

January 2021

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VOL. 15, ISSUE 1

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**Susan Hines**

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Meredith Collins, Publisher

We can never imagine having to care for those who cared for us. Not long ago both my husband, Joe, and I experienced having our very strong and independent mothers reduced to needing constant care for the most basic of needs. It is a reality of life, but a hard pill to swallow.

As many of those who have shared their stories in this issue have related, it is time consuming, emotional and challenging. At the same time, it is a heartfelt obligation that simply cannot be ignored.

One of the most eye-opening aspects of this situation is the dedication and compassion and competency of those who provide that kind of care day in and day out. For those in the health care business it is more than caring for those who are family. It is an inspired commitment to placing others above yourself and it represents the very best that we as humans can be.

The well-told stories in this issue fully echo what it means to give. It is filled with love for those we love. The stories are touching and warm. I hope you find them inspirational too. NDN

## Inside

- |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5. Susan Hines           | 28. Pat Healy             |
| 10. Vicki Keeton Miller  | 32. Char & Raffy King     |
| 13. Scott Williams       | 36. Megan Goodmundson     |
| 16. Elizabeth Dabney     | 39. Dr. Christina Mutch   |
| 19. Adam Stillwell       | 40. Neighbor to Neighbors |
| 22. Joanne Whitley       | 42. Maxine Goins          |
| 25. Paul & Susan Rodasta | 46. In the Neighborhood   |

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PROFESSIONAL HEADSHOTS

lisa

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# A Heart for the Aged

By Caroline Johnson

Like many with aging parents, Susan Hines and her siblings took on the role of caregivers when their parents became unable to care for themselves. Though it felt like a bit of a role reversal, it was a special time as Susan dealt with new challenges while always striving to maintain the utmost level of care and love.

For Susan's family, her parents' time was split between their children as they alternated between their home state of Texas and Susan's

home here. With her parents and siblings living in Houston, Susan would take time off to go be with them there or host them in Williamsburg if they were able to be in Virginia. When her parents were at her house, Susan had to learn how to find balance as she juggled full-time work with effectively caring for her parents as they aged.

"By the time they were spending a lot of time in Virginia, they were needing quite a bit

of care," Susan shares. While she luckily had support at home, it still made the caretaking process difficult. Susan's daughter, Erin, lives and works nearby and would assist when she could. Additionally, Susan's husband, Gary, was retired and was able to take care of them while she was at work. "The hardest part for me about their care was finding the physical stamina and practicing time management," Susan says. "You also have to ask for help. You

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can't do it all by yourself.”

When the care became challenging, Susan looked to her faith to find her strength. In addition to her strong faith, she often reflected on what her parents had done for her. “It was really easy for me to remember how well they cared for me when I was a child, and even when I was an adult,” Susan says. “They always loved us unconditionally, so I wanted to do the same for them when the time came.”

One additional challenge was learning how to communicate with her father, who had Alzheimer's. “I remember one day coming home from work and putting my arms around him and just talking to him like everything was normal, and he responded so well,” Susan says. “Even though he had lost a lot of his mental cognition at that time, he always responded well to a loving touch and normal conversation, even if he couldn't participate.”

Moments like this continually reminded Susan of the benefits of having her parents with her and her siblings to age in place at home. Sadly, her mother and father passed away. While dealing with the loss of their father, the siblings came up with a plan for housing so their mother could comfortably spend the rest of her time with them. Thankfully, her brother was able to create a special apartment in Houston for her mother to live in until her passing, always surrounded by people who loved and cared for her.

As a caretaker, Susan was taught life lessons in appreciating the aging and recognizing the special relationship between a parent and a child, even when times were challenging. Seeing her parents age, Susan became passionate about the importance of proper care for the aging population. “Love your parents while you have them because you don't get another chance with that,” Susan says. “If at all possible, I encourage people to keep their parents at home.”

A friend, Sam Kukich, founded Dignity for the Aged, a group committed to being a voice for the aging population, especially those in nursing facilities. After starting a Facebook group in 2018 to highlight and discuss common issues, the idea snowballed into something bigger than either of them could have imagined. Susan became very involved.

“Our group consists of people in need of support as well as employees of nursing facilities, legislators or even everyday people that want to assist the cause and help change the lives of the aging population,” Susan says. “We have almost 900 members in 42 states and four countries. It has really grown.”

The purpose of the group is to give people a listening ear so they know they aren't alone in what they're going through with aging loved ones. They wanted to be there for those who were going through similar challenges with someone they love in a nursing facility. “We knew starting out that we were working on a good cause, but we didn't know the extent this would resonate around the globe,” Susan shares. “It has become a force in state government, and we're currently working on legislation to amend bills and re-enact codes relating to nursing home standards of care.”

The group's two main goals are to change the resident to caregiver

A portrait of Sonia E. Hepburn, MD, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white lab coat over a purple top, smiling. The background is a clinical office setting with a sink and cabinets.

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ratio and stress better pay for CNAs who provide 90 percent of the care in these facilities. Because Virginia still doesn't have a good grade on the families for better care nursing home report card, their fight is more important than ever. "I know what I went through taking care of my parents, and it isn't a good thought to think about people not being well taken care of at that age," Susan says.

To assist the cause even further, Susan and her daughter are facility activity coordinators through Dignity for the Aged. In this position, they plan activities and play music for those living in nursing facilities. "I have a heart for the greatest generation, they're dear to me," she says. "When we share music in these homes and have our students perform, the people living there get a lot out of it."

This heart for the aging and ability to share music with them seamlessly blend together as Susan is a talented musician. Falling in love with the cello in middle school, Susan has an accomplished career in orchestra, a love she

began sharing with her daughter when she was old enough to play. When her daughter graduated high school, she left an open seat in her place in the Virginia Symphony. Seeing an opportunity to continue her career as a cellist, Susan auditioned and got the part!

Today, she and her daughter Erin co-direct the Tidewater Cello Ensemble, which they also founded together. Susan is currently a string teacher instructing beginning string for elementary schools within Williamsburg-James City County as well as teaching private lessons.

Susan has incorporated her work with Dignity for the Aged with her teaching as well, encouraging students to write cards for her to deliver to local long-term care facilities during the holidays and beyond through a program called "Letters from me to you."

"It's especially important now because of the isolation due to the pandemic," Susan says. "We've delivered thousands of cards over the last few months to every facility on the Pen-

insula."

In addition to her love of music, she also has a love of travel. Though a recent trip to Europe with Tidewater Cello Ensemble seniors was canceled due to the coronavirus, she looks forward to future trips. While Susan enjoys seeing the world, she also enjoys making the most of living in Williamsburg.

Susan and her husband, Gary, are thrilled to call Williamsburg home. Both being from Houston and being high school sweethearts, they were always open to the idea of moving as Susan would vacation in Williamsburg with family and enjoyed this part of the country. When Gary's company had an opening in Yorktown in 1993, they packed up their belongings and moved.

Married 42 years now, they love taking walks in Colonial Williamsburg and are consistently reminded of why they love living here. "We think of it as having the amenities of a big city with the feel of a small town. To me, it's the best; we love everything about it." NDN



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Lisa Martin Lee Photography

# Vigilant in Mom's Care

By Narielle Living

Vicki Keeton Miller loves her family and loves living in this region. She was born and raised in this area and now works for Ferguson Enterprises. "I schedule the appliance deliveries and installations," she explains.

Vicki had always been close to her mother, so when she noticed things seemed a little off, she knew she had to do something. Of course, caring for a parent can be trying, but perhaps

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the most difficult part is the planning that comes after a diagnosis. For Vicki's mom, it was Alzheimer's disease. "When she first was diagnosed, we sold her house and sold the car and she moved in with me," Vicki says. At this point, the disease had begun to rob her mother of much of her memory and functioning. It was not an easy move, and Vicki remembers her mother was upset at the loss of independence, mostly from losing her car. "She was mad because we took her car away. She really wasn't aware we sold her house, though."

They did the best they could, and Vicki outfitted her house with the types of things people use when living with someone who has dementia: doorbells on the doors to alert everyone that someone has gone outside and safety precautions around the house.

At the time Vicki's mother moved in with her, Vicki's youngest child was 10 years old and Vicki worked outside the home. In order to accommodate her mom, Vicki used an adult daycare service to help care for her.

Her mom was initially not happy about that situation. "She ended up enjoying herself because they did activities and lunches and stuff," Vicki says. Balancing the needs of her children with the needs of her mother meant juggling things to make it all work. "We couldn't leave my mother home alone," she says. When her son had activities, Vicki found sitters for her mother who could keep her safe. "She would wander off or go outside."

The one thing that is advised as crucial for all caregivers is to make sure to stay healthy and balanced or the act of caregiving becomes overwhelming. People are often encouraged to find support groups, but that's not always possible. Vicki didn't want to complain to her friends, and she felt like her situation would be depressing for others to hear. "It's hard for them to understand," she says. "You just go on autopilot and do what you have to do. It's funny, because everybody used to tell me to find a good support group, and I'm like, who has time for that?"

For most caregivers, there reaches a point when caring for a loved one is simply too much, and the health needs are overwhelming. That's when people start looking for a facility. Navigating insurance and Medicare can also be confusing, and on top of that, even when a loved one is in a facility, caregiving does not end.

The decision to move her mother to a facility did not come easily, but it was necessary. After about a year of attending the adult daycare, Vicki's mother came down with a virus. "And then she got worse, and it got to the point where I couldn't take care of her, so I put her in an assisted living place."

The process of finding a place to care for a loved one can be overwhelming. There is little guidance available to help people, and usually decisions have to be made after one or two quick tours of a facility. Vicki began searching for a nursing home that was close to both her and her aunt Mary, her mother's sister. Her idea was that if her mom was near her, she and



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her aunt could check on her mother often.

