Meet Fayth Kail: Advocate for Independence

Meeting Fayth Kail is memorable. She has an expressive face, completely in keeping with her vibrant nature. She’s articulate and knowledgeable. She’s a persistent, gentle force, too, as an advocate for people with disabilities.

Fayth knows from experience. “It never occurred to me that I couldn’t do something,” Fayth says. “The challenges always came from others who just didn’t know what to do with someone with a disability.”

When Fayth was a teenager, she contracted polio in September 1955. Paralysis affected her from her neck down. A Madison native, Fayth spent almost a year in the hospital, including time in an iron lung. Finally recovering enough to return to school, she had to attend high school in Milwaukee because schools in Madison lacked accessibility. She lived with a foster family, and commuted every weekend home and back by train. The train porter carried her on and off, and managed her wheelchair.

Eventually, Fayth was able to return to Madison to attend Central High School, as long as she agreed that she wouldn’t need a restroom break during the day. “Can you imagine a social worker asking me something like that? Fortunately, I had very good friends,” she adds with a sly smile. She graduated in 1959, and then attended MATC for two years, earning a business degree.

“I learned to type using just these two fingers and my thumb,” she says, raising her right hand. She also learned to walk, relying on a wheelchair only as needed. She started with General Telephone Company (later GT&E), then went to Central Wisconsin Center. Later, she worked at the Department of Health and Social Services in a job-share role as receptionist for Secretary Donald Percy. After several years, she switched and worked part-time as a messenger / page for the Legislature until she retired in 1997.

Home life was just as active. Fayth met Robert “Bobbie” Kail at Central High School in 1957. They married in 1964, and had a son, Ronnie. “He was born 7-7-70,” Fayth says. “The hospital bill was $777.44, and he was the seventh grandchild on both sides.” The number 7 factors often in Fayth’s life.

In the 1970s, Madison activism was gaining traction in accessibility rights. Fayth and Bobbie had a mission: to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. While Bobbie focused on helping people individually, Fayth was already an advocate, and in 1971, she was a co-founder of MOBIL, Madison Organization Behind Independent Living. Curb cuts, public transportation for people with wheelchairs and improved access in buildings were some of MOBIL’s accomplishments.

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NOTES FROM JOYCE

With the holiday season comes anticipation of special occasions that can be fun and fulfilling... or stress-filled and disheartening. For many elders, it can be a time of loneliness and sadness. We encourage you to reach out to the seniors among your family, friends and neighbors, and let them know they are remembered.

It’s more than a good deed that you will be doing. Chronic loneliness is linked with poor physical health, evidenced in research from the University of California-San Francisco and University of Chicago. Having someone willing to listen and care can make a huge difference to both people. I know this first hand.

My son, Keith, was 15 when he needed to perform volunteer hours for a National Honor Society project. I was working at Independent Living, and thought about the friendly visiting program we offer. Keith was matched with a perfect fit, although my son probably didn’t realize it at the time. We had a gentleman in our assisted living community who was the only guy in the group. I will always remember him. He was a veteran, somewhat quiet, someone who enjoyed jokes. He also was a widower with a family of daughters, so he didn’t have much for male companionship. With my son coming to visit him once a week, he found someone to talk to. My son was a pitcher on the high school baseball team, and this man and my son talked baseball all the time. He also taught my son how to play poker! Keith would arrive with his bag of quarters, and he must have learned well because he always came home with quarters.

These visits lasted maybe four or five months, until baseball season started and Keith’s schedule got busier. My son also worked part-time as a dining room assistant, so he would see his elderly friend from time to time.

It was a good experience for Keith. At that time, my dad had passed away, and the only elderly person Keith really knew was my mother. She had Alzheimer’s, and Keith thought all seniors were forgetful. Having a senior man like this veteran in his life showed Keith a completely different side to aging. Keith learned many lessons, besides how to play poker. Probably the...
“Independent Living is the perfect place for her.”

This is a comment from Tom Shorter, talking about his mother-in-law, Patricia Butcher. She’s been living for three years now at The Gardens, Independent Living’s senior community on Segoe Road. How she arrived is one of those mother-in-law stories with a great, funny ending.

Tom’s wife, Stacey, is a Madison native, and grew up on the west side. Her mother, Pat, continued to live in the family home, even after her husband, Don, had passed away in 1991. Pat seemed to be doing OK, although eventually she was unable to take care of the lawn anymore… then she quit the bowling league because it was becoming difficult to bowl…and then she withdrew from many social activities. Stacey, her sister and their families stepped in as they could, taking over the yardwork, taking on some house duties, adding a little bit more support here and there to help Pat stay at home.

Then “it” happened. Pat fell and was hospitalized at Meriter in 2013. As the entire family came together, they learned after-the-fact that there had been other falls, other incidents.

“That was it. We knew it wasn’t going to be safe for Pat to live at home anymore,” Tom says. An attorney who is comfortable taking charge, Tom reached out to an expert. “That’s when I called Rita (Giovannoni). I was already on the board at Independent Living at that time, and I knew we needed some help thinking through this.”

