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Silver Anniversary - 25 Years of Honoring Long Lives with Passion



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Eldercare Services was born in my kitchen 25 years ago. It has been an incredible journey of honoring the lives of so many wonderful individuals with advocacy, support, hands-on help and my heart. The stories of our clients have become part of my story... stories that have enriched my life and those of my staff. I am honored to share with you both my journey and a few of the wonderful stories that have happened along the way.

One story that I'm brought back to is Jane, in her late 80's. Since her only living relative was in Florida, she was sent to a nursing home after a fall. A social worker, who knew that Jane really wanted to be in her own home, made a recommendation to see me. After consulting with Jane, and her Banker/Trustee, who was hesitant to bring Jane home since she suffered from dementia, I convinced him I would oversee every segment of her life. Jane was able to enjoy seven more years in the home she loved. She had great care, good health and lots of community enrichment. I became enriched as well!*

Over the years, I have seen sad lives transformed to lives of quality and peace. I have seen those struggling for answers find the solution to a problem or find ways to cope with something that could have been life-threatening. We have worked with families without direction or resources to find a path that gave the entire family peace of mind. What a joy these

transformations have been and I feel honored to have taken part in them.

A dear client who comes to mind is Jim who originally called me because he was concerned he would die before his blind wife. I began working with them and three years later his wife suddenly passed. Jim needed a companion for cooking and conversation. We provided these services for him for five years, until he moved to an assisted living community that we helped him choose. Because of the support of our care management and companion caregiver, Jim often reached out to thank me for giving him a life he had not even thought possible. Last year, Jim called just two days prior to his passing, thanking me for the quality he enjoyed through his 95th year. I was honored to have become part of both his and his wife's end of life.*

Back when I began my career as a Care Manager for Contra Costa County in 1984, and later worked for a non-profit, we didn't have portable phones that you could fit in a purse and most of us didn't even have pagers. The few assisted living facilities in existence at that time would not accept individuals who used wheelchairs and/or sometimes even a walker. When I founded Eldercare Services there were only a few home care companion companies and only one other professional doing private Geriatric Care Management in the county. Look at where the Baby Boomers have taken us – we are certainly in a booming industry now!

Allowing clients to stay in their own home, usually their wish, but not always workable, has been very

rewarding to me. For the past 10 years, I've been working with Millie who is over 100, and her husband Howard. While our care started with just a few hours per day, several years later they both needed 24/7 support and were able to stay in their home for an additional seven years. While their needs differed, initially they were able to stay together. If they had moved into a care facility situation, they would probably have lived separately. When Millie eventually did need more skilled help, Howard went to a small assisted living home and Millie went to a skilled care community where she still is at age 101. When we bring them together, it is wholeheartedly delightful to see the sparkle in their eyes after 75 years of marriage.*

Earnestly passionate about making aging a positive experience, despite the challenges we may face as we age, I have always been part of the bigger community serving on committees, task forces and commissions. From serving on the board of Diablo Respite Program in the 80's and 90's, helping initiate the idea of S.H.A.R.E., (Social & Health Agency Resource Exchange), remaining on the Panel of Experts for San Francisco's Strategy for Excellence in Dementia Care to serving as a member of the Alameda-Contra Costa POLST Coalition (a committee of the California Medical Association), it's what I do...serve... educate...and try to make a difference in every life I touch.

At times we are only needed as consultants to families and that has been rewarding as well. Seeing the old and/or new conflicts between the adult children transforming into

*advocacy for their parents, leading to a high quality life in their later years, is a win-win for the entire family. I think of a family where all four children had different opinions on what was best for their parents. With our help they were all able to see the strengths and weaknesses through the same lenses and be guided by the Care Manager who offered options for now, and for later that would support their parents' dignity without burdening all four adult children. Two of the adult children started coming to our support group which supported their caregiving journey. Family education and support is sometimes the best medicine for peace and harmony.**

A big part of Eldercare Services these past 25 years has been family education. We offer over 20 classes and/or support groups in our office, and provide over 30 community presentations every year. Information is empowering so we are offering a new class for people with a new diagnosis of a disease. Individuals, couples and/or partners, as they start down an unknown and potentially frightening path, will receive education, information and resources for dealing with a progressive illness

such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's or MS. This class is the *Holistic Approach to Managing Progressive Illnesses* – so "joy" is still in the lives of these families.

As a pioneer in my profession, it has been my mission as both the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers President and



previously as the Western Chapter President, to build and inspire others to take up this career as the need is so great and is continuing to expand. As I was recently honored to be chosen for the 2014 Women's Hall of Fame (for *Women Demonstrating Leadership*) by the Contra Costa Commission for Women, my message at the award ceremony will continue — "If you have a passion, make it a profession and those with "like" values and vision will join you in leadership to

make this world a better place. If you lead for only self-interest purposes, the end result might not make an impact and you might be left with feeling empty or unfulfilled."

Silver is a precious metal that symbolizes 25 years . . . it can tarnish if not taken care of. I'm proud to say that because of the dedication of our staff and the thousands of individuals who have supported Eldercare Services, we have only become brighter! While we look forward to celebrating our Silver Anniversary, we also have become accredited by the Joint Commission, earning their Gold Seal of Approval, demonstrating our commitment to provide the highest quality services. It's what we do!

I commit myself and my entire team to advocate for our clients that joy and peace be part of each life, despite any obstacle or setback.

Get the support, direction and resources that a Professional Care Manager coach can bring to your family. Doing it on your own could cost you in time and dollars. Keep a balance in your life and remember to be mindful.

February's affirmation: "I am loved and express my love for others often." Remember to focus on your breathing as you say this affirmation daily.

Community Class

Walnut Creek
The Holistic Approach to Managing Progressive Illnesses

3rd Friday of February, May, August and November
10 am to Noon
 1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek

\$10 per person/\$15 per couple or 2nd family member
 Proceeds benefit the Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's Institute and National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Class Registration:

Please call at least 3 days ahead

For more information, visit www.EldercareAnswers.com, call 925.937.2018 or email us at Info@EldercareAnswers.com

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member
2nd Thursday of every month from 6 to 7:30 pm
 1808 Tice Valley Blvd., **Walnut Creek**

1st Thursday of each month from 5:30 to 7 pm
 Calvary Presbyterian Church, 2515 Fillmore St., **San Francisco**

No Cost and No Registration Required

More Info: 925.937.2018 or 415.469.8300



*Clients' names & details have been changed to protect privacy.