One facility was highly recommended. Vicki was vigilant and checked on her mother carefully. After all, with Alzheimer's disease her mother's world was shrinking, and Vicki did not want her to feel abandoned. "I monitored everything," she says. "I didn't trust anybody with her because she couldn't speak for herself."

Then, 2020 brought a pandemic, and everything changed. People were told to stay home, and nursing homes stopped allowing visitors. Although the facility where her mother was housed had tried to arrange FaceTime visits, it was not successful for them. Alzheimer's patients do not always do well with technology.

At that time, Vicki's mother weighed 110 pounds. Vicki remembers the last time she saw her mother before the pandemic hit. "She was scooting around in her wheelchair, she was eating, she was smiling. And then once the shut down happened, for the first time in 10 years I couldn't see my mother every day."

"My mom couldn't say my name but she

knew who I was and she knew who her sister was. And all of a sudden, now you have two people who are constant in her life that she doesn't see anymore."

At that point, her mother began losing weight. "She lost 20 pounds in a month." Vicki did see her one final time and was shocked at how frail her mother looked. She felt that although her mother had not contracted the coronavirus, the inability to see her family was ultimately what contributed to her downward health spiral and hastened her death.

Vicki misses her mother greatly and is glad she had the chance to care for her. She is fiercely protective of the elderly and learned from her experience with her mother to remain vigilant when others are caring for them. "You are their best advocate."

Her Aunt Mary also had a rough year. "Five months exactly after my mother died, she lost her husband. Then her sister-in-law died the day of the funeral."

Today, Vicki's daughter is 34 years old, and she also has three grandchildren. Her son, who

was 10 when his grandmother lived with them, is now 22 years old. "My son missed having his grandmother around [when he was younger] because she was very active in his life up until she had Alzheimer's but now he doesn't remember a whole lot." Her daughter, however, had spent a lot of time with Vicki's mother. "We know she's better off now but she's angry about it." Her daughter's anger stems from the fact that she wishes her grandmother had not been so isolated.

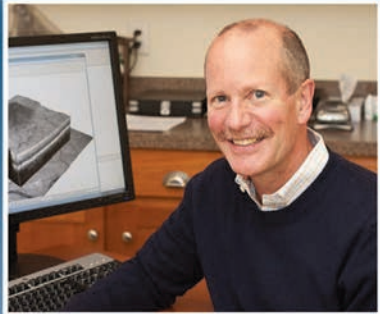
Today, Vicki Keeton Miller is adjusting to a new world without her mother. She notes that caregiving consumed her life for many years. "It took all my time because I worked all day and then I left work and I went to see my mother for a few hours every night and then by time I got home it was late."

Vicki's advice to others who are looking for a facility for a parent or spouse is to first, use caution, and second, know that they must be an active participant in their loved ones' care. "You have to be diligent; you have to stay in their lives." NDN

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**DESIGNS by REGGIE AKDOGAN**

# SCOTT WILLIAMS



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

## DEALING WITH DEMENTIA

By Dawn Brotherton

No one looks forward to the day when the roles are reversed and the child must care for the parent, but for some of us, that time has come. Scott Williams learned a lot from his father, even when Preston Scott Williams started to show signs of dementia.

“My dad was a character; I will tell you that right now,” Scott says with a huge smile. Pres-



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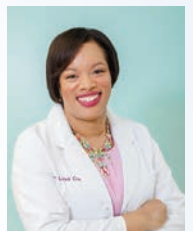
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ton was a Marine for five and a half years, a state trooper for 33 years, followed by sheriff of York County for 16.

Scott followed in his footsteps and retired after 26 years in law enforcement. After graduating from York High School and then Hampden-Sydney College with a degree in history and political science, he came back to the area to teach at Warwick High School until a position opened with the Newport News Police Department.

During his 26 years there, he worked patrol, was a child crimes and sex crimes investigator, ran the records division for a year, and was a hostage negotiator for 19 years. In 2016, he retired from the police force and went back to Hampden-Sydney College as the Chief of Police and Director of Safety.

When his father's health took a turn for the worse, Scott returned to the area to help his mother. "I've always heard people say [my father] was like a legend in the area," Scott says. "My dad was the kind of person who would take the shirt off his back to help someone, and it didn't matter who you were. It didn't matter the color of your skin, where you were from, if you were an immigrant."

After Preston retired, he took a job running cars for Enterprise Rent-A-Car, just to get out and talk to people. "One of his favorite sayings was, 'It's better to break than to rust,'" Scott says. It was during this time in his life that Preston started showing signs of dementia.

After a fall in the backyard that resulted in surgery on his broken leg, Preston had a horrible reaction to the pain medication. When Scott and his brother Bryant got to the hospital, his father was yelling out numbers and letters, calling in artillery positions. "That's when it first kind of hit me. He's going back to a certain time in his mind."

About a year later, Preston ran a high temperature, and they took him to the hospital where they learned he was having a mini-stroke. "But for two or three hours, he thought it was 1947. He thought Truman was still the president, and he thought he was at the sick bay at the Naval Weapons Station clinic," Scott says.

The doctors explained to the family that this was Preston's new reality. When he went back in time, there was no use arguing with him. Scott explained to his daughters Lilly and Lacey what was going on with their grandfather, and they adjusted well. They didn't take it personally when he got their names wrong or forgot them entirely. Scott praises his mother for handling it all so well. "Toward the end, it was really rough on her, and she knew he was in a lot of pain."

The part that really made Scott worry was when Preston began to lose his inhibitions. Although the doctor had explained it was normal with dementia, it was shocking to see his father act or say things that were inappropriate. Scott's best tactic was to get his father talking about a different topic. "That seemed to work about ninety percent of the time. But there were times where he would just go off, yell and scream at you, but that was more toward the end. We had to keep reminding ourselves, that's not him. That's the brain dying."

By this time, Scott and his daughter Lacey had moved back in with

his parents to help out around the clock. "It would blow my mind how one day would be so bad, and then the next day, be clear as a bell." One day when his father insisted that he needed to be in court to testify as the sheriff, Scott went along with it. They got dressed and drove toward the courthouse until his father snapped out of it. But during these times, Scott was catching glimpses into his father's past that he may have missed the first time around. He spent time with his father and heard stories he hadn't heard before.

In one of his more lucid moments, Preston outlined exactly what he wanted for his funeral, from songs to pallbearers. "I can remember how it would be one bad day and six great days." But toward the end, the ratio shifted to where there were more bad days than good ones. It was a full-time job caring for him, keeping him clean, and making sure he took his medication.

"But I think the other big part of it was making sure he was still human, making sure that everybody was still treating him like a human being. I can understand how some people could be afraid of this guy who's just sitting there shaking his head and humming hymns. I think people are afraid of the unexpected. They don't know what to do." But Scott doesn't begrudge his father any of that time spent.

"You're not going to get rich [taking care of the elderly], but you're going to get emotionally rich. I have gained so much knowledge about my family. So much understanding about dealing with people, not only with dementia." As a hostage negotiator and working in law enforcement, Scott thought he knew about dealing with people in mental crisis. "But dealing with somebody every day in your house really opens your mind, and it opens your heart," Scott says, getting choked up as he thinks about his father.

The biggest advice he has for others going through similar situations is don't sweat the small stuff. They will forget your name. It may feel hurtful, but don't let it become a sticking point. "Don't fight the person, fight the disease. When the person you're looking after says something outlandish or crazy, don't try to correct them, because that's the world they're living in."

He also stresses the importance of not hiding them away. Some people are defensive of their aging parents and are concerned the parent would be embarrassed to be seen in this state. Having their friends around to relive the memories with them can be helpful.

"When I teach hostage negotiation, I tell people, there's a reason why the great creator gave us two ears and one mouth. We need to listen more. I think it's a problem with society today. We don't listen as much."

Scott Williams lost his father to this disease in March 2020. After more than two years as a full-time caregiver, Scott is working as a consultant for colleges in security and law enforcement training. He is considering following further in his father's shoes and may run for sheriff in York County in the near future. In the meantime, he's working on writing a book about his father's life so others can learn from him the way Scott has. NDN



The graphic features the WholeLifeRx logo at the top left, with the text "BY BIOTICS RESEARCH" below it. To the right is a QR code and a short paragraph: "If you're ready to take back what's rightfully yours - your health and wellbeing - don't miss out on an opportunity to learn about a fantastic program that focus on the WHOLE body, not just exercise and diet. Just scan the QR code to learn more and gain access to our WholeLifeQ health assessment and to sign up for the on-line series." Below the text is a circular portrait of a woman and a small potted plant. At the bottom, the word "WELLNESS" is spelled out in large wooden blocks. To the right of the blocks is the WDC logo with "1895" and a star, and the text "THE WILLIAMSBURG DRUG COMPANY HEALTHY SOLUTIONS SINCE 1895".

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# ELIZABETH DABNEY



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

## Caregiving for Three

By Susan Williamson

Caregiving is a difficult task, especially when it comes in threes. Elizabeth Dabney was living and working in Richmond and newly married to her second husband, Russell, in 2007. Shortly after that, her aging parents fell ill. Since her parents lived in New Kent, she was not too far

away.

She says, “My mother was very frail, and she fell and ruptured her eye. It later had to be removed. She went from the hospital to rehab then a nursing home and then assisted living. Meanwhile, my dad was living by himself and

suffering from kidney failure.”

At the time, Elizabeth was working as a receptionist at the Massey Cancer Center at Virginia Commonwealth University and trying to take care of everyone when she came home. She and her husband tried to get her dad to move

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in with them, but he resisted. They eventually convinced him to sell the house and move to an independent living facility with her mom. He drove himself to dialysis on a regular basis.

One evening, her mom and dad were watching TV. Her mom looked over at him and thought he had fallen asleep in his chair. Her perception changed, though, when she walked over to him. He was not sleeping; he had passed away. This was in 2011.

