



Alberta Caregivers Association

Caring for Caregivers

Monthly eNews No. 36 December 2006

**Do you provide care or support to a family member
or to a friend with an illness or disability?
If you do, you are a caregiver.**

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hi Everyone,

Here we are approaching Christmas once again. I used to be such a fan of the Holiday Season. I guess I still am; however, in the last three or four years I find the whole thing very sad. This year will be the third Christmas since my husband's departure for the nursing home. The Holiday Season has never been the same. Although I still do the Christmas tree, with the help of friends, and the odd decorations around the house, when I hear Christmas music I feel more sadness than joy. The Holiday Season could be devastating for thousands of people because it is a very emotional time of the year.

In the last few weeks, my husband's condition has deteriorated seriously enough to discuss potential funeral arrangements. One day, as his daughter and I were entering the nursing home, to meet with the doctor, we could hear Christmas music playing. The Christmas tree was being decorated in the entrance. Normally I would have thought what a good thing that was, but instead it reminded me one more time of how sad my life has become. I realize that I cannot continue to focus on what I do not have. Rather, I know and believe that I have to concentrate on all the blessings that are given to me and be grateful for these things. I started to do that. At night in my journal, I list at least 5 things for which I am grateful. You know at times, on a bad day, you might have trouble finding one; however, you can always start with: "I am grateful for breathing." At least you get one there.

A few weeks ago I had to meet my oncologist for a regular consultation. I thought I was fine. I was doing all the things I had to do. Maybe a little trouble sleeping at times, maybe on my own a

little too much, but I thought I was just fine until during lunch with a very good friend, I started crying uncontrollably. Actually it was more like sobbing and I could not stop. Thank God my friend Pat was with me. In order to get privacy, as I was making a fool of myself, we ended up first in the chapel of the hospital for a while until people arrived for prayers. Then my friend found another location where I could continue Part II of my break down. What on earth happened? I really thought I was fine up to then. I had not cried like that in years. Later that day when I met the doctor, it was written on my face that I was falling apart. Now, I am grateful, first to have had my friend staying with me, certainly not the most fun day in her life, but I am also grateful to have met my doctor that day. Here are few things he suggested. Doctor's Orders:

Every day,

- Go out or do something fun,
- Try to meet people, and
- Allow yourself some time to cry if you need it.

I know that if you are a caregiver at home it is almost impossible to go out or meet people every day unless you have someone coming to relieve you. But if there is a time in the year when you could do with some relief, it certainly would be around Christmas. This year again, I had some good friends coming to my house to help me with the Christmas tree. It has been three years in a row that I have friends helping me with the decorations. That may be something you could consider if you are at home. Let the people come to you and ask them to bring some food. That way you do not have to provide or prepare anything. If they are good friends they would be happy to participate and help you out in such a joyful way.

Today another good friend came to pick me up, treated me for lunch in a nice restaurant and then took me to visit a really neat shop where all the Christmas decorations were at their best. Suddenly I realized that being plunged into the Holiday Season was not sad, because I was with her and we were having a great visit. She treated me even more when she bought me a beautiful Christmas decoration that I had admired while browsing in the shop. How lovely! When I came back home, I felt much better than when I left. The doctor was right, I have to see people and go out more often.

There is a lot of suffering in the world, and we do not have to go very far to see it. When I am at the nursing home and I look at the people there, I see a lot of suffering: the emotional suffering of the caregivers who still come to feed their loved ones, some of them more than once a day. There is that one man who comes for each meal to feed his wife. I never saw him smiling once; he seems to carry so much baggage on his shoulders. This kind of suffering is not easier for the caregivers at home, in fact it could be worse. Home caregivers may feel like they are in a prison. They cannot go anywhere unless they ask someone to come to their house and stay at home while they are out. If you are a caregiver at home, you also have the full responsibility of caring for your loved one and you are probably sleep deprived for months, overwhelmed and physically and mentally exhausted. The Holiday Season can only add some additional stress and sadness to your situation. This time of year might bring back special memories of happier times that will never come back. This is why we should make the effort to stay in the now. Recently I started again to read a book that was given to me by a very good friend a few years ago for Christmas. "The Power of NOW" by Eckhart Tolle. I have to say that it is helping me to stay in the moment; after all, what can the past or the future do for us now? Reading a good book might help you.

My first wish for you this year is that you have the courage to ask for help and seek support. And my second wish is Peace in your heart. May you find an abundance of serenity and harmony replacing any guilt or destructive feelings your soul may have carried. Remember Alberta Caregivers Association is there for you. Please contact us.

I hope that this edition of the eNews brings you enjoyment, information, and serves as a tool in your difficult and challenging journey. Please contact us and if you can attend our support group, as we would love to hear from you. Have courage and continue to have faith,

Christiane Greasley
Editor

COMING EVENTS

Enjoy the festive season!

