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Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers, Corvallis, OR

First draft sent: August 18, 2023

Second draft sent: August 21, 2023

Words: 1040

When Jim retired in 1999, after 26 years at Oregon State University (OSU), he had no plans to volunteer as a caregiver. He was a chemical analyst and had worked in the Crop and Soil Science, Entomology, and Horticulture departments at OSU. He also worked on an insect control project for the U.S. Forest Service for three years, was a weekend fire lookout in the Cascade Mountains one summer, and taught for two years in Nigeria.

After retiring, he planned on pursuing his many hobbies and interests, including bicycle riding, acrylic painting, wood-turning lathe work, fossils, and as a naturalist. He plays the flute with the Corvallis Community Band and a flute ensemble. He and his wife, Donna, sing in the church music group.

Jim grew up in Ohio and has degrees in biology, natural history, and entomology and a minor in geology. “Besides working at a grocery store in high school, I also did farm work. Part of my duties at the grocery store was to pack groceries at the checkout stand. Occasionally, a person would check through and then find out they were a few dollars short. I often had some money in my wallet, so I would pay for what they were missing. This built my faith and trust in people because I never lost a penny doing this. They all came back and repaid me.”

“I’ve always liked to help people: after meetings, putting the chairs away, and helping people on the street. I seem to be programmed more to spontaneity. Driving to town one day, I noticed a car of teenagers parked alongside the road. They had a flat tire and no tire iron, so I stopped to help. Ordinarily, I would have helped them, but this day I only loaned them my tire iron. They left it on a fence post, and I reclaimed it on the way back. My wife was perturbed because we were taking our daughter to the doctor due to severe allergic reaction, and I still stopped. Luckily, everything turned out okay for my daughter.”

“I don’t remember who from Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) asked me to become a volunteer driver, but someone needed a ride to a shopping center in Corvallis, and they were short on drivers. That was 18 years ago!” He lives five miles outside of Philomath, eleven miles from Corvallis. He still gets calls to drive every couple of weeks. Most are for short rides, but once he drove to Portland—a two-hour trip each way.

“People often need help carrying their purchases and sometimes they do not. I was a grocery delivery boy in high school, so packing groceries is almost second nature to me, and I help them unless they tell me specifically not to. They almost always offer to pay me for the trip, but payment isn’t why I do it, so I simply tell them to send it to the VIC office. Sometimes I notice little details for which someone hasn’t asked for help: I saw that one lady I drove for had trouble walking and her lawn was a mess—she couldn’t mow her own lawn anymore, so I mowed it for her.”

“One of my regulars was physically disabled and mentally unstable from his prior drug use and was only 40. Because he couldn’t take care of himself, another volunteer and I took turns taking him shopping and to his appointments. One time I noticed his soiled bedding (he couldn’t do his own washing), so I washed his clothes and bedding that one time, and I put his groceries away.

Another day, when I arrived to pick him up to take him shopping, I noticed his nose was bleeding. He ‘said’ he didn’t have a doctor because a doctor would send him to the hospital. So, I called the police for a welfare check, and I went out to do his shopping. When I returned, there was a police car and an ambulance at his house. His blood pressure was sky-high, and because of a legal technicality, they took him to the hospital, and then later to a nursing home. He was part Native American, but his reservation couldn’t help him and eventually, he went to a permanent facility. I know I did the right thing—he got the care he needed even though he didn’t want it.”

“Another interesting person I helped I will call ‘Mr. Daisy’. Mr. Daisy’s wife called the VIC office for a volunteer to give her some relief. She was caring for her husband who couldn’t drive and was getting cabin fever in the house. It turns out that Mr. Daisy was a really nice guy. A little forgetful, but he laughed at a lot of things, including himself, didn’t argue, and liked to ride around. His most common statement was: “I haven’t been on this road for years.” The interesting thing was that he knew who used to live in this house or owned that land and often told me where the roads would go. I found a road I had not been on for 35 years and noticed the county had extended it, so we went ‘exploring’. Or so I thought. He was more current than I was and already knew it. Yes, driving Mr. Daisy was an education. We drove to Alsea Falls, the wildlife refuges, Smith Island Loop, Bellfountain, and some other local sights. Two hours seemed enough to rejuvenate his spirit and give his wife a chance to be by herself. One day he said: ‘I’d like to go to…’ and then the destination wouldn’t come out. I do that myself. So, I told him, “Keep thinking about it and write it down when it comes to you. Then we’ll do it—but we’re not going to Georgia, California, or some really far-off place. He laughed, again.”

“My wife says I never sit down. And even at 83, there are so many interesting things to do in this world that I could not settle down. The people I drive may have family in the area but can’t always provide transportation. Some don’t have family nearby and they are lonely. They share their interesting life stories with me. If I had to stop volunteering, I would miss the occasional ‘thank you’ and their smiles.”

**Social media #1:** I don’t remember who from Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) asked me to become a volunteer driver, but someone needed a ride to a shopping center in Corvallis, and they were short on drivers. That was 18 years ago!

**Social media #2:** If I had to stop volunteering, I would miss the occasional ‘thank you’ and their smiles.