Elizabeth handled all of the funeral arrangements and details, financial and otherwise, that are part of being the executor of an estate. She was exhausted, and her husband suggested they take a trip away. The couple headed for Florida, but while they were there, she received a call that her mother had fallen and fractured her wrist. They quickly returned to see what she needed.

After that, her mother complained of stomach pain. After taking her to a doctor, a diagnosis came back: stomach cancer. Elizabeth and Russell moved her in with them. A caregiver came in the mornings, and Elizabeth returned

from work in the afternoon and took care of her mother's dinner and bedtime.

Her mother worried about her. "This is too much on you," she told her daughter.

Elizabeth answered her, "Life is like being at the beach. When the water is calm, you just float along, but when the rough waves come, you paddle like hell." Elizabeth's parents had always been very strong. "It was hard to become the adult and have to make decisions for them." She adds, "I have worked in nursing homes and assisted living for most of my life. I was no stranger to illness and death, but it's a whole different situation when it happens to your own family."

Her mother passed away in 2012. Again, she handled funeral and executor duties. When all of that was settled, the couple decided to make a change and moved in 2013 to a gated community in Blufton, South Carolina, near Hilton Head. They liked it very much, but life intervened.

Elizabeth has two sons from her previous marriage. One of her sons, who lived in New-

port News, told her his cancer, a rare form of sarcoma, was back. He had been in remission for several years. He was divorced and had no one to help him. He was going to Charlottesville for chemo and alternately staying with his brother in Lanexa and in his apartment. He continued to work in the computer department for Newport News Schools as much as he was able.

"He had a large stomach tumor," Elizabeth says, "and the doctors here were afraid to operate. I went with him to the Roswell Cancer Institute in Buffalo, and they removed it. He later developed a brain tumor and it too was removed. For a while, he felt okay. He was supposed to go back for follow up in three months, but he didn't. His cancer returned and at the age of forty-five, he was told by the doctors that they could do nothing for him." She says, "He was in denial. He was trying to live in his apartment and have Hospice come in."

The couple decided to move back to Virginia and bought a house on two acres in this area. The home would also accommodate their

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ill son. "One day he fell in the bathroom and landed against the door. He was a big guy, six-foot-two, and we couldn't open the door to get to him. We had to call the rescue squad." He died in February 2015.

"We'd had to put our dog down in December and then Brian died in February," Elizabeth says. "I went into a deep depression. I had no energy. One of my sisters would occasionally call to check on me and I'd talk with my other son in Lanexa, but nothing really helped. My doctor put me on an anti-depressant, but it didn't change things very much. I started going to counseling. At that time, my husband had retired and was volunteering at Jamestown Settlement. He suggested I try volunteering to get me out of the house. I knew I had to do something."

She looked at the website and found a job opening for the museum gift shop. She was hired and went to work. She also knew she needed another dog, and a Labradoodle named Izzy came into their life. "She's very smart and very independent," Elizabeth says. "She passed

puppy obedience class but just barely. And she doesn't come for treats, so we had to put up an invisible fence." Izzy has since been joined by another puppy, a golden retriever. "My husband complains about the dogs," she says, "but they keep him entertained, too. They are so interactive."

Elizabeth loves their neighborhood. "It's rural, and everyone has at least two acres. The neighbors are nice and always willing to help. But Williamsburg has really grown and changed."

Elizabeth first moved to Williamsburg in 1979. She and her first husband visited on the way to Florida from upstate New York. A Colorado native, she had met her first husband when he was stationed in Colorado Springs. After they married, they moved to his home area near Buffalo in the snow belt of upstate New York. They both liked Williamsburg and decided to relocate. Later, she moved to Richmond.

Elizabeth left her job in Jamestown when she needed foot surgery. "I was on my feet all day, so the recovery would have been very dif-

ficult." Now she enjoys gardening and joining Russell in volunteering for Meals on Wheels. He is a woodworker and now that the couple are in their seventies, he has downsized from making outdoor furniture to wooden toys and craft items. His latest projects include Santas and snowmen for the holiday season. He crafts, and she paints the finished products. They have enjoyed selling at the weekend open air market in Toano which requires that everything be handmade. "Right now we're not doing anything social due to COVID, but selling at the market is fun."

Elizabeth Dabney credits three things for her recovery from crippling depression: finding a job, getting a dog and going to counseling. Her advice to others in the same situation is, "Time does heal all wounds. You don't forget, but the heartache eases."

She highly recommends counseling, pets and activity to aid in the healing. She also appreciates her husband's support through all of the caregiving situations and her depression. "Russell was wonderful." NDN



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# ADAM STILLWELL



## Caring for Stepmother

By Brandy Centolanza

Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Caring for his sick stepmother as she suffered through the final stages of dementia during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge for Adam Stillwell, but he says he would do it all over again. Janet Stillwell, who passed away in March 2020, was the only mother Adam had ever known, so it was only natural for him to look after her

in her time of need.

“There were a lot of sacrifices,” Adam says. “When you are a caregiver, the only real reward is making sure that your loved one is loved and cared for, and I would do it again just so that she would know that.”

Janet had been a part of Adam’s life since he was about the age of seven. Adam grew up

with a single father, Larry, in Norfolk in his early years until Larry married his stepmother. Janet, who was from England, was a huge part of Adam’s life and a mother figure, but the pair lost touch after his father passed away in 2009 and Janet moved to Florida.

“My dad had been our rock,” Adam says. “He held our family together.”

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Three years ago, Adam received a phone call out of the blue from a woman claiming to be Janet's caregiver asking him to come pick his mother up. The woman, who turned out to be scamming his mother, had abandoned Janet in a hotel in Alabama.

"I drove ten hours to pick her up," Adam says. "She was sick, she was emaciated. She had dementia, but I didn't know at first that that was what she had. It was a real struggle."

Adam brought his mother back home to Virginia to live with him, his wife, Heather, and his two children. Overnight, Adam essentially became a full-time caregiver. While caring for his mother, Adam also had to track down the woman who had scammed Janet and help reestablish his mother's identity and credit.

"The money she had wasn't enough to put her in a caretaking home, but I didn't want that anyway," Adam says. "I wanted her to stay with me."

Adam was able to purchase a small, one-story house nearby for his mother, where he

cared for her until her passing. The situation was complex for him at first as he navigated Janet's world not only as a dementia patient but also as an alcoholic. Janet had begun drinking heavily and taking prescription pills after losing her husband.

"She was a completely different person than what I remembered, and I think my dad's passing definitely had everything to do with it," Adam says. "I had to wean her off the alcohol and get her off the pills. She was unreasonable due to her condition."

Janet's dementia eventually progressed and her behavior became more erratic. Some days she appeared lucid, while other days she was unpredictable, sometimes staying up all night and sleeping all day.

"One day she was functional and the next day she would be like a vegetable," Adam says. "It was very stressful."

As the dementia worsened, Adam had to assist with taking Janet to the bathroom and helping her walk. Caring for his mother was often a strain, but Adam didn't mind.

"Having my mother around was comforting to me," he says. "Knowing she was safe was comforting to me. I worried about her, but she didn't make it easy on me."

On tough days, Adam would turn to others for support. His wife, Heather, had gone through a similar experience while caring for her own mother. Adam also leaned on his network of friends.

"You can't do it alone," Adam says. "I tried doing it alone for too long and it hurt my situation. You need physical support but you also need emotional support. I had my family and friends, but I also had creative outlets."

Adam, who had been active in theater while in high school, decided to return to the stage as a release. He became involved with Williamsburg Creative Collective, an artist advocacy group serving those in Williamsburg and on the Peninsula. He also performed in community theater productions through the Williamsburg Players, the Peninsula Community Theatre in Newport News and the Generic Theater in Norfolk.



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"I have a lot of passion for theater," Adam says. "I started getting a lot of parts. There was always something for me."

Adam performed in plays such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Rock of Ages* as a distraction from caring for his mother. He also wrote a Biblical musical, "A Song for Saul." The story is about King Saul's relationship with the prophet Samuel as well as his successor, David.

"I've had the story in my head since I was sixteen," Adam says. "It's a light comedy. It took me about three years to write it. It just flowed out of me. I've always enjoyed writing. I also taught myself how to write the music. I am just waiting for COVID-19 to resolve itself so that I can put it on."

Work has also been a source of comfort for Adam. Though his background is in information technology (IT), Adam found a better fit first as a historic interpreter at Jamestown Settlement and then at Colonial Williamsburg.

"At the time, working at Jamestown Settlement was the best job I ever had," Adam says. "I was an interpreter in the fort. I got to use

my hands, build fires, learned to cook using 17th century techniques. I got to fire muskets. I used a lot of talents I never knew I had. It was a very unique experience."

Adam worked at Jamestown Settlement for two years before being hired at Colonial Williamsburg. He started out as a tour guide for Colonial Williamsburg's nighttime ghost tour programs and now works as a historic interpreter.

"I love to educate and inform people and change any preconceived notions people may have about history," Adam says. "I would love to elevate my position at Colonial Williamsburg."

As the country began to decline due to the pandemic during the spring of 2020, so did Adam's mother's condition. One day in late March of last year, Adam found his mother unresponsive and curled up, muscles locked.

"She wasn't aware of her environment," he says. "I needed to take her to the hospital, but I couldn't find a place due to COVID-19."

Janet was later admitted to Mary Immaculate Hospital, where they put her in hospice

care.

"I didn't even know what hospice was," Adam says. "I found out she hadn't been eating or drinking. She had hidden her food under her mattress because she was embarrassed by her weakness."

She passed away two days later.

"When it was safe to do so, I spread her ashes over my father's grave," Adam says. He tears up at the memory and all he's been through these past few years.

As Adam continues to find the strength to move on, he's refocused his energy on theater and his script for "A Song for Saul." The script and music are finished and have been copyrighted. Now, Adam is just biding his time until he can hit the stage again. Eventually, he would also like to direct a production of "The Madness of George III."

