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Nurturing Plants, Birds & Participants



Yun-ing watering plants last summer.

ElderHealth's North Seattle adult day health program, located in the Ravenna district, has an enthusiastic gardening group and a sunroom full of houseplants. This spring, they are expanding out onto the adjacent patio, where they're filling pots with flower and vegetable seedlings.

Another Ravenna activity group will be putting the finishing touches on five large birdhouses which they'll sand, paint, decorate and set out to encourage visitations from their feathered friends.

Many ElderHealth locations have similar groups starting up this spring. For more information, call (206) 528-5315.

Participants Discover TIME

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Sophia," Christina says, "because she gets up everyday and has something to look forward to." She continues, "Her vocabulary has gone through the roof—she's much more expressive now with words than with signs—and her mobility has improved: now she can get on and off of the van more easily."

Josh Caple, TIME's coordinator, says that Deborah too is developing new skills. "When she started the program she came through like a bull," he says. "She'd sit in the corner and wouldn't interact. But one day when Fred came to pick her up, Deborah was sitting at a table having dinner with her new friends. He was completely teary-eyed. That's what this program is about, looking for small successes that mean a lot to the participants and their families."



ELDERHEALTH

N O R T H W E S T

SPRING 2008

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Thursday, May 1, 2008 from 7:30 to 9:00 am

**Breakfast at the Ballpark
fundraiser with Nancy Dapper**

Executive Director Alzheimer's Association

SAFECO Field, First Base Terrace

**Info/RSVP (206) 224-3772
or daveb@elderhealth.org**

NORA'S ROOM

an expanded edition of Nora's Corner

Love in the Time of Alzheimer's

by Nora Gibson, Executive Director

This is a difficult story to tell.

"Francis" and "Cora Lee" had an intense love for each other, almost to the exclusion of the outside world.

They had no children and spent their time travelling the globe. But by their nineties—reflecting statistics showing a 50% prevalence of dementia in persons over 85—Cora Lee had developed Alzheimer's disease. Francis had not.



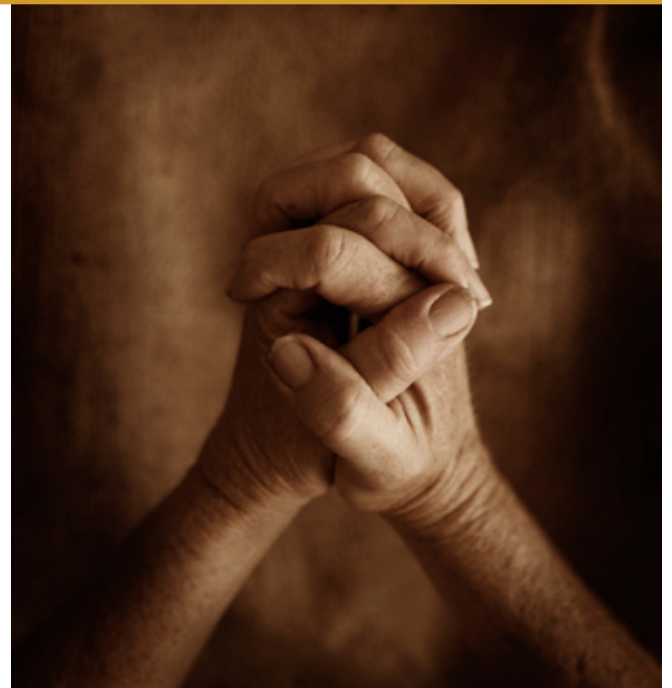
Photo: Lani O'Conner & Kristina Goudey

She became more than he could care for, and for most elders, that would be the point at which they parted ways, with her moving to a skilled nursing facility. But they remained inseparable, moving into Gaffney House, where they shared a bed in a large room on the second floor. With Francis' independence in mind, we

simply charged him a *devotion rate* (room and board).

He spent his days caring for her, and in the beginning they would still go out together: bird watching, shopping, walking around the neighborhood. But she continued to decline to the point where she could no longer tolerate the outings and was struggling with other health problems. Francis was still physically strong and mentally vital while Cora Lee needed almost constant care. We had to insist on letting our staff help take care of her, which he allowed; still, he rarely left her side.

