our taxes for over 40 years. Now she can no longer balance our checkbook. For decades she planned multi-million-dollar budgets. Her medical administration career ended when she realized she could not complete the annual budget for the foundation she worked with.

A geriatric psychiatrist can prescribe appropriate medications to lessen the depression and anxiety that often accompanies dementia because of those skill losses.

Neurological help. A neurologist can diagnose the type and severity of dementia, prescribe appropriate medications, and make referrals to needed helpers. My wife's neurologist sent her to a psychologist who specializes in testing mental function. Her evaluation emphasized the need for treating her depression.

Care for yourself. An important piece of advice came from the friend I mentioned earlier, who works closely with people with dementia. She stressed that I need to take time to renew my strength as a caregiver. Many resources are available for caregivers, and one place to begin is Aging Information with the Johnson County Area Agency on Aging. Just call 913-715-8861.

Accept the inevitable. At present, medications for dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, which is perhaps its worst form, can slow its progress but cannot cure it.

My mother died with Alzheimer's disease. For the last years of her life, I flew to Oklahoma every two months to visit with her for a few hours, and then flew back to Kansas City the same day. I still remember the day I visited her in Little Bird's Nursing Home and asked, "Do you know who I am?"

She smiled broadly and shook her head no. It hurt, but I was thankful she was in a nursing home owned by a neighbor of many years and cared for by a nurse she had helped train when she was still a nurse herself.

Someday, like my mother, my wife may not know who I am. But each day with her dementia gives me the opportunity to learn skills that enable me to show love for the important person she has been in my life for 50 years, come August.

Recently Jim Rawdon won the Writer of the Year Award from the Heart of America Christian Writers Network. Rawdon is a retired pastor and freelance writer who lives in Lee's Summit, Mo.

Celebrating Memorial Day—country style

By Marie Fletcher

It's a beautiful Memorial Day morning. There is a fragrant freshness in the air, left behind by the quick-passing prairie thunderstorm that swept through last evening. Here in western Kansas, the country roads dry rapidly in our notorious wind. As my husband steers the car along, dodging an occasional mud hole, we enjoy the flat countryside. Newly planted corn is about six inches high. The headed wheat, not yet showing gold, sways like ocean waves. Short buffalo-grass pastures are carpets of green.

Our destination is a country graveyard called Beulah Cemetery. As we drive through the gate, we see red, white, and blue flags waving in the breeze from the graves of veterans. We stop, and my husband carries flowers from the car to the final resting place of his parents. After paying our respects, we stroll among the plots, reading names and dates.

By this time, cars are starting to line up near the small native-stone church across from the cemetery. The historic Beulah Church is where Memorial Day services will be held this year. Regular church services no longer take place at the church, but it's used often by community groups for events such as this.

As we approach the open door, my husband greets an old classmate and former neighbor. They reminisce for a few moments about high school days in the 1930s and rooming together, when their parents would take them to town at the first of the week, along with food supposed to last until Friday. By the second day the food was gone, and if they were lucky they might have 20 cents between them to stretch for the rest of the week.

Inside the church, friends and neighbors in casual dress talk and laugh in the wooden pews. The sounds of meadowlarks drift through the open door, and from the red cedar and pine trees surrounding the cemetery, mockingbirds sing. Talk about "a joyful noise unto the Lord" !

The previously mentioned classmate, who is also president of the Beulah Cemetery Association, greets and welcomes the assembly. A slim man, close to 80 years old, he is dressed in Western attire—blue shirt, black jeans, and a leather belt trimmed in silver with a large ornamental buckle. Before going to the lectern, he places his Stetson hat upside down on top of the upright piano.

The group gathered there represents diverse denominations and ages. The program is just as diverse—a third-grade girl plays "Oh, How I Love Jesus" on the old upright piano, two teen girls play a duet, and a three-generation Mennonite group sings several selections a cappella with perfect harmony. To add the final touch, a senior citizen plays "America" on her musical saw. Each performer is warmly applauded.

Next, a kind-faced, rotund Presbyterian minister steps to the pulpit and smiles affectionately. His wife and grandson sit side by side on the front pew. He talks about

the sacrifices made for us by our grandparents, parents, and war veterans—and notes that sacrifice is a good thing.

Near the end of the service, as I look around at the white walls, wooden pews, wood-burning stove, and lantern hooks from a past time, two forked-tail swallows enter through the open door. The birds fly in circles, twittering above the heads of the congregation. Now and then they stop to rest on the horizontal part of the stovepipe or the lantern hooks.

Before closing, the cowboy hat is retrieved from the piano and passed for a voluntary collection to help maintain the historic stone church. After the last hymn and benediction, we pass back through the church door into the peace of late morning on the prairie. Smiles are shared, hands shaken, and shoulders patted as the group disbands for other activities on this memorable Memorial Day.

Inside the cool church, the two swallows continued to circle and twitter. No one seems too concerned. The birds will decide on their own when their church service is ended and will fly out the door to continue their communion with God.