Caring for the only mother he had ever known during her final years may have been a difficult journey for Adam Stillwell, but it was something he felt he had to do.

"It gave me the closure I needed, and the care she needed," Adam says. NDN



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# Compassion in Caring

By Ashley Smith



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Joanne Whitley and her sister, Sharon, grew up in rural Smithfield, Virginia. The girls were raised by their mother, Bonnie, a woman of fierce determination and high spirit. Joanne describes her as petite and tiny, with a loud voice. "She was a true spitfire!" Bonnie worked for the Commonwealth Attorney's office for several years, but Joanne never had any interest in a legal career.

When she left home, Joanne attended Old Dominion University where she wanted to

study geology or anthropology and eventually be paid to dig in the desert. However, concern about the amount of math involved led her to pursue theater and English. Joanne was only willing to pay for one degree at the time. Eventually she focused fully on literature and poetry, because as she says, "If I had to pay for it, I was going to study what I wanted."

Upon graduation, Joanne had no desire to toil in an office setting, and since she was not qualified to dig in the desert, she hap-

pily worked at a coffee bar in Norfolk. After relocating to northern Virginia, she took her barista skills to Starbucks. Joanne was content but a friend's persistent encouragement soon led to a major career change.

Joanne's former manager at Starbucks had taken a position at a law firm in Washington D.C. and often called Joanne to encourage her to apply for a position. Joanne resisted. Starbucks was a fantastic company and she enjoyed her job. For months, her friend pestered her.

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Though she was in line for a promotion, Joanne relented and applied to the firm. “I had no interview skills at all,” she says with a laugh. “I was in too short of a skirt and too tight of a suit!” Despite the faux pas, she immediately connected with the interview panel, and they offered her a position right away. Still nervous about walking away from her secure position at Starbucks, she replied, “I’m about to receive a promotion, but if you’ll pay me this much, I’ll consider your job.” Thankfully, the firm offered a salary above Joanne’s expectations, and her legal career commenced.

Of course, she started as a case assistant since she had no prior experience, but she caught on quickly. As case assistant, or paralegal, she prepped court cases to go to trial and received her legal education in so doing. So, though she mainly worked in litigation, she had gained experience with corporate law, privacy and security issues, and even trained new paralegals, or “the new me’s,” as she calls them. Joanne continued to excel. By the time she left the firm, she had been promoted to senior paralegal.

She left the first firm, and then the second one, and landed at a new, boutique law firm. The firm couldn’t afford a paralegal, so they hired her as an office director in charge of billing.

“The secretaries did all of the work that a paralegal would have done. Anything the lawyers couldn’t or didn’t have time to do, we did.” She recalls that the finest compliment she ever received came from a partner at that firm. “Joanne, ‘he said, ‘we were just hoping you’d keep the lights on. The fact that you were able to send out bills and receive payment was amazing.”

Joanne held more titles at that firm, including director of operations, director of billing and collections, and paralegal manager. In all, Joanne spent 25 years working in the legal profession.

In the meantime, her sister, Sharon, had moved to Williamsburg and was in closer proximity to their mother. During a family trip to Charleston, South Carolina, both Joanne and Sharon noticed that Bonnie didn’t seem to be quite herself. She enjoyed the trip, but her daughters had noticed slight changes to her mood and energy level. Though Joanne returned to Washington, she couldn’t help but worry about being so far away from her mom. After a time, she made the decision to move closer to the family. The chance to reconnect with her high school flame sweetened the deal, and Joanne arrived in Williamsburg with her legal career behind her.

Instead of finding similar work, she pursued a real estate license. Again, she laughs. “It was the first career I learned about before I started!” While she studied, she worked for a local cleaning company. It was honest, contemplative labor that Joanne enjoyed. After she earned her license, she started her own cleaning company in order to retain a client whom she enjoyed serving. JC’s Cleaning Service, LLC focuses on turnover cleaning at Williamsburg Landing and especially now, Joanne is quite thankful to have the opportunity to safely work during the tumultuous economic times that the pandemic has wrought. She describes cleaning as a therapeutic endeavor. “It’s a time in which I can simply focus on the task in front of me, then move on to the next.”

In addition to her career as a Realtor® and owning her cleaning company, Joanne also runs a small business in which she loans out vintage china for events.



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As Joanne settled into Williamsburg, she and Sharon were faced with the growing concern over Bonnie's health. It had become clear that she was suffering from the effects of Alzheimer's. The diagnosis irrevocably altered their lives. Supporting Bonnie became their focus and through the process of finding appropriate care, they made the decision to become co-guardians of their mother and co-conservators of their mother's estate. The gravitas of that responsibility is not lost on Joanne or Sharon. "You're constantly second-guessing yourself. Is it better there or here with us? Are we doing the right thing?" The never-ending questions can become overwhelming.

As with any long-term medical condition, there have been challenges, but Alzheimer's is a particularly insidious foe, as it steals independence and trust little by little. The family, however, has poured their energy into supportive, encouraging caretaking, both for Bonnie and one another. As they transitioned to the new role of caretakers, Joanne and Sharon became a united team. During the current pandemic, their commitment to protecting their mother is remarkable. Both daughters remain vigilant regarding coronavirus protocols. "We have to be careful because we don't know if or when we may get to see our mother or perhaps, if necessary, bring her home." Another casualty of the virus has been their visits with their mother. Though they've recently had limited success with video calling, Joanne and Sharon have not seen their mom in almost a year.

One of her favorite memories of her mother illustrates the fun and fire of Bonnie's indomitable spirit. At the time, Joanne was still living in northern Virginia. Bonnie had come for an extended visit and the two decided they would go out to eat at the French restaurant in town. So, of course, they had to dress for the occasion. "She hadn't packed much, so I was throwing everything I could at her." In their fancy attire, the ladies arrived at the restaurant. Once seated, the owner showered them with special attention, and Bonnie delighted in every moment. "We felt like royalty, especially Mom, and I told her afterwards to keep everything she was wearing!"

Joanne also praises her sister, Sharon, whose dedication to both Bonnie and to the clients she serves through home health at Riverside Health System is unwavering. "My sister and I are a team. Neither one of us does this alone, and I believe that our experiences have driven Sharon to deliver even greater care and service to the families she serves." Sharon channels her energy and stress into helping others, while in addition to cleaning, Joanne enjoys spending time with her best friend, Kim and her family.

The Whitley daughters also fundraise and walk for the Southeastern Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association to support the local work of that organization. In light of her experiences with the Association and with her own family's recent battles, Joanne hopes that the community will rally around those most vulnerable in their midst. "The pandemic is confusing and difficult for most of us, but for those to whom it cannot be explained clearly, it can be terrifying. Have a thought for those who aren't able to protect themselves from this virus or whose knowledge of it must remain limited." The Williamsburg community has shown strength, resilience, and grace to one another, and it is Joanne's dearest wish that the community extend that same compassion and consideration to its most senior residents. NDN



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# PAUL & SUSAN RODASTA

# LOVE HARDER



By Alison Johnson

Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Before Paul Radosta proposed to his now-wife, Susan, she made sure to tell him about the serious illness she has that would one day change both of their lives.

At age 24, Susan was diagnosed with polycystic liver and kidney disease, an incurable condition that causes clusters of fluid-filled

sacs to grow inside organs and damage them over time. She underwent a lifesaving liver transplant in 2019 and now needs a new kidney.

Susan, an energetic social butterfly when healthy, has been bedridden at times and today is mostly homebound as she waits for a kidney

donor. Struggling with extreme fatigue, nausea, pain, and frequent kidney infections, she has been on disability for six-plus years after having a brain aneurysm linked to her illness.

Paul, 52, is her primary caregiver. And he has absolutely zero regrets for his clear-eyed decision to marry Susan 23 years ago.

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“I want people to know that while caring for a sick spouse is hard, there is joy to be had,” he says. “I thought I was trading off the hard times in the future for the joy of knowing her in her youth, but I was wrong. The joy goes on.”

His simple but powerful mantra: “When life gets hard, love harder.”

When Paul is not on the job at Target, where he works in customer service five nights a week, he aims to get Susan, 51, outside for fresh air as much as possible. He handles a lion’s share of daily household chores, including caring for their two dogs, cooking and grocery shopping, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Susan helps whenever she is able.

“I love my wife for her willingness to struggle with pain and fatigue while striving for her best life,” Paul says. “She is highly motivated to do things. Sometimes she can do a lot, and sometimes her world shrinks down to the couch and Netflix.”

What has helped Paul most as a caregiver was Susan’s own advice to him. Shortly after her hospitalization for the brain aneurysm in 2014, and as her liver began to fail, his wife told him that the Susan he married wasn’t coming back.

“That sounds sad, but it was actually so liberating,” Paul relates. “Once I realized that and accepted that, I stopped thinking about what we’d lost. I started focusing on what we could be going forward.”

Paul was a caregiver of sorts in his first career, teaching. After spending most of his childhood in Easton, Pennsylvania, he earned a Bachelor’s Degree in English from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. He also has a teaching certificate from Kutztown University, also in Pennsylvania.

In 1995, Paul met Susan when both were looking for roommates in nearby Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Susan’s roommate had just moved out of their duplex to elope, while Paul was in the process of leaving his parents’ house. Friends first, they soon fell in love and were married in 1997.

“Aside from physical attraction, the things that I admired most about Susan were her virtues, like honesty and loyalty,” Paul says. “She is the kind of person who you can always trust and rely on.”

Paul taught high school English in two New Jersey school districts before the couple moved to Virginia in 2008 for its more affordable cost of living. They settled first in Charles City County, where Paul again worked as an educator, and then moved to Williamsburg in 2010.

“With teaching, I liked the challenge and opportunity of talking to my students and helping bring out the better parts of them,” he says. “Sometimes their writing would really show off who they were inside, which was very rewarding.”