- Festival of International Conferences on Caregiving, Disability, Aging and Technology June 16-19th in Toronto, mark this on your calendar.
- Celebrate Caregiver Week February 18-24 2007
- Hypothermic Half Marathon will be held February 18, 2007. This is a partnership effort of the Running Room and ACGA- 8 AM until Noon starting at the Highlands Golf Course.

EDUCATION

The Alberta Caregivers Association will launch the COMPASS program in the New Year, watch this space for times and places!

FROM THE EXPERT

Catherine Johnson, B.Ed., M.A.



Putting Festivities into Caregiving

The Holiday Season can be a trying time of year for some people and may be especially difficult for caregivers who cannot indulge in their usual festive events because of their present situation.

Although this may be a burdensome time perhaps I can offer a few suggestions about how you might bring some cheer and joy into this time of year.

Little things mean as much as big things if you have someone to enjoy them with you.

Then how might you get a little joy into your life while others are indulging in festive activities?

Here is a list of things that others have found to help them put a little brightness into their days at this time.

- ❖ Warm some apple juice with a sprinkle of nutmeg and cinnamon in it for a tasty holiday beverage.
- ❖ Invite someone to help you bake a few dozen holiday cookies. When you are finished you have something you can share with a friend invited for tea or juice. If you have no one who can do this for you, buy some festive cookies to enjoy.
- ❖ Make some popcorn add a little green or red food coloring (if no one is allergic to vegetable food dyes). Put a bowl of colored popcorn on the coffee table. Share popcorn for a holiday snack.
- ❖ Tie a bright ribbon around an orange so you can hang it on a nail. Stick whole cloves into the orange (on either side of the ribbon of course) until you cannot see the surface of the orange. Hang it near a heat vent to enjoy the spicy scent.
- ❖ This is the time to indulge in scented or pretty colored bath salts and to make the time to have a leisurely soak in the tub. Ask a friend to be in the house so you don't have to worry about the person for whom you are caring.
- ❖ Sit for a few minutes and listen to your favorite holiday music. Do this 2 or 3 times a day. It's time for you to rest more, not less.

- ❖ Ask someone to come in for an hour and go to the church of your choice just to sit quietly and listen to the singing or chanting. This is restful and peaceful.
- ❖ Just for the next few weeks, give yourself permission to look after the person you are caring for and do only 2 or 3 other things around the house. Do not make a long list and try to get them all done for the holiday season.
- ❖ Go for a *short* drive to see the holiday lights and enjoy the cheeriness they bring.
- ❖ Decorate a can or box and label it “Crap Can” – or some other appropriate title. Whenever anything that is really not your responsibility irritates you, write it on a piece of paper and put into the Crap Can. Say, “This is not my crap!” and let the can or box take care of it for you for a while.
- ❖ Put an inspirational saying on the fridge. Take a moment to reflect on its wisdom.
- ❖ Each day take even five minutes, sit in your favorite chair, put on your favorite sweater and think about the positive things in your life or phone a loved one.

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Best Wishes for a restful and blessed Holiday

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

From: Caregiver.com

“I will fearlessly acknowledge when providing care for my family member becomes impossible, either because of his or her condition or my own, and seek other solutions for my family member’s care needs.”

This principle in the Fearless Caregiver Manifesto relates to one of the most important decisions you may be asked to make as a family caregiver—choosing an appropriate long term care facility for your loved one. With this decision you are not only selecting a safe and comfortable place in which your loved one will live, but also a team of healthcare professionals who will become your partners in care. Before you choose a facility it is important to consider some important points. The first thing to remember is that when entering any facility you should trust your own senses.

http://www.caregiver.com/articles/caregiver/caregiver_manifesto.htm

Are you comfortable that the facility’s residents are content and well cared for in a clean and comfortable surrounding?

You may want to also:

Conduct a “smell test.” Be concerned if the facility has a strong scent of urine or even an overpowering disinfectant smell.

Speak to as many different staff and residents as possible. Get a sense of how the residents and workers feel about the facility; do they enjoy living or working there?

Talk frankly with family members of other residents. Notice how the staff treats the other residents in their care. That probably reflects the level of care your loved one will receive.

Visit at differing times of day and evening before making a decision.

Ask about the level of staff to resident? How many are on duty during the day, overnight and on weekends?

Ask about the facility's policy for holding a bed if your loved one must be hospitalized or go into a rehabilitation facility for a temporary period?

Ask to see a copy of the facility's contract and read it carefully. You may want to consult with an attorney before signing a contract.

Find out if the facility has a comprehensive disaster and emergency plan including evacuation procedures and when it was last updated. Ask to review a copy of the plan.

Visit a few area facilities before making a choice. You are in charge of this important decision and should never be made to feel as though you were pressured to choose any particular facility. You need to research, ask plenty of questions and above all, (as always) trust your own instincts.
Take care

Gary Barg
Editor-in-Chief
gary@caregiver.com

IT'S A GOOD TIP



To easily identify baggage when traveling, place several large strips of contrasting colored tape on your suitcase or tie a large bright color ribbon to the handle.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

No Slipping and Sliding for Me! During these cold winter days it is not uncommon to hear about people slipping on the cold ice or snow. Many become isolated in their homes due to the fear of falling, but with a few precautionary steps in place, one can prevent falls and injuries like sprains, fractures, or bruised areas, during the winter months.

