

Another Perspective

Written by Lori Pankonin

Senior living visits provide special memories

What started out as taking a relative a newspaper after it was rather fresh off the press has turned into my weekly delivery route at Imperial, Neb. Heights, Parkview and Manor.

I leave most of the 27 newspapers at the subscribers' doors, but if the door's even partway open, I walk in for personal delivery. I just love the greetings.

I really treasure the wisdom of so many of the residents during other visits. My grandchildren agree to sing to the residents sometimes when they're in town.

They can sense the delight, and we focus on how good it feels to make others happy. They really enjoy stops at the ice cream room, and we always head down the hall to see the fish and birds. And one special friend consistently has a quarter for each of them.

Austin, my grandson, would go with me on the paper route when he lived in Imperial as a preschooler. He took his toy drill and pretended to scan the paper before handing it to the resident. He soon recognized individual characteristics, telling me that he needed to be careful not to scare Henry because he wouldn't hear us when we walked in his room. And he was right.

It warms my heart to see children mingling with the residents. That vividly sparks memories of a generation ago when we lived in Wauneta, Neb. and I made regular stops with our two girls at the nursing home there. My grandpa was 98 when he died in a Colorado nursing home. Seeing how the residents there lit up around children was what started our Heritage of Wauneta visits.

We determined a special person where we would direct our visit and chatted with others as well. Our buddy, Howard, requested pie when he came to our house for his birthday supper. Although he didn't have many teeth, he had no problem downing his meal with a big smile, ending with pie a la mode.

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His death was hard on me, but the girls seemed to understand, and we started visiting Lue regularly. She saved some of her bingo prizes to give to the girls and was always happy for a visit, no matter how brief. I sat with her in the hospital when she took her last breath, and it was a special moment. But it ripped at my heart, and I thought we might take a break from having a “special” person.

Then Brooke suggested we have Percy as our special friend and when he died, we could visit Bob more often. At first I thought that was rather insensitive, but I realized they were looking at death in a different light. Our Heritage friends were older and had lived good lives. It was actually quite natural for them to die and go live with Jesus.

Percy very proudly presented the girls with his paint-by-number creations of puppies. Bob revealed his chocolate stash and invited us to enjoy his treats with him. One gentleman never did forget that I danced with him on the day they had special music, and that made me feel good. As a centenarian, Edna fascinated me when she'd recite the poem about the presidents that she learned at age 4.

Daughter Celeste started doing ladies' nails on Tuesdays after school. I really can't imagine a first-grader doing an ideal nail painting job; however, just think what that gift of time did for the older ladies. Picture an elderly woman having one-on-one time with a young girl, having her hands touched gently and sharing conversation. Wow.

One day Celeste told me that one of the ladies had a lot on her mind. I asked what they talked about, and Celeste said it was just between them.

Several years later, Celeste is now studying speech and language pathology in graduate school. “I just love old people,” she said with sincere respect when referring to one of her adult clients. And she admits that it was probably her Heritage days that instilled that compassion. What a valuable characteristic to have acquired.

My dad was very instrumental in working with others to get the Imperial Manor established in 1968. He was so excited when progress happened to add on the various other levels of care.

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And he made clear to me that if the time came that he needed more care, he did not want us to consider adding another generation to our household. As it turned out, Mom was his caregiver.

I have a great respect for the elderly. And I really admire people who work in senior facilities who take the time to make life for the residents more pleasant. Sometimes it isn't easy to leave home, but it certainly is great that folks in the area have an option to move to a friendly environment and make that their home.

Kudos to those who volunteer at senior facilities and to those who take time to visit the residents. I find it inspiring!!

Holyoke Enterprise April 7, 2012