**(long version 1,396 words-not counting boiler plate)**

**I’M RETIRING, NOW WHAT?**

**Or**

**WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU ARE RETIRING!**

***by Tammy Glenn, Executive Director, National Volunteer Caregiving Network***

If you were born between 1946 and 1964, you are considered a “baby boomer” and if you have not already retired, chances are you will be retired within the next few years. In the U.S., more than 10,000 ‘boomers’ turn 65 every day, and according to *Investors Business Daily*, in 2024, more Americans will reach the traditional retirement age of 65 than at any other time in history.

Many retirees enter this new era with no plan for how they will spend their golden years beyond not working and many are not prepared for the physical, mental and social changes that occur during these years. Over the last several decades, I have had the honor of working with hundreds of amazing people over the age of 60, both personally and professionally. As you might imagine, I have heard a lot about the many challenges of aging. Here are three of the most common refrains and a few suggestions to deal with them.

1. ***“I didn’t think I’d live this long; I’m not financially prepared!***

Many of our seniors didn't expect to live as long as they are and are not prepared to deal with rising rents, unforeseen expenses and lack of resources.

If you haven’t retired yet, don’t panic.  Plan. Plan for the worst and hope for the best. **Before you retire consider these suggestions**:

* Consider relocating to ensure you have a second bedroom or storage space that can be used for rental income.
* Pay off all of your credit card debt
* Budget so that you are not dependent on tapping into your savings to make ends meet each month
* Calculate your savings based on your expected lifespan. In other words, take a guess that you might live another 15 years. With $50,000 in savings, divide by 15 years which comes to $3,333 per year or $277 per month. That’s what you can afford to take out of savings.
* Try not to take a Reverse Mortgage on your home too early in your life. A Reverse Mortgage should be one of your last options.
* Get a part-time job while you’re still able to work.

1. ***“My body is changing and not for the better!”***

In working with hundreds of people over the age of 60, I’ve come to realize that older adults come into their age based on their individual mind, body and spirit.  A variety of factors play into how gracefully we age, and one of those key factors is how free you are to move. Good mobility is made up of several ingredients:  balance, flexibility, muscle tone, joint health, weight, cardiovascular ability, and strength  *The greater command you have of each of these ingredients, the more likely you will be able to move about freely*.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, unintentional falls in adults over the age of 65 and older are the leading cause of injury. Over 14 million, or 1 in 4 older adults report falling every year.  While not all falls result in an injury, about 37% of those who fall reported an injury that required medical treatment or restricted their activity for at least one day, resulting in an estimated nine million fall injuries.

We **highly recommend having a medical alert device with built-in fall detection.** That means that emergency services are alerted when the fall happens. You don’t have to press a button or locate your cell phone.  In fact, if you were to fall and hit your head–a scenario that happens too frequently–you may be too disoriented or even unconscious to call for help.

Fall detection is highly sophisticated now and works with GPS to identify your location. It’s recommended that emergency services get to you within 20 minutes to combat potential brain injury.  Know that fall detection technology has evolved so well that false alarms rarely occur.

* **Balance** is a great skill to work on. The better your balance, the less likely you are to take a spill in the first place. It’s likely that a balance routine will also include stretching and increased flexibility–two ingredients that will make your trips down to and up from the floor so much better.
* It’s never too late to start **strength training**.  If you’re not familiar with using weights, consult with a trainer or coach.
* Have a **plan for when that fall happens**–especially if you live alone or spend hours by yourself. Knowing the game plan for when bad things happen will alleviate added stress.
* Your doctor may recommend taking **more frequent walks**, and that’s where a volunteer caregiver can be a great companion.  Consider reaching out to explore a walking buddy. Visit **nvcnetwork.org** to find a volunteer caregiving organization near you.

1. ***“I don’t know what to do with myself now, I’m kind of lonely!”***

Loneliness in senior adults is no joke and as seniors get older, their risk of isolation increases. To prevent the negative effects of loneliness and isolation in seniors, it’s important for seniors (and their loved ones) to be proactive about staying engaged throughout the day.

According to ***Senior Lifestyle***, senior isolation affects nearly every aspect of their lives. In addition to the effects on mood and mental health, isolation often leads to physical deterioration. In a study from the [**National Academy of Sciences**](about:blank), lonely and isolated seniors showed higher rates of poor physical and mental health. Individuals with limited social lives are more likely to suffer from the following health concerns:

* Hypertension
* Coronary artery disease
* Cardiac failure
* Depression
* Anxiety
* Alzheimer’s (and other forms of dementia)

As you can see, there are often serious consequences for older adults that become isolated.

So, what can you do? Things are changing! If you are retiring from a job, you will no longer have the regular comradery of co-workers and will need to seek a different way to regularly socialize. Similarly, if you are moving, you may need to make new friends in your new home and build new social systems.

**Volunteering in your community** may be one of the first important steps in building your social network of support. A social network of some kind is so valuable when it comes to building friendships. It’s all about the “give and take.”  Striking a balance between how much you give and how much you take may be a reason you refrain from getting involved in your community. It’s important to fill your own well in all kinds of relationships–and that can look a lot different for one person than it does for another.

One of the benefits of lending your time and treasure is the opportunity for a helping hand from a like-minded individual when you need it. Surrounding yourself with people who share your interests and values is a wonderful step in your personal journey. If you’re lucky enough to fall into a good community, or two or three, you just might make some lifelong friends.  There’s lots of ways to volunteer–including serving as a phone friend or helping around an office.

**Have a little faith!** Growing old and aging in place is not for the faint of heart. People don’t plan for the inevitable, so when they arrive at that moment where it becomes evident that “We’re old!” most people scramble to address the challenges in front of them. From what we’ve seen, it happens with a major hospital visit, something that catches us off guard like a heart attack, a stroke or diagnosis of cancer or diabetes.  We should have seen it coming.

Even if you have a good support system of family and friends, this new health incident defines you. No matter how many people you have around you, this is a personal battle where you can’t count on your body the way you used to.  It’s comforting to have a little faith.

Consider taking another look at the options. No matter the religion, every faith seems to offer a wide range of experiences from the traditional branches of Christianity and Judaism to less traditional environments filled with music and social diversity. Even traditional environments are expanding their outreach to include a wide variety of support systems. It’s worth looking into the options because faith communities are filled with people who want to do good–and that often starts with the Golden Rule:  Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

*Tammy I. Glenn was a family caregiver to her bed bound mother for 20 years and now leads the National Volunteer Caregiving Network* ***nvcnetwork.org*** *while directing one of the original pilot programs for volunteer caregiving in Ventura County, California****vccaregivers.org.*** *Tammy is not a medical professional, so check with your medical professional regarding your own personal health.*

*In 1984, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation began providing seed money for volunteer caregiving and its initial grants pioneered the model that eventually scaled to serve the entire United States through more than 1,000 organizations, now present in every state. Forty years later, this national model continues to thrive, supporting people with disabilities and older adults seeking to age in place.*