Creative Strategy May Help Memory

Walter Miner is reading aloud to a companion.  
But lo! Suddenly in the midst of the glory of the king his golden shield was dimmed. The new morning was blotted from the sky. Dark fell about him. Horses reared and screamed. Men cast from the saddle lay groveling on the ground.

It’s a passage from Tolkien’s third volume from the trilogy of “The Lord of the Rings.” A resonant bass, Walt’s voice is rich with inflection, intonation and emotion. Listening to him read is better than any Garrison Keillor radio program, any book on tape.

Walt uses his voice, vocabulary and command of language masterfully. Projection is not an issue for this retired high school English teacher. Nor is diction or articulation.

However, he has noticed an increasing issue with words escaping him.

“It was two or perhaps three years ago that I noticed that words weren’t coming to me,” Walt explains. “I am used to having words at hand, not just the word I want but also at the moment I want to express it.”

Eventually, his concern led to physician visits and the ultimate diagnosis of vascular dementia in early stages.

So far, language and conversation haven’t been terribly cumbersome, Walt says. “I do notice when I have to find another way to say something. If I don’t remember a word, invariably I will think of it but not on time. It may be only 10 seconds but by then the nuance has changed, the relevancy you feel.

“When I’m reading aloud, I find I don’t have that problem,” he adds. When reading privately to himself, Walt assumes he has comprehended the passage; reading aloud, however, requires more immediate comprehension.

Plus, “it is much more fun to read to someone, especially one who enjoys listening,” he says with a grin. His ever-listening companion comes from Independent Living, Inc.

Reading aloud is Walt’s creative approach to maintaining mastery of words and comprehension. Aware of changes in his memory, he hopes that by observing himself he may contribute somewhat to helping others. “Everybody worries about memory. What happens to memory is so varied, and there is no single phrase that can describe it. If I can figure how my unconscious brain is managing language, perhaps the understanding of those changes will help another elderly person,” he explains.

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NOTES FROM JOYCE

Tennyson Senior Living Community is a labor of love for Independent Living, Inc. We continue to work on the financing package, seeking the best possible terms. We hope to break ground soon and welcome the first residents in 2018.

Tennyson will be an important anchor on Madison’s northeast side, creating a new option in senior living. It will offer independent and assisted living, as well as memory care. Memory care is significant, if based only on population numbers. The Alzheimer’s Association says about 5.4 million Americans have the disease, equating to about one in nine people age 65 and better.

What does that mean here in Dane County? With a projected senior population of 78,020 by 2020 (according to Dane County Area Agency on Aging), about 8,600 people will have Alzheimer’s or dementia related to another condition.

Awareness is growing about the need for memory care. One development is the memory café. It’s a combination of program and a social gathering place—often a restaurant—for people with dementia, their family, friends and caregivers.

Another focus is building dementia friendly communities, with infrastructure and support to help individuals with dementia and their caregivers. This includes training the workforce to recognize and assist someone with dementia. Several communities and neighborhoods are working towards this, including Sun Prairie, Middleton, Fitchburg, Monona and Waunakee.

How to interact with someone who has Alzheimer’s is important. The Alzheimer’s Association, and the Alzheimer’s and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin offer support; online, volumes of material exist from numerous sources. The Washington Post published a well written article May 30 about talking to someone with Alzheimer’s. It was accompanied by a sidebar on how to interact with a person with Alzheimer’s. Expert tips include:

- Approach from the front so that the person sees and hears you. Approaching from the side or behind may scare someone.
- Introduce yourself every time you enter the room. Avoid assuming the person still remembers you.
- Don’t quiz. Asking “what did you have for breakfast” or “don’t you remember my name” can be upsetting.
- Use simple language and a calm voice.
- Avoid giving too many instructions.
- Ask the person to help and limit the choices, i.e. “Would you like to help set the table?”
- Minimize distractions.
- Call the person by their name.

Family and friends often provide uncompensated care for loved ones with dementia. Home care is often the first choice, yet just as often it can be costly especially in time and health. Unfortunately, there is a serious shortage of memory care places in Dane County.

Tennyson Senior Living Community, when built, will help address that gap with room for 24 memory care residents. It will be a solid place to call home, with unique features including the Health and Wellness Center on site. If you would like to be kept informed about Tennyson, we’re happy to add your name and contact information to our interest/waiting list. Just get in touch with Sue Berg at 608-268-9628 or sberg@independentlivinginc.org.

If you would like to make an impact on Tennyson and memory care in this community, please become a donor. More information is available from Arlen Moss, director of fund development, at 608-268-9631 or amoss@independentlivinginc.org. We’ll be glad to hear from you.

Joyce Behrend, CEO
**Keeping Your Home Safe For You**

Living at home involves more than keeping up the house. It is important to be able to safely climb in and out of the bathtub; to reach for that favorite platter on the top shelf, and to easily manage the steps into the house or the stairs in the hallway.