In 2010, Paul took a job at Target after budget cuts eliminated his position teaching middle school reading and high school English. He has been with the retail giant ever since, currently working a three to 10 p.m. shift and handling a lot of COVID-related sanitization work.

Paul and Susan have three children: Danielle, 23, a computer programmer for the Department of Defense; Jacob, 20, a junior at Old Dominion University; and Emily, 16, a junior at Warhill High School.

Emily, an aspiring veterinary technician, is on the autism spectrum but helps her dad with baking and dog walks; the older two kids pitch in whenever they're home.

"They all have adapted so well and really shined," Paul says. "They keep their mom entertained and engaged and give her reasons to be up and active if she can."

For many years, Susan was in good health, only dealing with high blood pressure and occasional urinary tract infections. A psychology major in college, she had jobs in mental health care, customer service and real estate. She loved going to her kids' sporting events and Busch Gardens and Water Country USA, and she quickly made friends wherever she went.

Then the day after Easter 2014, Susan developed a severe headache and collapsed at home. A ruptured blood vessel in her brain miraculously didn't kill her, but it did damage her memory and ability to focus. Soon afterward, Susan's abdomen grew distended as her liver began to swell and fail. After her liver transplant, anti-rejection medications suppressed her immune system and impacted her kidney function, which has dropped to between 22 and 25 percent.

Ironically, Susan has been too healthy to be designated as "active" on the national waiting list for a cadaver kidney. Her best bet is a living donor, but no one in her family is a good candidate for a variety of reasons. She and Paul also have too much income for Susan to qualify for Medicaid, and they worry they won't be able to afford dialysis if she needs it. Still, Paul has focused on life's positives, including the couple's still-strong marriage and the small joys they find every day.

One of the couple's hobbies is trying out a new recipe each week, which has produced items such as homemade broccoli cheddar soup, wonton cups, nacho dips and taco-style crunch wraps. Paul also tries to leave crockpot dinners for Susan before going to work.

"I am so thankful to have Susan around," Paul says. "She is the kind of woman who tells me not just the things I want to hear but the things I need to hear. A walk with the dogs or a trip to Target is our adventure now. A recipe that comes out yummy and pleasant conversations with all of our children are special treats and memories made."

Although Paul has largely given up personal hobbies such as reading and playing guitar, he finds stress relief in shopping outings to provide for his family and especially on neighborhood walks with Emily and the family's rescue hound mixes, Pickles, 4, and Toby, 6. Pickles suffers from epileptic seizures, which the couple knew when they adopted her.

"Susan's medical issues have made us more patient and willing to provide Pickles the care and love that she needs," Paul notes. "Both dogs spend their time at Susan's side during her rough days and bring such happiness to the house on days when things could be very depressing." Susan also has stayed connected with her family and friends to boost her mood, but she is most grateful to her husband. "It's a tough road we've been down, and there doesn't seem to be much of an end to it in the near future. It's not a fun way to live, but he is a trooper," Susan says.

Paul Radosta disagrees on the "fun" part, though. "We still have so many good times. We are still writing a great life story together." NDN



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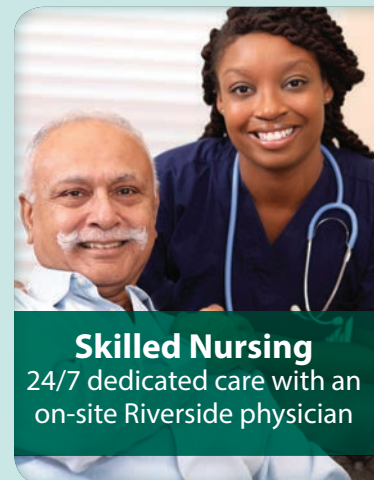
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# PAT HEALY



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

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Pat Healy did not grow up in this area, but since coming here she has helped countless numbers of people facing significant crises in their lives. Originally from St. Louis, Pat refers to herself as a “sodbuster,” a term that signifies a farmer who plows the land. Despite the farming reference, Pat’s father worked in the film industry, which led to a move to a different part of the country when she was a kid. “My father was transferred to New York, so we moved

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from St. Louis to North Jersey.”

After meeting and marrying her husband, they lived in the northern part of New Jersey for a while before deciding to come to the Williamsburg area. “At that point we had nobody, no living family, up in north Jersey,” she says. “It was horribly expensive.” Although it was 30 years ago, she says that at that time the cost of dinner and a play in New York could cost around \$500, in addition to having to deal with constant heavy traffic. “We were very happy to come down here. My mom and dad

had a retirement home here, so we would come down with the kids because it didn’t cost us anything.”

Today, Pat is a facilitator for a support group for caregivers. “It’s sponsored by the Williamsburg Presbyterian Church where I’m a member, but it’s open to anybody. The only requirement is that people are taking care of a loved one.” Pat is clear that it does not have to be a parent or a spouse. It might be a parent caring for a sick child. However, she notes, the typical person who comes to the caregivers’ support group

is an older woman caring for an older man who is ill.

Pat’s involvement in this group was a natural fit. “I have my Master’s Degree in Psychiatric Social Work,” she says. In her work life, she had worked with many people in a therapeutic setting. She has been retired for almost 10 years. “I worked at the local community mental health center in what was called the day support program, which is a day program for people with long-term, serious mental illness.”

She knew about the caregivers’ support pro-

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gram at her church, and when the woman who had started the program decided to step away from it, Pat jumped at the opportunity to help. "I thought, I could do this, so I said, 'send me in coach.' And that was it."

Sometimes the work she does as a support group facilitator can be draining, but Pat also finds that this is a very hopeful group. "There is one gentleman who had been encouraged by the pastors to come to our group," she says. "I called him and offered a personal invitation, and he said he'd think about it." Later, this same gentleman walked by the room where the support group was being held. He did not like what he heard. "He heard a lot of laughing. And he reported to the pastor, 'that proves this is not for me, this is not funny.' Well, of course it's not funny but you have to laugh. [There are] some really funny people in the group, and we do a lot of laughing. And he's right, the whole thing is not a funny concept but if you don't laugh, you cry."

Many caregivers find the prospect of going to a support group daunting. "More likely it's

something else to put on their schedule, and their schedules are already so full with doctor's appointments. But Pat says there are always ways around these issues.

"I have used Faith In Action, and I recommend it highly to all of our members because Faith In Action will send somebody over to basically babysit. They don't call it that, but they go over to sit with the person, while the husband or the wife goes to the support group for an hour, an hour and 10 minutes. And that's worked out well."

The support groups last for approximately an hour to an hour and a half. In general, they touch base with everyone in the group to find out what is happening in their lives and with their loved ones, and they check in to see what each person has been doing to take care of themselves. Taking care of yourself is one of Pat's biggest mantras that she repeats to caregivers. "You've got to take care of yourself," she says. "You can't take care of anybody until you take care of yourself. We kind of run by that and they're very good about offering sug-

gestions and ideas to each other. And that's an important part of the group, too."

Things are a little different right now, and meetings are being held via Zoom. For many, the isolation on top of caregiving has been debilitating. Pat reminds everyone to stay positive. "Don't ever give up. There's always hope. It doesn't matter where it comes from, but wherever you can get it, grab it. And take care of yourself. You know, walk every day or put your makeup on, dress up." Eventually the pandemic restrictions will be lifted, and Pat says to take the time to get a sitter for your loved one and go out with friends, even if it's just a quick lunch. "It's an outlook thing," she says. "It's true."

The people who attend the support group meetings are a mix of folks from everywhere. "It started mostly from the church because it was sponsored by the church and the person who ran it was a church member." When Pat started running the group, she opened it up to everyone and anyone who is a caregiver. "My experience is, people who are in trouble have



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the same symptoms. They feel overwhelmed, they feel angry. And then they feel guilty because they feel angry. Those are exactly the same feelings, whether you're caring for a sick child or a demented husband. It doesn't matter what the problem is. The feelings are what have to be dealt with, and that's why I decided to open it up to more than just people from our church and more than just old people."

The truth about caregiving is that it's easy to get burned out doing this, especially when caregivers don't take care of themselves. For that matter, many people get burned out just during the course of everyday life. "It could happen to me if I'm not careful, but I'm careful," Pat notes. She has been careful to maintain a balance in her life, plus there is one aspect of her world that keeps her centered. "I have a very supportive husband. That's the key." In addition to a love of playing the game of pickleball, Pat spends time reading, going out with friends and watching football with her husband.

Although she loved her job before she retired, she is glad she stepped away when she did. "I knew it was time to leave," she says. "I

was ready to get out because I had done what I'd set out to do. I started the program down here. And that that was the main goal, to get one going. I met that goal, so it was time to move on."

Although Pat Healy is not currently a caregiver, she has worked with enough people in this role to repeatedly stress to them the importance of self-care. "Take care of yourself. You need to take care of yourself before you can take care of other people. I've seen too many folks come in, and they're dragging. They're exhausted, they're emotionally spent, and they can hardly stop crying. Those are all symptoms of burnout. They can't take it anymore and they don't have anybody to help them and they don't know where to turn."

The wonderful part about being in a group, she adds, is that other members will offer ideas and suggestions to each other. "There are lots of ideas, it's never hopeless. There's always an idea or a suggestion from somebody else who has tried something that works. Don't give up. Check out the resources. You're entitled to them, and most of them are at no cost." **NDN**

## Next Door Neighbors

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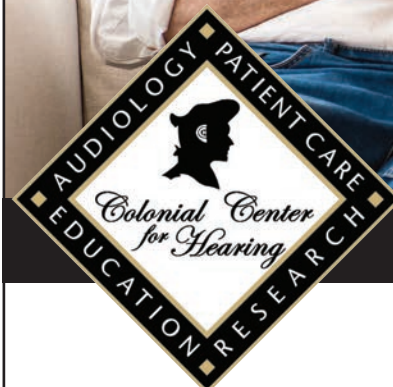
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# CHAR & RAFFY KING



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

## Offering Hope and Encouragement

By Narielle Living

Charlene King, or Char, and her husband Raffy do their best to support others and act as a source of inspiration. They believe in remaining positive about all aspects of life and hope to share some of that positivity with others in their world. "One of the things that we love to do is to be encouraging to others."