Marie Fletcher is a freelance writer in Leoti, Kan.

PICKLEBALL **The sweet sweat of playful exercise**

By Victor L. Druten

Every senior has memories of physically oriented games from youth: kick the can, fox and geese, red rover, hide and seek. We usually had our own sets of rules, subject to change according to how many participants were involved and where we played. And we spent many hours in sandlot games for which we set our own boundaries (“*Joe’s front hedge is out of bounds!*”) and constructed our own equipment (a cork, a sock, and some tape made a great ball, and, “*No, Ma, our bat is not the handle of your kitchen mop.*”).

When we grew up, organized sports took over our lives. Once we had uniforms, regular practices, coaches, and rules cut in stone, the competition became serious. That wasn’t necessarily bad, but, darn, some of the fun got lost. Winning was now the main goal, not health or fun or camaraderie.

As we aged, we took our once hormone-fueled minds to more adult fields and found that our rusty body parts couldn’t get oiled enough. Less strenuous pastimes involving much less perspiration held sway.

Wouldn’t it be nice if we could recapture the enthusiastic grunts, sweat, and physical joy of those early sandlot memories? We can, and the answer is pickleball!

A few years ago, local community centers imported this game from down south as a way for seniors to get exercise. They outlined a 40 x 20 court, put up a tennis net, handed out wooden paddles and a Wiffle ball, and let us loose with rules suited for tennis.

A local paper recently ran an article showing silver-sneaker types playing this paddle/ball/net game. When I read the article, it sounded like a bunch of fairly active retired people enjoying keeping a plastic object in play. It sounded soft and easy, a

relaxing way to spend time with friends. You know: grandparents doing hand-eye coordination activities, isn't that nice.

So curiosity sent this ex-jock to the community center to check out my peers playing pickleball. When I entered the gym, I saw what I expected: about 20 60- to 80-year-olds who resembled normal seniors. I didn't notice any super-fit, exercise-is-my-life types; for the most part, they were everyone's expectation of someone's grandparents. *I'll bet they mostly use this time for morning conversation*, I thought.

Well, give me a ruler across the knuckles for a bad case of misjudgment.

Now, I spent my first 55 years playing and coaching multiple sports. I was a jock, a coach, someone who recognizes and judges athletic performance—so imagine my shock when, after watching two courts of seniors playing doubles, I had to move my jaw back up to where it belonged. There was no softness to these games. There was nothing remotely antique-like about how they played. Serves were hard, forehands had a lot of pace, overheads were potent, and returns were crisp, sharp, and decisive. Grandma and Grandpa had *game!*

It wasn't just one or two players who excelled; it was all of them. Soon I found myself applauding remarkable volleys, brilliant saves that belonged to someone 30 or 40 years younger, and amazing blocks and shots. I just could not believe that these people were capable of the athleticism I was witnessing. And this was not an all-star tournament of the best pickleball players in the Midwest. These were the center's regulars. They were all playing a solid, competitive, physical game. Hustle and competitiveness were in evidence, but more overwhelming were the smiling, laughing, and camaraderie. It was like a bunch of neighborhood kids having a blast.

By the way, these weren't just people who had inherited good bones and joints. I watched a couple of guys in their 70s make one outstanding play after another, and their knee scars showed they'd had knee replacements.

Kudos to all you pickleball players for reminding seniors everywhere that the fat lady has not begun to sing. And to you who haven't played, find some pickleball in your area!

Vic Druten, a retired teacher, lives in Shawnee. Druten formerly authored a Best Times column called "Putting On My Top Hat."

A grudging gardener and his tomato

By Pamela Boles Eglinski

My husband is not a gardener. In fact, he doesn't like plants, inside or out. But this doesn't keep me from bringing them home.

Last winter I bought a large philodendron. I set it on the hearth and stood back to admire it. My husband held forth with his usual scolding: "Do we have to keep it in the family room? Jeez, it's ugly. Can't it go outside?"

"Honey," I said, "it's January. And we live in Kansas."

"Exactly," he replied.

I get the point. I have another plant for my office.

In the summer, he scouts the outside of the house, assessing the plants and wondering aloud, “Can’t we cut that thing back? Who planted it, anyway?”

I have to lie and say, “the previous owners.”

“All the more reason to take it out,” he says.

So I was surprised when my husband came home last week with a Topsy-Turvy tomato planter. If you haven’t seen these, they look like a green mesh cylinder with three wires and a hook at the top.

“Tomatoes?” I ask in shock.

“I’m tired of eating those pink cardboard things they pass off in the grocery store,” he replies.

My eyes open wide. I want to ask whether he has enjoyed his martini a little early, but I don’t. My husband is on a mission, and I am going with him.

He pulls a bag of potting soil out of the car along with a very small, but cute, tomato plant. Its name: “Chef Jeff.” I pick up the planter and move toward the potting soil.

“Hold it,” he says. “We have to set up a hoist or it will be too heavy to hang.”

