

Reflection on Elder Care April 24, 2020

I would like to share a few resources that have informed my approach toward Elder Care.

First is George Vaillant's book [Aging Well](#), which I read almost twenty years ago. I should write a review of it.

Another is Dan Buettner's book [Blue Zones](#). Blue Zones are places in the world where people are so happy, they forget to die. They get plenty of sleep, drink coffee in the morning and home made wine at night (in moderation); they have robust family and friend relationships, they get natural exercise, and they eat a lot of legumes (like lentils), fruits, and vegetables. And they have a healthy spiritual life, with traditions and celebrations.

I took an Aging Options course at the local community college. That course introduced me to a whole world of books and resources that I haven't yet begun to explore, but I have them all at my fingertips when I need them.

From it, I learned that the best option is to remain in your home, if it's at all possible with family support. So I'm being that support.

Compared to the cost and hassle of nursing homes, it's so easy. Check in a few times a week, make sure the waste stream is flowing, clear bottlenecks, bring food, joke around, care for the yard. No big deal. Keep an eye out for problems, and be prepared with solutions, like in-home care. Be their eyes, ears, and voice.

It isn't really a chore; it's just life. Our parents cared for and fed us throughout our entire childhoods, sometimes later. Isn't returning the favor in late life the least we can do? Who better knows their favorite foods and modes of cooking than their own kids?

But it isn't a chore. It's a blessing. It's a win-win. I find that in late life, my dad sweetens. He doesn't have the energy to quarrel, or the memory to recall grudges. Yet he's still filled with all the wisdom and experience he ever had.

His short term memory does not work, but his long term memory is excellent; and his energy constraint has a distilling effect on those memories and experiences. He has become extremely succinct, like with his two word assessment of the lentil soup: "First rate."

So we'll just be sitting around, then he'll pop off with this gem of wisdom that sums it all up.

I'll probably write these things down like I did with Johann's baby words.

Sometimes it isn't just wisdom; it's just funny. Or perhaps it's humor with underlying wisdom. Two quips at top of mind are,

"Aging ain't for sissies"

and

"Too bad there's no money in it" (late life self-care, which becomes very time consuming work).

The wisdom behind the first quip is that we all need to prepare for our own aging, because it can be rough. Some people would rather die than age, and they commit suicide. I've seen this happen, first hand. When it happens it's daunting and tragic. It can derail everybody else's lives for years. I keep thinking of that Bible verse, "It is better to be an alive dog than a dead lion" (Ecc. 9:4).

The wisdom behind the second is, again, prepare for old age because it's an expensive time, both in terms of how time is spent, and also in terms of out of pocket costs. It's a season of gradual depletion, so you had better be prepared for it. You'll find yourself spending a lot of time doing non-remunerative work.

In late life it's so important to be in familiar surroundings (to aid memory) and have access to the comfort of comfort food, pets, and loved ones. Deprived of those things, the elderly die of a broken spirit in a matter of weeks. With them, they can live on for many years.

These are not my opinions; they are lessons I learned from what I studied, and took to heart.

I hope this helps others.