Raffy grew up in Pittsburgh, and Char grew

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up in Oklahoma. Char came to this area to attend college, and both landed jobs in the Washington, D.C. area. But they didn't meet at work. "We actually met at church," Char says.

They have been in this area for 16 years. They raised four children, then their lives started to change. Only it wasn't changing in a way they could have foreseen. As their last child moved out, Char's mother began needing care, and they decided to move her in with them.

"We gave her the upstairs of our home so she could have most of her treasured things. And then, within a year of her moving in, we began caring for our grandson who was just a baby at the time."

So it was that Char and Raffy found themselves caring for two people at opposite ends of the age spectrum. "We had both a stroller and a wheelchair in the back of our car."

Caring for a baby and an elderly person can be challenging, but Char and Raffy navigated this with one necessary element. "We always tried to keep our sense of humor," Char says. She notes that there were some really trying times, especially when they had both a 90-year-old and a three-year-old crying that they had to go to the bathroom at the same time. Through it all, Char and Raffy remained calm and maintained their positive outlook on life.

Gradually, Char's mother's health deteriorated, and she eventually died. "After she died, and when our grandson was four and a half, his baby sister was born."

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Alberto is an exceptionally responsible, conscientious student, and that the experience and expertise of the staff of Literacy for Life, as well as its library resources, are at my disposal. For me, it has provided a meaningful occupation in retirement. I am not only addressing a critical societal need in a stressful time, but I am also building a strong personal relationship with a fine young man. We are friends who help each other!" Hans heartily recommends tutoring with Literacy for Life as a flexible and rewarding volunteer experience. "Give the gift of language! Speaking and listening are how we interact with the world, make our living, raise our children, become part of the community. Language, like music, nourishes our spirits."

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When their granddaughter was about a month old, she too came to live with them.

For almost 40 years this couple have been caregivers, and through it all they have maintained a positive outlook. “We’re just so grateful that we are able to do this and, in fact, we keep a gratitude journal. We have found that if we don’t focus on gratitude, it all just becomes too hard.”

The world of kinship care, or caring for children who are in your family, can sometimes be difficult to navigate. These are children whose parents are either deceased or unable to care for their own children, so they may already have had a rocky start in life.

“We would say that almost nothing has gone smoothly,” Char says. “We struggled through the courts, and we now have custody of the children, but that took us a long time.”

Finding community resources has made this process much easier for the King family, and Char says that it’s important to know where to look. “We have several resources now that we

rely very heavily on,” she says. “You just have to keep knocking on doors until you get one to open for you.”

Char and Raffy believe that the number one resource that was of the most assistance was the Williamsburg/James City County Social Services kinship program. “Barbara Watson is running that now, since the kinship navigator just left and they’re in the process of hiring a new one. But I cannot tell you how much they helped us.” Char notes that with something as seemingly simple as filling out forms to obtain Medicaid for the children, she and her husband were stymied. “We both have graduate degrees, and we were trying to navigate our way through social services to get Medicaid for the two children, because our insurance would not accept them. We could not figure this out even though we’re smart. I kept saying we have graduate degrees, we ought to be able to do this.”

Char says that therapy is an integral part of caring for children who have had to go

through the system. “We found a group that does behavioral therapy, and I think they do other kinds of therapy too, called The Healing Project. They are incredible,” she says. “We had tried three or four different family therapy places, and we finally found this one. They help children who’ve been through trauma or who are experiencing difficulties in life.”

The other resource that Char and Raffy relied on was the school system, who they found to be extraordinarily helpful. “They were able to help us a lot, and the teachers, administration and staff are superb. I am so grateful to be living in Williamsburg and have all these people that are so excellent, and they’ve all helped us. All of the people that help us are the heroes. We’re just doing the day-to-day work, but they’re the heroes.”

Char mentions that another point in their gratitude list is where they live. She feels their location is ideal for raising children. “We have a yard where the kids can play outside and our grandson can ride his bike around the neigh-

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borhood.” Char and Raffy joke that they are going to send the kids outside to run their energy off, but of course that is not how it works. “We always joke that we’re going to tire them out, but of course when they come in, they’re still full of energy and we’re the ones that are dragging.”

An important aspect of caregiving for someone of any age is taking care of the caregiver. It’s important for the caregiver to stay healthy and balanced in order to help the person they are caring for. So how do Char and Raffy take care of themselves when they are caring for others? It turns out that their greatest strength is each other. “My husband and I are best friends,” Char says. “When we first met, we became best friends. And it was kind of a surprise to us to find out that we had fallen in love with each other because we were best friends first. We have so much joy in being able to be with each other, and we sometimes communicate without words. We can just look at each other

and communicate.”

Raffy adds that they are very fortunate because both of their grandchildren are athletic. “They love to go to the park, or just outside in the neighborhood, around the block. We like being outside, and they love to walk.”

In addition, Char says, both kids are smart and healthy. “They have a lot of interests. For instance, our grandson loves Legos, and he can spend an hour or two in his room building. Our granddaughter loves puzzles and arts and crafts. It was harder when they were little, especially when we had my mom, but now it’s getting a little easier because they are becoming more self-reliant and are able to get involved in their activities.”

Char and Raffy point out that they are one of many thousands of people referred to as “grand families,” grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. While they know they are not alone, it can still be a difficult road. “Sometimes we feel pretty overwhelmed, but we feel

like we do have those resources. It was very hard work, but we have them, and that gives us strength.” In addition, Char adds, their focus on gratitude is what allows them to enjoy their lives with the children. “We just keep praying for good health, strength, energy and wisdom and all those things.”

Recently, their grandson, who is now eight years old, asked them what will happen when he and his sister grow up. He wanted to know if his grandparents would get more grandchildren to take care of. “That’s how he sees us, that we take care of people.”

It is this perception of reality that Charlene King and her husband Raffy offer to their grandchildren that will help them frame the world as a place where people look after one another, a concept Char and Raffy embody. In doing so, it is their wish to offer hope for anyone who is facing the prospect of caring for a family member. “We want to give you hope and encourage you,” Char says. NDN



*Helena S. Mock, Esq., Managing Attorney*

*Happy New Year!*



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MEGAN GOODMUNDSON

# Caring for Dad

By Lillian Stevens



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

One of Megan Goodmundson's favorite quotes comes from the late Margaret Mead, perhaps America's most famous cultural anthropologist. It goes like this: "Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts. We are at our best when we serve others. Be civilized."

Megan aims to live her life in that vein, and she believes it begins at home.

"My parents devoted their lives to being good parents," she says. "Now it's my turn to help take care of my dad."

She and her brothers, one of whom lives with their dad, do their best to provide care for their father who has spent the past 22 years living with Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's is a long-term degenerative disorder of the central nervous system that mainly affects the motor system.

"I learned about respite care years ago when I was volunteering a couple times a month for an organization that provided caregiver respite," Megan says. "I was assigned to a family whose dad had Alzheimer's."

Alzheimer's is, of course, one of the most well known forms of dementia.

"I'd go to their house and stay with their dad so his caregiver could get out of the house and have an afternoon to herself. I learned then the importance of a caregiver just having that time to recharge those batteries."

Today, Megan's father still lives in the family home in Chesapeake.

"I'm probably the one that takes on more of the administrative parts of my dad's life," she says. "But it's great that my brother can live

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**Next Door Neighbors**

there with him.”

Megan lives in Williamsburg. Her job in regional property management keeps her traveling between Richmond and Norfolk, so Williamsburg seemed like a good middle place to make home base.

Another sibling, a younger brother, lives in Richmond.

“He has two children that keep him and his wife busy,” Megan says. “But he does what he can to help our dad. In fact, he and his children were here just last weekend. I had my dad here with me in Williamsburg, so my older brother was able to get a break. We all went down to Colonial Williamsburg and had a nice outing. Weekends like that provide an opportunity for us all to have a little break and a change of scenery.”

For several years now, Megan has made sure her dad is able to attend a Parkinson’s support group. Additionally, there are other meetings or appointments that come up, so she must keep track of her own work schedule in order to help plan ahead. Keeping a calendar is key, as planning and organization are of the utmost

importance. If she can’t be there in person, then she calls on a brother or her uncle to lend a hand.

“When we’re arranging my dad’s various appointments, I will determine which ones are the most important ones for me to be there in person, whether it’s so that I can help communicate to the provider or just be listening and taking notes we can refer to later.”

Even though he is 22 years along in his journey, Megan says that her father is doing fairly well with activity and mobility. He has a good attitude too, which certainly helps.

“My dad served as a surface warfare officer in the Navy for 24 years, so he’s not a complainer. He never pities himself.”

Before the pandemic, Gary “Goody” Goodmundson attended regular non-contact boxing classes designed specifically for Parkinson’s patients.

“Boxing movements are good Parkinson’s therapy because they are forceful movements incorporating coordination, balance and brain activities,” Megan says. “So, when his ‘Rock Steady’ class starts up again, I know he’ll be

ready.”

The family is encouraged that great strides have been made over the years, both in terms of medicine and technology. “My dad has a DBS, or deep brain stimulator, and that has made a world of difference,” Megan says. “A DBS is an electrical stimulator that is implanted in the front lobe of his brain, and there’s a little box in his chest on the right side sending a constant stimulation to his brain.”

The device allows him to enjoy some mobility and independence and has all but eliminated Gary’s right side tremors. Tremors are one tell-tale sign of the illness. Megan says that she doesn’t remember exactly when her father was diagnosed, but she remembers he had a tremor in his hand.

“I think my dad knew he had Parkinson’s before he was officially diagnosed. In fact, he told the neurologist he knew it was Parkinson’s.”