One day I was in a meeting when I received a call on my cell phone from Steve, the manager of Gaffney House. He was noticeably upset as he told me that one of the staff had walked into Francis and Cora Lee's room



to find Francis trying to kill himself. He had wrapped a bungee cord around his neck and was trying to strangle himself. He almost succeeded. Cora Lee was in the room seemingly unaware of what was going on. He cried out that he had failed in his promise to her that if she ever got "too far gone" he would "release her." They had made a pact that he would help her die. He had tried to smother her with a pillow but couldn't bring himself to kill her.

We called 911 and the police. They took him over to Harborview Medical Center to be evaluated and considered charging him with attempted murder. After learning more about the situation they decided to reduce the charges to domestic violence but he would have to go to jail. I couldn't envision a 94 year-old man's night in King County Jail. I hoped that Harborview would keep him in the inpatient psych unit because he had just attempted suicide and could be considered a danger to himself, but they couldn't hold him because he wasn't clinically depressed. So he spent the night in jail.

A young public defender helped secure his release, which came complete with a restraining order. Steve

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Love in the Time of Alzheimer's

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recognized the importance of the couple's time together, so we requested a modification in the terms, allowing Francis to spend supervised time with Cora Lee. Steve helped Francis move into the apartment complex next to Gaffney House.

For a long time after the incident Francis spent most of his days at Gaffney House. He helped to feed Cora Lee and spent time with her, holding her hand and watching birds at the feeder outside the big front window. Every time I visited the house he was there, often laughing and joking with the staff. After a hospital stay, Cora Lee went on hospice. Our occupational therapist worked hard to keep her mobile and able to transfer. Like many people on hospice, she stabilized and her condition actually improved. They had a peaceful, easy time for the next year.

In November of last year, when Steve was on vacation and Jennifer was in charge, Francis was still visiting every day but he was getting weaker and weaker. She noticed he struggled to walk over to Cora Lee, pausing several times to catch his breath. Jennifer was alarmed and insisted that Francis go to the hospital. He was evaluated at Virginia Mason and found to have pneumonia. Still very cognitively alert, he declined treatment.

Some geriatricians call pneumonia "the friend of the elderly." It is supposed to be an easy way to die, and Francis had decided that he did not want to continue living. We were initially surprised but then understood his decision.

Jennifer visited him in the hospital and assured him we would always take good care of Cora Lee. He was very weak and looked close to death. Soon after that visit the hospital called because they

wanted to discharge him. We knew he didn't want to go to a nursing home; Jennifer asked if we could move him into Gaffney House back with Cora Lee. There was still a restraining order in place but he was too incapacitated to pose any risk to Cora Lee. We checked with the powers that be (our licenser, her guardian and others) and they all understood the situation and told us to go ahead. We signed him up for hospice and awaited his arrival at the house.

Then the hospital called again. They said Francis was too weak to survive the transport: could we bring Cora Lee to the hospital? After fruitlessly trying to arrange for a cabulance to transport her, Jennifer asked if she could use her own car. She and Ashu (one of our long-time staff) helped boost Cora Lee up into the car and they drove off to Virginia Mason.

The staff at the hospital went to great lengths to get Francis ready for Cora Lee's visit. He was dressed in his best shirt and favorite blue jeans. His teeth were in and he had his watch on. He looked just like Francis always did, but he was too weak to sit up. He gazed lovingly at Cora Lee while holding her hand. She kept falling asleep and Ashu would try to wake her but Francis said, "No, it's fine if I can just look at her." Jennifer and Ashu left the room leaving them alone together for the first time in months. (I admit I had one crazy fear that he might—like something out of *Fatal Attraction*—try to take her with him by wrapping the IV tubes around her neck, but nothing that dramatic happened.)

• He kissed
• her goodbye:
• *Good night*
• *my love.*
• *I'll love you*
• *forever.*

Jennifer told Francis that it was time to take her back to Gaffney House and asked if he would like to kiss her goodbye. He said yes and so Jennifer and Ashu picked her up and helped lay her next to him on the hospital bed. He gently kissed her forehead and said, "Good night my love. I'll love you forever."