The family, concerned and united, determined that Pat needed to move. Pat, of course, was reluctant to leave her home of decades. “She was incredibly unhappy about this. We told her all the great things about Independent Living. We knew it was the right thing but she was having none of it.”

While making plans to move Pat and sell her house, the family carried on with other routines as much as possible. Tom continued to take Pat with him to University of Wisconsin women’s basketball games, an activity and a love they had shared for many years.

In the spring of 2013, Pat moved into The Gardens. “For her own safety, it was the best place,” Tom says logically, adding that they all hoped she would adjust and make the best of her new surroundings.

Pat had been living at the Independent Living community about six months when Tom called one day to make plans to pick her up for a women’s basketball game. “She hesitated,” Tom recalls, laughing. “Then she told me she wasn’t going that night. It was movie night, and she was planning to spend the evening with a bunch of her friends. I realized that I just been blown off!”

Tom adds, with clear relief in his voice, “Now she loves it there. She has made some great new friends. She’s even back to bowling; she’s been using the Wii!”

“It was a journey for us to get through, and Independent Living was there to help us through that journey.”
Helping Family Care for Family

“They don’t treat us like we’re just another client. They get to know us.”

Liz Whitesel is describing two caregivers who have been helping her with her husband, Russ. Cory was first; when he took a career advancement job, Hans followed. Both have been attentive, considerate and respectful, Liz says.

Both Liz and Russ are fairly recently retired. Liz was a speech therapist for 39 years with the Madison School District, first working with hearing impaired students, then focusing on preschoolers with developmental disabilities. Russ spent 40 years as an attorney with the Wisconsin Legislative Council. In April 2015, their lives were upended. Russ was diagnosed with fourth-stage brain cancer. Surgery, radiation and chemotherapy followed; so did seizures. The tumor affected Russ’s orientation to time and space; the seizures impacted his motor skills. It was devastating for Russ and Liz, who enjoy outdoor activities and traveling.

For a while, Liz coped alone as 24-hour caregiver. Realizing she needed respite, she contracted with various private duty caregivers. Then, someone suggested she check her long-term care insurance policy. She found it would definitely help with expenses, as long as she worked with a Medicare-approved agency.

Based on advice, Liz contacted Independent Health Care, the sister agency to Independent Living, Inc. That’s how Cory, then Hans, stepped into Liz and Russ’s lives.

“They’ve bonded,” Liz says of all three gentlemen. With Cory, the family found someone comfortable caring for Russ and being a sounding board for Liz. “It was like he was a caregiver for both of us,” Liz notes. “Cory is observant, too. He saw little things that needed to be done beyond caring for Russ, and he just did them like filling the bird feeders or emptying the dishwasher.”

Liz and Russ both have a sense of humor, which helps. “I do have a funny story to tell,” Liz says. “In our house, before he couldn’t any more, Russ took care of everything. There was a day years ago when I heard a strange noise in the house, and I flew downstairs. Russ very calmly told me that’s the noise our vacuum cleaner makes when it’s being used.” Knowing her aversion to vacuuming, Russ asked Cory to vacuum, which he gladly did.

With Hans, Russ found a fellow baseball fanatic. Hans created a paper chart that enabled Russ to track games; however, the two had to come to an understanding, Liz adds with a laugh, about the Cubs. Russ is a huge fan; Hans, not so much. Outside of baseball, Hans catches the details such as garden hoses that need to be brought in for winter.

Another characteristic of both caregivers that Liz appreciates is that “they’re supportive but honest.”

“They both know what to say when Russ brings up difficult subjects. He might say something like, ‘next summer, when I’m not here, this won’t help’ when Hans is helping him with exercises. And Hans will respond

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Golf Outing Scores Success

By Arlen Moss

Independent Living, Inc. expresses gratitude to all the golfers and sponsors who enjoyed a great day of comradery and fun at our University Ridge golf outing Sept. 22, 2016. The third annual ILI golf outing raised approximately $20,000 toward the Tennyson Senior Living Community capital campaign. Tremendous thanks go to our exclusive sponsor, BR Diamond Suite, for donating a $3,500 gift card as a raffle prize. Also, special thanks go to our key sponsors: Zimbrick, C. G. Schmidt, First Business Financial, WMSN-Fox47, Savant Capital Management, TRICOR Insurance and Wegner CPAs. Without the guidance and contributions from this important group, the golf outing would not have been possible. We are profoundly grateful for your continued support.

CEO Joyce Behrend explains Tennyson Senior Living Community, a project Independent Living plans to develop on Madison's northeast side. Looking on is ILI Board President Saul Glazer. (All photos by Jody Dingle)

Beautiful University Ridge Golf Course was a perfect setting for a great day of golf and fundraising for Independent Living, Inc.

Wade Hanna, First Business Bank, carefully tees up a marshmallow at the golf outing.

Relaxing on the golf course are (L-R) Sarah Dunn, CG Schmidt; Mary Carr Lee, UW Office of the Vice Provost and Chief Diversity Officer; and Linda Ewing-Brusca, Studio Glassworks.

Mark your calendars!

