

Parent Care: Planning makes life easier for maturing families

by Marsha Kay Seff

Instead of waiting for a crisis, Terry Perondi came up with a plan for her parents while they were still in reasonably good health.

Ten years ago, she suggested that the older couple sell their two-story home and buy a one-story closer to her. They liked the idea, realizing that by living within spitting distance of their daughter, they could remain independent longer, surrounded by their own things.

About four years ago, Terry decided that 4 miles wasn't close enough, and she moved within a mile of her parents' California home.

"I view this as the granny flat not in my backyard," Terry Perondi says. The family agrees the arrangement has worked well.

Mom still cooks and Dad drives short distances and even mows his own lawn. As a result, Terry doesn't consider herself a caregiver: "I think of myself as a loving daughter."

And as she gets older and decides to cut down on her own driving, Terry says, she'll still be able to walk to her parents' place when needed.

In fact, she hopes someday her two grown children will arrange a similar situation for her and her husband, Larry. For now, one son lives at home, and the other, just a quarter-mile away.

Terry is more fortunate than some children because she doesn't have to work. Larry, whom she once helped put through school, is deputy superintendent of a school district.

The first thing each morning, Terry e-mails her folks. They answer when they awake. "That way, nobody calls at a bad time or wakes them before they want to get up. Also I don't worry about Mom running to catch the phone call."

They e-mail throughout the day in addition to seeing each other daily. They walk, shop or have lunch together. "My mom has always been my best friend."

The arrangement works, Terry believes, because her parents are not needy or demanding. And because she seems to understand the nuances of this caregiving thing. For one thing, she's learned to negotiate.

"The negotiations are how much they will let me do for them. You need to negotiate the land mines together," she says. "I never say I'm taking Mom shopping; I say we're going shopping.

"It's a mistake to treat your parents like children."

The setup might not be as novel as it appears. Terry points out: "Tribes used to live close together so the younger people could take care of the elderly and the elderly could care for the kids. ... More children could do this if they chose to."

She's impatient with adult children who aren't looking out for aging parents. "Who the heck is taking care of your parents if you're not doing it?"

As for the future, Terry says, "Health is changing slowly for all of us. The realization of facing the unknown is scary." But if needed, she has a downstairs bedroom and bath waiting for her folks.

"I'm fortunate to be able to spend these golden years with them. ... To outlive our parents is the greatest gift we can give them. So we accept the responsibility."

WATCH THOSE MEDS

An estimated 25 percent of admissions to hospitals and skilled-nursing facilities are related to adverse reactions to medications by older adults, according to Sandra Timmermann of the MetLife Mature Market Institute. To help older people avoid drug problems, the group has published *Since You Care Guide: Medications and the Older Adult*.

It contains information on the benefits and risks of taking over-the-counter, herbal and prescription medications. It also offers cost-saving advice and a list of resources, as well as a medication record chart and a pillbox set-up chart to help keep track of multiple medications.

To order, phone (203) 221-6580, e-mail maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com, download the guide from www.maturemarketinstitute.com, or write to the MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.

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