He hops into the car and departs for the hardware store. I keep planting flowers in the back yard, humming “You say tom-ay-toe, I say tom-ah-toe.”

He returns with two feet of linked chain, drops it on his work bench, and disappears into the house. Slathering himself with SPF 50, he dons his ultraviolet-ray-stopping shirt and returns to the garage, where he steps into his tool belt.

Fully equipped, he unwraps the planter and studies the instructions. Placing the illustrated text on the workbench, he reads aloud.

“First, we need to free the roots.”

My dear husband takes “Chef Jeff” by the throat and spanks the dirt from its roots, leaving good black soil all over his shoes and the garage floor. I say nothing, thinking, *I need to be encouraging.*

He feeds the roots up into the planter and attaches the foam rubber pad around the exit hole, then places the plant and planter in our large red wheelbarrow. *Couldn’t we just carry it?* I wonder.

He wheels the plant to the back side of the house, where he has drilled a hook into the roof overhang. Then he connects the chain to the hook and hangs the Topsy-Turvy planter. We scoop potting soil and dump it into the top.

“Careful,” he says, “not too much.”

I hold back on filling the planter to the brim, but one more cup of dirt won’t hurt, will it? I get a scowl, and stop.

It’s time to hoist the planter. We pull, listening for the clicking sound of the links as we try to ratchet the plant upward. Nothing happens. We try again. Still nothing.

“It’s not working,” he says, taking it off the chain and handing it to me. I try to stretch up to the hook without the hoist. But by now, the weight is considerable, and the wires are cutting into my hands. Afraid to put it down for fear of crushing “Chef Jeff,” I yell, “Get my leather gardening gloves!”

He’s off and running.

Back in seconds, he’s carrying my gloves and a step stool.

By now I’m hoping our neighbors aren’t watching, as this is edging toward the bizarre. He helps me onto the stool. I elevate the planter and jiggle the chain links into the

hook. I pause for a moment, afraid to let it go. My hands are sweating. I pull away. It holds!

But we're not done yet. It's time to water the plant.

Using the slow-drip method, he takes the hose and stands on the step stool. Watering from the top, he moistens all the dirt, stopping only when water runs out the bottom and mud splashes onto the side of the house. I get annoyed. *Not important*, I tell myself. What is important is that my husband—yes, *my husband*—took ownership of a plant.

After a hard day's work, we sit back in our white wicker lounge chairs, blue-and-white-striped umbrella overhead, wine glasses in hand, and gaze up at the tomato. We can't wait for our luscious homegrown tomatoes to ripen and drop into our outstretched hands.

Pam Eglinski writes from her home in Lawrence, Kan.

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Do-it-yourself sparkling windows

By Bill Noon

There is no better feeling than sitting back in your recliner with a glass of iced tea, looking through windows you've just cleaned. I've been cleaning windows for 18 years and know all the secrets, so let me share the do's and don'ts of cleaning your windows.

You'll need a squeegee, paper towels, or a lint-free cloth; some cleaning solution; a pail; a sponge; and a ladder for upper windows. You can buy a 10-inch squeegee at the local hardware store. If a squeegee is too long, you can remove the rubber and cut the channel down with a small hacksaw. Cut the rubber with a scissors and insert it back in. I use surgical towels to wipe up excess water, because they are lint-free and can be washed.

Some people like the old formulas, such as vinegar and water wiped dry with newspapers. You can also use a mild dishwashing soap and wipe the glass with a sponge, then squeegee it. Keep your sponge moist but not dripping wet. Wipe around the window edges with your cloth. You are better off if you don't use blue cleaning products, because they leave a film.

If you have storm windows, they'll have to be removed for cleaning. If you have a ranch-style or a two-story house, you'll need a ladder. (Ladders are dangerous! Don't lean over to reach a window. Please move your ladder.)

After you clean the window, don't forget to wipe the sill area. If you have storm windows, you will want to wipe around the inside frame to remove debris. If you have screens, you can sponge-clean them for best results, or hose them off and let them dry.

It's always a good idea to put a bath towel on the floor below the window you're working on. This helps keep drips and dirty water from staining the carpet or floor. Change the water in your pail often.

A lot of people have found that it's easier and just as effective to spray a cleaner on the glass and wipe it with a towel. I agree, because you will have less chance of streaking the glass. (Warning: Never clean glass in direct sunlight!)

I really do clean my own windows at home, and I experiment with different products. We use a secret family formula in the business that is too strong for an inexperienced person to use, so I like to have products I can recommend to do-it-yourself homeowners. I recommend:

Generations Go Green Glass Cleaner
Sparkle glass cleaner
Noonshine spray foam glass cleaner

All are available in the local grocery stores.

Some customers like the "half and half" plan, which means they clean their lower windows and hire a pro to do the upper ones. So sit back and relax, because you now know all the pros' secrets.

*Bill Noon owns Noonshine Window & Gutter Cleaning Service, Inc., of Overland Park.
913-381-3780; www.noonshine.com*