

Aging Happens: Three options for 'prepare to care'

By Ellen Waldman

January 2, 2018

My back “went out” recently. I’ve had back problems over many years, so I’m familiar with this painful event. I’ve addressed this condition through various medical and complementary approaches available to us fortunate enough to live in Ashland.

I’m also no stranger to preparing for future needs, as you may have noticed. I’ve done an in-home, fall-risk assessment and filled out all the appropriate paperwork (Advance Directive, Power Of Attorney). But when my back went into a spasm, I had a front row seat on how all my preparations both worked and didn’t. I’m hoping you might benefit from what I learned.

I’ll start with what didn’t work too well. I have a new-to-me refrigerator which seemed perfect. It had a bottom freezer, which I assumed was a good idea, should I ever need to be in a wheelchair. But since I could not bend over to get my large ice pack, it turned out to be a problem. I barely managed to make this work, and now I see that a side-by-side refrigerator would really have been the better choice for my needs.

I also did not have a walker in the house, so when I needed to get up from sitting, I had to improvise. I used a broomstick-type aluminum pole, with a rubber tip on the bottom so it wouldn’t slip on the wood floors. It wasn’t too bad, as I could put it in front of me, hang on with both hands, and shuffle forward. But now I will be looking for a walker, which is much easier and safer.

Here’s what I’m the most pleased I prepared in advance. I put together a group of people who wanted to “prepare for care.” You might have been one of the 400 folks who attended the vital issues forum at Southern Oregon University last spring, which was sponsored by OLLI. Called “Prepare for Care: Getting to Plan A and Beyond,” the hope was that it would inspire a majority of people to take this info to heart and put it into practice. I’m one of those who did, and not a moment too soon, I can say.

When this recent bout with my back occurred, I was able to call and inform one person in my group of my situation. She made sure that everyone else was updated on my status. Should I need someone to come by during the day to assist me, or do some food shopping, or anything else I needed, I had a group of others ready to pitch in. How did this happen?

I proposed this group idea to my friend. She came up with other friends who were interested in meeting together to address the many issues of aging. The nine of us — men, women, younger and older — meet about every six weeks. We started by asking what types of topics we had an interest in exploring, the commitments we were willing to make, and agreed to give this a try. For instance, we agreed after the first meeting to complete our advance directives and any other paperwork we needed to have handy. We’ve since informed ourselves on topics such as websites that are helpful, what to know about dementia, types of housing options, caring for the dying, and other areas of interest.

Based on this model of coming together to meet our aging needs, here’s a suggestion. Find like-minded individuals and consider creating a “prepare to care” group. There are more than enough items to

address to keep things interesting for a long time. And when something does come up, like it did with my back, you'll have what I think is the most important component in place: others who know you and whom you can call upon.

To support this idea, here are three options:

1. If you would like guidance getting started, I am offering my services to help you set up a "prepare to care" group. Put some friends together, give me a call (541-482-9489) or go to my website below, and for a small fee, I can put you on the path to Plan A.
2. "Aging Happens" columns in this newspaper offers many topics to guide you.
3. Finally, you can check out these two websites below: the 36-page "Prepare to Care" booklet (www.aarp.org/caregiving/prepare-to-care-planning-guide/) and the 56-page "Planning for your Future" booklet (www.adrcoforegon.org/consite/plan.php). Of all the things I prepared in advance, this group was by far, my best choice.