It is important to be safe from falling. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that one out of three adults age 65 and older falls. Falls are the leading cause of fatal injury. Over half of falls resulting in death occur in the home.

Home hazards can be easy to overlook. Even if the home hazards are apparent, it may be difficult to know what to do about them. A home assessment conducted by a qualified individual can identify changes that enable seniors or adults with disabilities to continue living safely at home.

Fortunately, many home hazards can be easy to fix. Changes may include:

- installing a grab bar or hand hold
- adding a custom-built ramp
- making minor repairs
- swapping out hinges so that cupboards or doors swing better
- taking out a standard tub and installing a stepless shower stall
- and many more handy services.

Independent Living, Inc. has a department dedicated to home safety modifications. Staff members are:

- Manager, who oversees all functions of the department
- Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant who conducts home assessments and recommends changes
- Licensed carpenter who makes changes and repairs

If cost is a factor in making changes, there may be help. In Madison and Dane County, two special grants may be available to pay for some expenses for qualified individuals. The grants are administered by Independent Living. To learn more about the grants and services, call Emily, manager of the home safety modification department, at 608-268-9635.

Many thanks to UW Health & Unity Health Insurance for being a sponsor of Evening Meals on Wheels! Last year, we served 35,865 meals, delivered by 163 volunteers and groups. Support from volunteers and donors ensures nutritious evening meals for seniors and adults with disabilities.
There seems to be a new headline every day warning about our country’s increasing aging population, the impact aging baby boomers will have on already stretched resources, and that life expectancies continue to rise. These projections point out that this growing aging population will also need more health and home care, and for longer amounts of time than ever before.

Contrary to popular belief, Medicare is not the payer of these long-term care services. Medicare Part A, otherwise known as hospital insurance, covers up to 100 days in a skilled nursing facility, and only if the person had a qualifying 3-day hospital stay first. Many people do not realize that Medicare does not pay for the long-term care they envision – care that goes well past 100 days. In fact, the average length of a nursing home stay is about 835 days – more than two years. The stay is often longer for people with illnesses such as Alzheimer’s, a diagnosis that is also on the rise.

Some people have long-term care insurance, but it is becoming harder to obtain. Many insurance companies no longer sell it. People who do have long-term care insurance are finding out their coverage is far less than what they need, or their premiums have increased to unaffordable levels.

When a person’s income and assets have been exhausted, Medicaid becomes the go-to option to pay for long-term care. People need to meet low income and asset limits, and their giving (known as divestments) will be scrutinized up to 5 years prior to application in Wisconsin. (This is sometimes called a look back.) Medicaid will impose penalty periods if it seems like a person tried to transfer or hide money before the person applied. Plus, a person’s estate will be subject to estate recovery after the person’s death. Medicaid will expect to be repaid after the person has passed away. Even with that, there are questions regarding Medicaid’s ability to financially support the increase in demand that is expected to emerge in the next few decades.

There is no question that lower-income aging adults will need more options to pay for long-term care, but the solutions have been slow to come. Recently, there has been talk about making changes in long-term care insurance that includes incentives to participate, as well as changes in Medicare that might support less expensive at-home care.

It will be interesting to see what additional ideas begin to surface, and which ones, if any, actually take hold. Regardless, the need for change is present and growing.

Sources:

**Sharing Cookies**

Who can resist the charm of a Girl Scout on a mission to sell cookies? A successful Fitchburg troop of young Girl Scouts received many boxes of cookies for the “cookie share” program. The program enables patrons to purchase cookies that are then donated to a worthy cause chosen by the troop. As a result, this troop ended up with 160 boxes of cookies to share. They packed them up and chose to donate them to Fitchburg grandparents served by Independent Living!

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**Kibble On Wheels Receives $2500 To Help Seniors With Pets**

Seniors with pets are 36 percent less likely to report loneliness and have 21 percent fewer doctor visits, according to research. Yet some seniors struggle to have adequate nutrition or care for their pets as well as themselves. A $2500 grant from Meals on Wheels America will help the beloved companion animals of seniors served by Independent Living, Inc. The grant will be used to provide food, supplies and care through Kibble on Wheels, operated by Independent Living, Inc.

Megan Meyer, coordinator of the Kibble on Wheels program and Independent Living’s volunteer program, says the grant will help keep seniors and their pets together. “For many elderly citizens, pet ownership is a key to health and happiness. Our Kibble on Wheels program acknowledges the special bond between seniors and their pets and supports this bond by removing cost and transportation burdens. With this grant, we can better serve our clients by expanding the number of pets we support and accommodating their various dietary needs.”

Funding is possible in part through a donation from Banfield Charitable Trust, which handed the program to Meals on Wheels America to continue.