Here is an acronym "PREVENTION" to help avoid painful falls:

Plan ahead. Make time for you to get to appointments, as rushing can increase your risk of falling. Also try to plan a safe route for your winter walk.

Railings near-by are great to hold on to! They can help maintain support and balance when walking on slippery surfaces.

Exercise regularly – Practicing leg exercises improves strength and flexibility. As well, limb strength will facilitate stability and could aid in helping you get up if a fall were to occur.

Visit your health care provider as changes in vision, hearing, and muscles can lead to falls.

Eye protection such as sunglasses can block the glare when you are walking outside.

Nutritious food can help keep you energized and prevent you from getting weak or dizzy on your

excursion.

Talk to your health care provider about side effects of your medications. Certain medications may make you feel drowsy, dizzy, or lightheaded and might affect your alertness when you go outside for a walk in the winter.

Ice grippers on footwear can improve walking on heavy snow or icy terrain. Proper winter boots with deep-tread sole and low wide heel are also recommended to keep you grounded.

Outdoor stairs and sidewalks need to be sanded or salted during the winter and free of snow and ice.

Night lights should be used. Ensuring pathways are well lit, can allow you to see any hazards in your way preventing a fall from occurring.

Jenny Stephens, BSc in Human Ecology

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Adapted from: "HKPR-Healthy Adults" <http://www.hkpr.on.ca/news.asp?id=1831> And "Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit" <http://www.healthunit.org/injury/seniors/falls.htm>

WORDS OF WISDOM

A friend is a person with whom you dare to be yourself.

Pam Brown

That's funny!

Two antennas met on a roof, fell in love and got married.
The ceremony wasn't much, but the reception was excellent.

Volunteer Opportunities

Runners are already registering, and donations are already rolling in for the Hypothermic Half Marathon to be held February 18, 2007. Held in partnership with the Running Room, ACGA provides volunteers to help with this popular event, which will take place from about 8:00 A.M. until noon. The activity kicks off Family Caregiver Week, to be held February 18 to 25.

The Running Room's many enthusiastic athletes and fitness participants in its Running Clinics are listed on the website at www.runningroom.com and folks wishing to pledge can sign up online. This was a major fundraiser for us last year and both volunteers and runners enjoyed the activity and good cheer.

We need 40 volunteers to fill the different positions and those helping outside will work in short shifts – guaranteed! All volunteers will be treated to a delicious brunch after the event, which takes place at the Highlands Golf Course.

Round up your family members, friends, and neighbours to help out for a few hours at this worthwhile event. Call me at 447-9301 to sign up.

Heather C. Miller
Volunteer Coordinator

There is no membership fee required to receive E-News. To be a member of the ACGA and participate in the association just fill in the following form. Donations are welcomed. A charitable tax receipt will be issued for a donation over \$20.00



**Alberta
Caregivers
Association**
Caring for Caregivers

Membership Application Form

<p style="text-align: center;">Personal Information</p> <p>Name: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p>City: _____ Prov: _____ PC: _____</p> <p>Phone: (_____) _____</p> <p>E-mail: _____</p> <p>Are you a caregiver? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Is a family member a caregiver? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other- specify.....</p> <p>Volunteer opportunities are:</p> <table><tr><td>Fundraising <input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Information displays <input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td>Special Events <input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Board & committee <input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td>Friendly Visiting <input type="checkbox"/></td><td>Administrative Assistance <input type="checkbox"/></td></tr><tr><td>General service <input type="checkbox"/></td><td></td></tr></table>	Fundraising <input type="checkbox"/>	Information displays <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Events <input type="checkbox"/>	Board & committee <input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly Visiting <input type="checkbox"/>	Administrative Assistance <input type="checkbox"/>	General service <input type="checkbox"/>		<p>Membership for 2006:</p> <p>Individual \$20.00 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Organization \$45.00 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Corporate \$150.00 <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>I wish to make a donation in the amount of</p> <p>\$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Total\$ _____</p> <p><i>Please make your cheque payable to:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Alberta Caregivers Association 14220 – 109 Avenue Edmonton, AB T5N 4B3 www.AlbertaCaregiversAssociation.org Phone :780-447-9301</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tax deductible receipt will be issued.</i> <i>Charitable Tax Reg. No: 86590 2217 RR0001</i> <i>Canada Revenue Agency www.cra.gc.ca/charities</i></p>
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Special Events <input type="checkbox"/>	Board & committee <input type="checkbox"/>								
Friendly Visiting <input type="checkbox"/>	Administrative Assistance <input type="checkbox"/>								
General service <input type="checkbox"/>									

October 25, 2006

Thanks to everyone who participated in this edition and thanks to all of you for reading us. Remember; send us your feedback, articles, news and suggestions or questions etc.

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