The 4th annual Independent Living, Inc. golf outing will be held at University Ridge golf course on Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017.

If you would like to join a great golf steering committee or have an interest in sponsorships, please contact Fund Development Director Arlen Moss at (608) 268-9631 or amoss@independentlivinginc.org.
“We had to fight for everything,” Fayth says. “And we did it.” In 1974, she worked to form the Madison Citizen’s Advisory Commission on People with Disabilities; in 1978, she was instrumental in establishing Access to Independence, which continues today. She supported the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), Wisconsin’s Wheelchair Lemon Law (1992), and other legislation protecting the rights of people with disabilities. For her work, she was honored with awards that include YWCA Woman of Distinction in 1982; local Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award in 1987, and Fayth Kail Recognition Day, a surprise citation presented on her birthday Dec. 21, 2015, by Mayor Paul Soglin who has known Fayth since his first term as mayor in the 1970s.

Activism, volunteerism, career and family kept Fayth going, who never slowed even with a wheelchair. Her husband Bobbie was right there with her. “We did everything together,” Fayth says. “He made it possible for me to help others because he was helping me.” They supported each other through tough times, especially when Ronnie died unexpectedly in 2013.

Eventually, Bobbie’s chronic health issues prevailed. Fayth and Bobbie had been married for 50 years when Bobbie passed away in February of 2015. This was followed by the deaths of two helpful friends. In August 2015, Fayth fell and broke her leg in two places, landing her in the hospital and then in rehabilitation.

Never one to quit, Fayth rebounded, determined to return to her home. Now she defines independence her way by orchestrating help where and when she wants it. Fayth has caregivers from Independent Living, an organization she has known for decades. On the logical side, contracting with Independent Living means there has been a thorough background check; plus, workers compensation insurance will cover the caregiver should anything happen while working. On the personal side, Independent Living offers flexibility.

“I only need a little bit of help, and Independent Living is willing to work with one hour increments,” Fayth says. “Plus they have backup in case my regular person is on vacation. It’s been well worth the investment (of using an agency). I know I can get up in the morning and someone will be here to help me.”

She’s in no hurry to move to senior housing although she is keeping an eye on the senior living community planned by Independent Living on Tennyson Lane. “I have everything I need right now. I have someone who comes in the morning to help me get out of bed and get dressed for the day. At night, it’s just the reverse, and I have someone who comes in for that. Everything else, I can do for myself.”

Charitable Gift Annuity for the Holidays
by Arlen Moss

The Independent Living charitable gift annuity provides our donors with the opportunity to support our mission and generate income at a rate of return generally well-above current rates. Please contact us for information regarding how a charitable gift annuity can benefit you and your family in estate planning now while supporting Independent Living’s programs that service seniors and adults with disabilities in the future. Charitable rollover gifts directly from your IRA account benefit you and those we serve! For details, please contact me any time at (608) 268-9631 or amoss@independentlivinginc.org.
Together, We Can Make Life Better

Independent Living, Inc. creates independence for seniors and adults with disabilities. One of the ways this is accomplished is through hands-on services from our outstanding staff. Would you like to make a difference in the lives of others?

We have numerous career and volunteer opportunities with varying schedules waiting for you. You can find something that might just be a perfect fit! Enjoy being a caregiver? Perhaps tidying up is your thing? Maybe you have just enough time to be a volunteer and deliver a few meals.

You have many choices, more than what you see here. Please visit our careers and volunteer sections on our web site at www.IndependentLivingInc.org. Or call our main phone number at 608-274-7900 and inquire today!

Helping Family Care for Family

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with something like, ‘even if it’s true, these exercises will help you now.’”

In their immediate future, the Whitesels are looking forward to the birth of a third grandchild in December. They have two daughters, both married, and one granddaughter and one grandson. When asked if the experience of bringing in caregivers held any surprises, Liz responds, “I didn’t expect the caregiver to feel so much like family.”
**ILI Honors Six Staff Members for Exemplary Work**

Independent Living, Inc. has outstanding employees, and we celebrated everyone’s hard work with an Employee Recognition event August 17. It was a lovely event with a program, delicious brunch, prizes and--best of all--awards given to six front-line staff nominated by their colleagues or clients.

Congratulations go to Cory Dreyer (home health aide), Heidi Dubiel (server), Trudy Grinnell (resident assistant), Judy Johnson (server), Sabine Knopple-Wetzel (resident assistant) and Andrew Richel (maintenance technician). In all, there were nearly 50 employees nominated, making the selection process difficult.

The winners received certificates and cash awards sponsored by donors. Many thanks go to major donor and board member Carroll Heideman, whose leadership helped establish the recognition program in 2010. Kudos goes to everyone who was nominated, to everyone who made the awards program possible, and to every single ILI employee who makes a difference in the lives of the seniors and adults with disabilities we serve. THANK YOU!

Pictured are Andrew Richel, CEO Joyce Behrend, Trudy Grinnell, Cory Dreyer, Founder and Donor Carroll Heideman, Heidi Dubiel, and Judy Johnson. Not pictured is Sabine Knoppke-Wetzel.