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(continuation from page 1)

At 86 years old, Walt lives independently in a meticulously kept and well organized home. For nearly 40 years, he and his wife Ruth lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Retiring and moving to Madison made sense in 1997, giving them an opportunity to live closer to family. Their daughter lives in Madison; their son was in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2007, Ruth passed away. In 2011, son Robert, an exemplary scholar and aficionado of the languages of words and mathematics, passed away from cancer. Daughter Margaret, who lives just a few blocks from her father in Madison, likewise has a flair for language, as a professor of French literature affiliated with the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her husband “speaks” another language, that of music as a University of Wisconsin music professor.

Walt also enjoys music, singing and accompanying himself on piano. “I would be happier if I were fluent in several languages, but it has been a hobby rather than an interest that has pushed me into learning,” he says.

He continues to read aloud, enjoying a warm summer afternoon on his front porch with a companion clearly enraptured with Walt’s narrative abilities.

Stern now was Eomer’s mood, and his mind clear again. He let blow the horns to rally all men to his banner that could come thither; for he thought to make a great shieldwall at the last, and stand, and fight there on foot till all fell, and do deeds of song on the fields of Pelennor, though no man should be left in the West to remember the last King of the Mark.
Thank You, Volunteers

We are grateful to our volunteers who generously share their time to help us with the important work of serving seniors and adults with disabilities. In this issue of our newsletter, we recognize volunteers who serve on our Board of Directors, Computer/Event Support, Friendly Visiting, Health Advocate, Home Help, Kibble on Wheels, Nutrition Services, Office/Administrative Support, Special Projects, Telephone Reassurance and Volunteer-By-Design. Thank you for your support!

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Stephanie Wild
Chloe Wilkerson
Kelly Wisch
Rachel Witthof
Molly Yunker
Qianran Zhang
Haosheng Zhen

GROUPS
- Blackhawk Church
- Spartan Youth Services
- Edgewood High School
- University of Wisconsin Delta Gamma Fraternity
Teacher Knows Where She’s Coming From

Nancy Veenendaal is a semi-retired elementary school teacher who probably never really sits still. Among many projects, she just spent the last five years researching genealogy, mostly on her side of family. Her husband, Dave, already had a great deal of his family history traced by a cousin, willing to share her research.

A sense of family runs strong in the Veenendaals. After raising two children, they then provided day care for their five grandchildren. No wonder, then, that Nancy decided to dig into more family. The tidbits Nancy discovered along the way add fun and intrigue to centuries of family history:

- One distant relative in England planned to travel on the Mayflower in 1620. The famous ship left early, however, and went wayward, landing at Plymouth Rock, Mass. Nancy’s ancestor traveled instead on The Supply, a companion ship that arrived as planned in Jamestown, Virginia. The relative was a scribe who wrote many legal contracts.

- Another distant relative disappeared with the rest of the famous lost colony of Roanoke.

- “Unfortunately, you find black sheep in the family, too,” Nancy says. One ancestor was one of the judges in the Salem Witch Trials.

- Another ancestor was a woman entrepreneur who delivered supplies to troops during the Revolutionary War.

“One of the most exciting finds was that there is nobility going back on my mother’s side,” Nancy said. “The Meltons were noblemen with a castle in England.”

A picture of the castle and numerous other photos adorn a unique decal on the Veenendaal’s living room wall. The decal is a 6-foot by 8-foot tree with branches, perfect for family ancestry displays.

“I was so excited to find the tree because when I finished researching, I didn’t want to put the pictures away and never see them again,” Nancy says.

Nancy has successfully traced some of her family lineage back to the 1300s. Dave’s side dates back to the Revolutionary War, which also factors on Nancy’s side. Benjamin Hoyt is a relative for whom she has a document that actually names him. A 1776 ledger entry names Hoyt as a recipient for scrip (pay). A copy of the ledger entry is framed on the Veenendaal’s living room wall.

Nancy and Dave live at Olympic Village, an active retirement community in Sun Prairie that is managed by Independent Living, Inc. Nancy taught nearly every grade from kindergarten to seventh grade; she still teaches part-time. Dave taught high school advanced placement physics; also an athlete, he coached basketball and baseball teams and then became team statistician.

Nancy has immersed herself in Olympic Village committees and producing the newsletter. Both Nancy and Dave stay active as learners, always curious about something. “Never stop learning,” Nancy says. “Never stop being open to new ideas.”
**Fore –ward, helping others**

Thursday, September 22, is a great date. Not only is it the first formal day of autumn, it is also Independent Living’s third annual golf outing. Spend a day swinging golf clubs for a great cause: helping seniors and adults with disabilities in Dane County. Join colleagues and network with new friends on the University Ridge golf course, 9002 County Road PD, Verona. The cost is $200 per golfer or $800 for a foursome, and includes registration, lunch, golf carts and reception. For extra fun, purchase raffle tickets for great prizes! Visit www.IndependentLivingInc.org, click on the “donate” tab, and then go to the golf registration link. What an easy way to help others!