Twenty-two years have passed since then, and Megan admits that there are times she feels stretched too thin.

“Sometimes it can feel like there’s no time

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for me as a person to have a personal life.”

When those feelings surface, she is careful to set some boundaries because she knows she can't be helpful if she's not healthy too. That includes emotional health.

For Megan, recharging can involve painting, gardening or just enjoying time with friends.

“If I had a perfect day, either by myself or with friends, first I'd hit up a good coffee shop,” she says. “Then I might find some garage sales or visit a few antique shops and find some treasures. Or maybe I'd just go to the farmers' market.”

Last year she treated herself to watercolor painting classes.

“I did that specifically because I knew I needed to do something for myself. Going to the artist's studio was such a warm and calming place to be. It was fun to feed my creative side.”

At 44, Megan is optimistic that her future holds abundant opportunities for many of those perfect days. In the meantime, she is careful to carve out time to recharge, balancing her needs with those of her father.

“Sometimes when I feel overwhelmed, I stop and remind myself that what I'm doing right now for my dad is the most important thing. We won't have him forever. So, taking a walk with him is going to be more important than cleaning my house because making memories is important.”

One of her favorite memories involves a fairly recent, pre-pandemic trip with her dad, a 1969 graduate of the United States Naval Academy. In October 2019, Megan was able to take him to Annapolis, Maryland for a four-day weekend so he could attend his 50th class reunion. Attendees included spouses, partners and friends. Megan's mother passed away several years ago, so Megan was happy to drive her father to his special reunion. Although there had been other reunions over the years, this was the first time all surviving members of the 23rd Company had been together since their graduation.

“There was even a journalist there from the Wall Street Journal. She wrote a story about these men and the lifelong bond they share.”

Megan soaked up every moment, watching

her dad with his Navy buddies. “It's a weekend I know I'll never forget.”

For those caring for relatives with long-term illness, she offers a few words of wisdom. As the saying goes: it's a marathon, not a sprint.

“We hear this all the time, but it is so true,” she says. “Prepare yourself for that reality and get acquainted with organizations or agencies that can provide resources because you will not be able to do everything yourself. Whether it's back-up transportation or respite care, just reach out. The more you can disperse to others, things like appointments and errands, the better it will be for everyone.”

She also stresses the importance of having something to look forward to. “I think when we don't have something to look forward to, it really affects our well-being. Whether it's the person with the condition or their caregivers, we all need our breaks to recharge.”

At the end of a busy day, Megan Goodmundson enjoys retreating to her new home in Williamsburg.

“I love living in Williamsburg,” she says. “I feel so lucky that I have landed here.” NDN

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# Delivering New Primary Medicine

By Kristine Hojnicky



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

Nestled against the woods, where the Colonial Parkway meets South Henry Street, sits Defiant Direct Primary Care, one of Williamsburg's newest primary care clinics. Co-owned by Drs. Christina and Jake Mutch, the husband-wife team of Defiant DPC looks to redefine the traditional healthcare model.

It's an all-too-familiar situation. An acute medical issue prompts a patient to call their primary care doctor. Unfortunately, the next available appointment is isn't as soon as you had hoped. The patient arrives at the doctor's office and sits in the waiting room for a while and spends another 15 to 20 minutes in the exam room, only to have limited time with their provider.

"To treat a patient, you have to get to know the person, understand the context of their life, who they are, where they come from, what they do and ask all of these questions on top of the traditional questions you would ask them to help make a diagnosis," Dr. Mutch says. "Those five to seven minutes I spent with

patients while I was training during residency were painfully short, and I felt like I was doing a disservice to them. It was a stark contrast to how I envisioned myself practicing holistic family medicine. The biggest goal of a primary doctor is having someone you can rely upon, talk to and help guide you. You can't build that relationship in a five-minute window."

Dr. Mutch's path into osteopathic medicine is what she describes as roundabout, though her father would say he knew she would become a doctor one day. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Jordan at a young age in search of a better life for their family. They eventually settled in Northern Virginia and they encouraged Dr. Mutch and her brother to use education as a way to open doors to opportunity.

"That's always been a big focus for our family. My parents sacrificed a lot to come here, and their goal in life has always been for their children to have access to quality education. It was never about them, and my brother and I

never took it for granted how blessed we were to have parents who did so much for us so we could have an education and better opportunities."

Dr. Mutch grew up as a runner, competing in cross country and track and field at West Springfield High School. As an athlete, she was intrigued by the human body, nutrition and exercise, and how it affected one's overall health, so she applied to William & Mary with the goal of studying kinesiology and becoming a physical therapist. Her interest in molecular cell biology research caused her to pivot her studies and pursue a PhD research route, but she found after four years of studying the cardiovascular effects of exercise on laboratory rats, she missed interacting with human patients.

"While I was at William & Mary, I worked at the rock-climbing wall, and my instructor encouraged me to get my EMT degree so I could ride on the ambulance squad and get some experience to ensure that medical school

was the right path.”

Her instructor also told her about a wilderness EMT course located in Conway, New Hampshire that teaches aspiring medical professionals how to adapt their urban medical skills for wilderness emergencies.

“I love outdoor sports, and this course combined all of the things I enjoy about medicine and being active.”

Dr. Mutch and her then-boyfriend, Jake,

set out for New Hampshire the summer after graduation. Once there, they met the founder of the school who happened to be an osteopathic doctor, or D.O.

“We spent a lot of time learning from him and understanding why he pursued the D.O. versus M.D. route. I became interested in osteopathic medicine because it requires additional training in anatomy and manipulation skills that is quite intensive. You’re able to

diagnose imbalances in anatomical structure, learn compensation patterns, and acquire techniques in how to fix those imbalances. There was a lot of cross over with physical therapy.”

The other tenant of osteopathic medicine that interested Dr. Mutch was the connection between mind, body and spirit, and how a focus on one area can hinder full health because another area may be neglected.

# neighbor to neighbor

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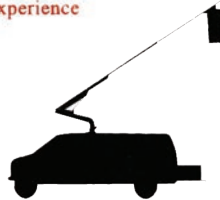
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"It was a fusion of all the things I loved about each sector of medicine and physiology into one field, and it felt perfect for me," she says.

Dr. Mutch returned to Williamsburg invigorated by the experience and decided to take the next two years to complete her medical school prerequisites. She also ran on the Williamsburg volunteer EMT squad for several months before applying to the West Virginia

School of Osteopathic Medicine. She and Jake were both accepted into the program and began medical school together.

"We have a very long history of always working together. We had the same classes as undergraduate students and then continued on all the way through medical school."

Dr. Mutch explains that one of the major differences between a D.O. and an M.D. is the requirement for osteopathic medical stu-

dents to complete 300 additional credit hours in manipulation therapy.

During her residency, Dr. Mutch decided she wanted to become a family primary care doctor, but the pace of seeing up to 20 patients a day was grueling, and she felt constrained by administrative policies related to patient appointment schedules. She and her patients were also frustrated in the lack of information regarding the cost of care, which often

# neighbor to neighbor

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prevented patients from pursuing things like diagnostic labs or imaging tests, the results of which were critical to determining treatment.

“How are patients supposed to make informed decisions or reasonable choices about their health, or know what they can afford when the process is blinded to both the patient and the physician? I felt like if I continued to be in this system and not try to change it or do something different, I was just as much a part of the problem because I was saying it was okay just by virtue of not doing anything.”

She and her husband discovered the direct primary care movement, an alternative model to traditional medicine that focuses on patient-first care, transparency and clarity in pricing, and a holistic approach to treatment.

“There is this overarching theme in the direct primary care movement of feeling like there is oppression in the system. Patients aren’t being treated right and doctors are getting burnt out. It’s this lose-lose situation

where we’re constantly trying our hardest to provide good patient care but everything in the traditional model is built against us.”

Inspired by the growing national movement, Dr. Mutch and her husband opened the doors of Defiant DPC in early 2020. For a monthly subscription fee, patients with or without insurance have access to same-day or next-day appointments, telehealth resources, personalized consultations and treatments, and deeply discounted fees for labs and imaging services.

“It’s a simple model. The monthly fee covers unlimited in-office services, and we’ve gone to labs and imaging companies to remove the middle man and the guessing game in pricing. We can now tell our patients exactly how much labs will cost, and it’s 80 to 90 percent cheaper through self-pay,” she says.

Thus far, they’ve received an overwhelming amount of support from the Williamsburg community and the practice has hit the

ground running. Dr. Mutch says they hope one day to increase the number of direct primary care offices across the peninsula by either expanding their practice or inspiring other medical students to open up their own.

“I hope to inspire others by showing them there is an alternative way to build a practice and ultimately decrease the primary care shortage.”

In the meantime, Dr. Mutch and her husband will continue to serve their patients in the tight-knit Williamsburg community they fell in love in, and with, during their time as undergraduate students.

“We don’t have children now, but as we look to the future, this is the type of community we would want to grow a family in. We are technically transplants, but the close-knit feeling is what drew us back here, and we’ve been blessed to get to know some amazing people and establish a strong support system,” Dr. Mutch says. NDN

## To All,

As we move into the New Year and reflect on our lives this past year, let us be mindful of how we can learn from our past and look toward the future in positive ways. Let’s appreciate all that we can, and embrace our Williamsburg neighbors in friendship and love.

Thank you for supporting me in my desire to publish *Next Door Neighbors*. I can’t believe it has been 14 years. I am very blessed with many loyal customers who make this magazine possible. In addition, I work with awesome, professional folks who write, provide photography services, sell advertising, plan, schedule, and edit and help in so many other ways. These are dedicated individuals who never miss a deadline and contribute their very best. If there is a last minute need, they do not hesitate to meet that need. Even my husband, Joe, has toiled over these pages each month for the last fourteen years trying to make sure that not one little error slips by. And when it rarely does, he does not take it lightly. We do, and always have, tried to bring you our very best.