The story is not over not yet. Francis perked up after Cora Lee's visit and the hospital wanted to discharge him again. Jennifer moved regulatory mountains and helped him move back home: to Gaffney House, to their room. With help from hospice, he directed his own care until the very end. A few days later, Ashu called to say, "I think Francis is not breathing." I told him to call the hospice nurse and drove to Gaffney House.

When I arrived, Ashu and his sister Besha, who also works at the house, were in the room with Francis and Cora Lee. Her big wheelchair would have prevented her from getting close to him, so they had put her in a small office chair next to his bed. She was leaning over, holding Francis' hand and stroking his arm. She was with him at the very end.

After we told her he had passed away, she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry." She forgot about it when we took her back downstairs, but I think on a spiritual level it meant a great deal to her.

Ashu had been the one who had discovered Francis attempting to strangle himself and now he witnessed him die so peacefully. "I never thought that he would die before Cora Lee," he said.

As I said, this was a difficult story to tell, but it had to be told. I was so touched by Francis' devotion to his wife and the tremendous effort that Jennifer and others made to allow him to die with dignity, in a wonderful place, in the warm embrace of the love of his life.

For more information about life at Gaffney House contact Steve or Jennifer at (206) 838-1930.



Photo: Mallory Erickson

From left: TIME participants William and Sophia at work with ElderHealth staffer Ronda.

Developmentally-Disabled Participants Discover TIME

Fred and Lucille don't eat out at restaurants very much, because their daughter Deborah doesn't always behave very well in that environment. She won't stay seated at the table, and instead pushes chairs and tables around, drawing unwelcome attention from other diners. Young couples know the risks of taking a toddler out for a meal, but for Fred and Lucille, the situation is different. They're elderly, and Deborah is 56 years old.

Deborah is one of the participants at ElderHealth Northwest's new program: Therapy, Integration, Mobility, and Education (TIME), a spin-off from the Get Active Program, which serves developmentally-disabled participants at several of our adult day health sites. Whereas Get Active participants work well in groups, the members of TIME have less ability to do so and mostly need individual activities customized to their needs.

The program runs afternoons at ElderHealth's South Seattle adult day health location, and has several therapeutic components:

Therapy – Our occupational therapist helps participants maintain or expand their range of motion and develop fine motor manipulation skills. She also makes necessary adjustments to adaptive aids,

and assists participants in developing or maintaining their independence in eating, transferring, toileting and other activities of daily living.

Integration – As adults, many of the members in our program have had little opportunity to spend time in a community setting; now they are integrated into a goal-oriented setting, allowing them to develop social skills with their peers.

Mobility – Those who are ambulatory are enrolled in walking programs and work on path finding, others may have goals related to transferring or propelling wheelchairs.

Education – With an eye on each participant's abilities and current interests, staff members seek to discover "teachable moments," incorporating aids such as puzzles, pencils and books to develop language, spatial- and object-recognition skills, among others.

Christina is the mother of Sophia, a 24 year-old participant. She notes that when developmentally-disabled persons cannot qualify for a job placement, then there's very little opportunity for their continued growth. "TIME has been wonderful for

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CONTACT ELDERHEALTH

DAY CENTERS & RESIDENCES
King County

(206) 528-5315

ADULT DAY HEALTH CENTERS

North Seattle (Ravenna)
South Seattle (Rainier Valley)
Downtown Seattle (First Hill)
Kent (near IKEA)

SUPPORTED LIVING HOMES

Gaffney House (Capitol Hill)
Buchanan Place (South Seattle)

ELDERHEALTH AT HOME

(206) 224-3752

DAY CENTERS
Snohomish County

(425) 355-1313

ADULT DAY HEALTH CENTERS

Snohomish County (Everett)

DAYBREAK SENIOR RESPITE PROGRAM

Snohomish, Marysville, Mill Creek and Edmonds

VOLUNTEERS

(206) 224-3790

DONATE

(206) 224-3772

OUR E-NEWSLETTER

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