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Published January 16th, 2013

## Celebrating the Caregivers

*Submitted by Siv Ricketts*

Like many folks in Lamorinda, Liz Mesenbring and her family are learning to juggle their typical life activities while providing extra care and support for loved ones with special needs. Parkinson's and Alzheimer's have affected two grandmothers who currently live with significant medical and daily life concerns.

While it's challenging, stressful, frustrating, and sometimes even depressing, the Lafayette resident says her family recently coordinated a special gift this past December - arranging Grandma Dori Murdoch's visit with her husband and the rest of her family to the home she had lived in for the past 25 years, but hadn't seen for the past four months since moving to an assisted-living facility in San Mateo.

"Both Grandpa Lex and Grandma Dori loved sitting in their kitchen and sharing a favorite home-cooked meal with their beloved family gathered around them. It took nearly five people to make this possible, making sure medicines were organized, transportation on time, even a neighbor cheering Grandpa on that he could do it!" Mesenbring says.

Since this successful get-together, the family has planned more outings, Mesenbring says. "An aid at the assisted-living facility where she now lives lovingly helps us dress and ready our grandma for trips home. Since Christmas we've already succeeded with a second trip home."

To make all of this work, changes needed to be made. Despite cherished traditions, it's become Grandpa Lex's job to coordinate the details of the mini-reunions - from transportation and care at home, to menu planning, shopping, and cooking assignments for favorite meals. "All family members have specific responsibilities, in addition to coordinating homecare for a dependent Nana on another branch of the family tree," Mesenbring says.

"Photographs show hugs and smiling faces, yet our everyday experiences are teaching that caring for aging parents, a chronically ill spouse, or even special needs children is a complicated challenge," she adds. "Besides providing quality care, finding ways to enjoy time with each other, or to recharge one's own energy, can sadly be rather difficult, if not isolating."

But Mesenbring says it's not all bad. "We're now comfortable savoring pies that come in cardboard boxes and aren't baked by a grandma," she says. "We're learning to transport wheelchairs, listen and accept stories that are forgotten mid-way through. We toast dishes that sporadically arrive at the table, and we regularly realign our expectations.

Time with both grandmothers has become more meaningful than ever, thanks to the helping hands of a few angels in our community, folks who make it possible to carve out moments when we can simply enjoy being together."

Mesenbring says getting help as a caregiver isn't always easy, nor is it easy to admit when you need help. "We're lucky to have support from the folks at the care home, as well as friends who've been open about their own experiences," she says.

Caregivers or anyone else seeking answers to questions about financial and legal considerations, transitions of care, and spiritual and emotional care of the caregiver are invited to an upcoming workshop, Caregiving: A Labor of Love, a Workshop for those Caring for Family Member, from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 2 at the Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church at 10 Moraga Valley Lane. Keynote speaker, Dr. Karen Taylor, DDiv, wife/caretaker of a husband with early-onset Alzheimer's, and former Burton Valley music teacher, will share her journey to encourage and empower the caregiver from a biblical point of view. Lunch is included and registration is required.

To register, email [MVPCdeacons@gmail.com](mailto:MVPCdeacons@gmail.com) or for more information, visit [www.mvpctoday.org](http://www.mvpctoday.org) or call (925) 376-4800.

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