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Your neighbor,  
Meredith



Lisa Martin Lee Photography

## Maxine Goins: A Heart for Homes

By Linda Landreth Phelps

Many people struggle with household tasks after going through chemotherapy or recovering from surgery. Sometimes, the duties of being a caregiver means chores that used to be done promptly are piling up depressingly high. Maxine Goins, owner of Colonial Cleaning Service, is a woman with a true heart for helping others with these tasks, and she is happy to assist anyone overwhelmed from medical issues. “Call or shoot me an email! I’m blessed, and I want to share that blessing by donating my services,” she says. “Serving

people is who I am.”

Colonial Cleaning Service began in October 2009 with just Maxine, and then slowly and steadily grew. The Toano-based business now includes 22 employees. She is one of the few local small business owners doing well during the current COVID-19 crisis. With more people working from home and children learning remotely, living spaces are getting harder use and require more upkeep. Hiring professional help frees the weekend from chores and allows the family to leave the confines of home to

pursue healthy outdoor activities. “You’re buying back time,” Maxine says.

“Although I do make exceptions, from the start I wanted to specialize in residences, not commercial clients, with no contracts or cookie-cutter cleaning plans,” Maxine says. “If somebody just needs a little short-term help while recuperating from an illness, or someone else only needs bathrooms and floors done twice a month, I decided that I would make it simple for them to get what they truly need, and not pay for anything extra.” Her successful

business model has stayed the same, tailoring what's needed to the client, whether it's short term, partial cleanings, or irregular schedules.

Maxine always does the initial client visit herself to assess their needs and, just as important from her viewpoint, personality and cleaning style, so she can match them to the perfect cleaner. Her policy of sending the same person each time often leads to establishing a special relationship and close connection with one another.

"Cleaning a house is more personal than most jobs," she says. "The person who cuts your grass isn't coming into homes like my people do. They notice things like if you've been sick, or need groceries." Maxine believes her kind of service isn't just affordable, it's cost effective if it helps to keep elderly clients from prematurely transitioning into assisted living or nursing homes.

From the beginning, she has looked for ways to give back to her community. She liked the idea of doing a free cleaning for cancer survivors and others who could use a literal help-

ing hand, because Maxine knows from experience that sometimes the most helpful hand is equipped with a duster or dish towel.

"When I was 33 years old, I had three kids under six," Maxine remembers. "I'd lost weight and I wasn't feeling well, so I went to see my nurse practitioner. Even though she didn't find anything wrong, I believe an angel whispered in my ear and told me to insist on an ultrasound." That procedure revealed a cancerous, 14-pound ovarian tumor, and Maxine was told she had only six months to live. Miraculously, surgeons were able to remove the tumor completely, and after a long recuperation Maxine got her life back.

"My family doesn't live near me, but friends would come over and do laundry, clean my house, cook meals, watch my kids... whatever I needed while I was sick. I will never forget that, never." That gratitude caused her to sign with a national charity, Cleaning for a Reason, which matches cleaning volunteers with cancer patients.

"I was so disappointed when they never uti-

lized me. I paid eighty dollars a month to be part of it, but they didn't send me a single person to bless," Maxine says. "I was devastated, but it caused me to make a pledge of my own. I committed to do two free cleanings a month for people who have been nominated by someone, with no questions asked. I don't care how much money they have or what kind of illness, I just ask that someone recommend them and say that this person could use some help."

She usually offers free cleaning to those who are ill, but sometimes also for a mom with a sick child who just needs a boost or time freed up for other things. "As a woman who has been helped by others when I was at my most helpless, I know how much of a spirit-lifter it was to have a clean and orderly house." Maxine now assigns one of her staff to do the actual work and pays them to do it. Usually this ministry is a one-time thing, but not always. "It depends on the circumstances and the person," Maxine says. "God has blessed me in a huge way, and this is my way of giving back."

Sometimes when she makes the call to say

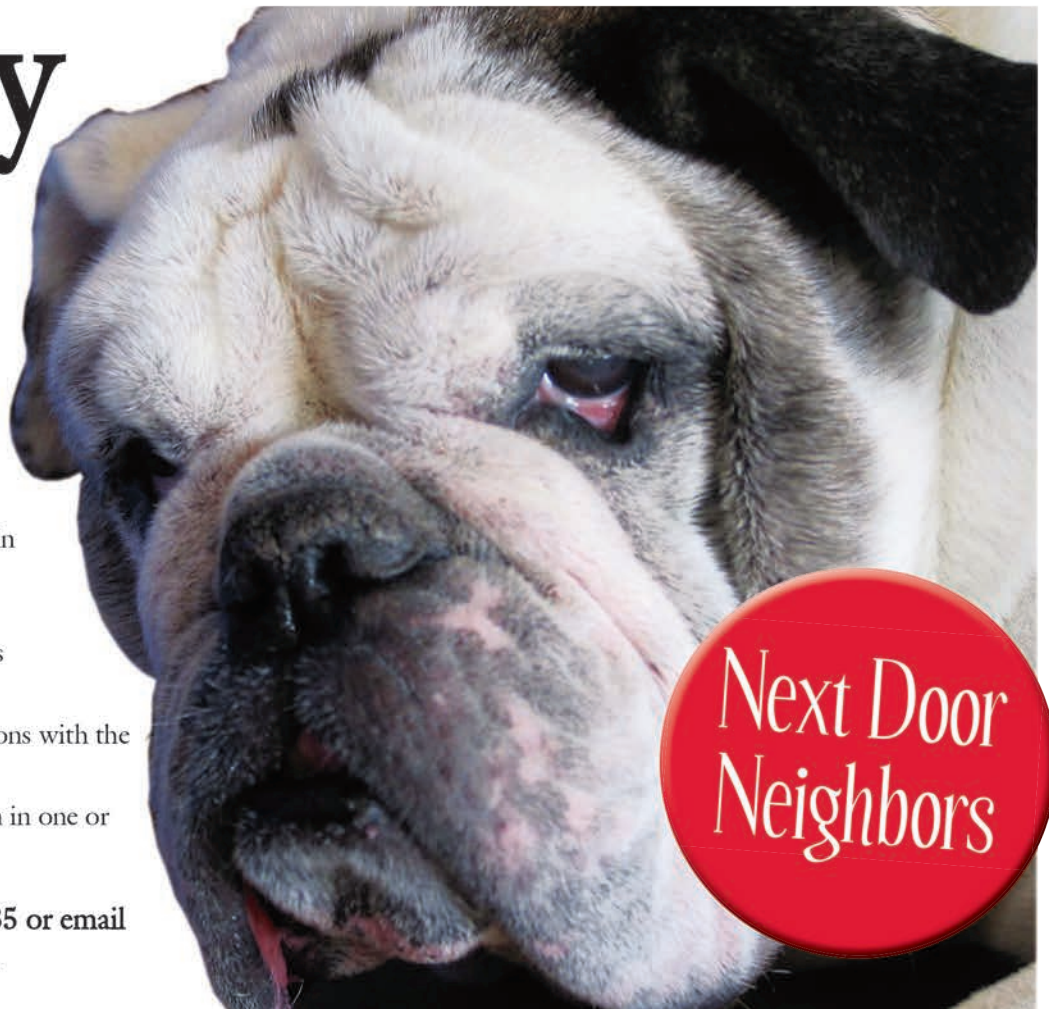
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they have been selected for the ministry, there is some resistance, as if their caregiver was being criticized for falling down on the job. “I had one daughter insist, ‘I can come and clean for Mom.’ I said that if she’d let me do it, then she could just visit with her instead. Spend that time watching Hallmark movies; looking at old pictures; or just cozied up together. She soon saw the beauty in that and I didn’t get any more arguments.”

Maxine’s motives in giving away free cleaning services are pure. Some cynics might say it’s just a clever marketing ploy to benefit Colonial Cleaning Services, but she is quick to explain.

“I do it only because I genuinely enjoy serving others,” Maxine says. “I’m blessing the person in need, but what I find is that I’m also blessing myself as well as my employee. I cannot tell you how many times they tell me, ‘I’d like to go back again and do it for nothing!’ Our recipients have no idea how much we care for them and the prayers we send up. It’s pretty special and makes everyone feel good, so I’m

really disappointed when there are no nominations and no place to serve.” Maxine hopes that she’ll get more emails from friends and family of people who have a need. “I’d love to do at least two or three cleanings a month, maybe more,” she says.

Maxine shared one special memory of a young mother who had just moved to Williamsburg when she found out her cancer had come back. Struggling through tears, Maxine says, “She wanted us to come clean weekly, and once I learned of her circumstances, I told her the first one was free. We helped her find a lawn care service and get settled in her new home. Six weeks later, she was gone. It happened really fast. It was as if while she was dying, she had made all the arrangements for her little family to be cared for after she was gone. We clean for that dad to this day, and he has no idea we still hold such a warm place for them in our hearts.”

Cleaning homes wasn’t Maxine’s first career. “Marketing was my jam,” Maxine says with a laugh. “After we moved to the Peninsula from

our home town in West Virginia, I worked at a bank for eight years, then stayed home when my boys came along.”

She and her husband, high school sweetheart Wayne, have three children: Austin, now 22, Dylan, 19, and then comes Chandler, who is 16. “Chandler was only two years old when I started this business,” Maxine remembers. “I knew I wanted to earn a good income without sacrificing those Mom moments. It was really important to me that I be the one to put the boys on the school bus in the morning and meet it in the afternoon.”

Colonial Cleaning Services was the perfect fit for a young mom who wanted a good income and flexible hours, and she loves to employ caring cleaners who want the same. The business has flourished over the years, and with its success also grew Maxine’s capacity for specialized charitable giving.

“At last count, we had given away \$55,000 in free cleaning services over the last ten years,” Maxine says. “We just love helping people. In my company, that’s the bottom line.” NDN

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