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Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers, Corvallis, OR

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“Shortly after I moved to Philomath, Oregon, a small community about 5 miles from Corvallis, I was ‘drafted’ as a volunteer with Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC). This was in 1994 when I was the ‘new kid’ at my church and a woman (who was a real go-getter) asked if I would be willing to provide respite care for the family of a woman who was near death. They needed a few hours’ break. This was something I could do as I had been in nursing for many years but retired in 1992 when my mother-in-law had a stroke and then died, leaving a need for my help in dealing with her estate.

Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) began over 30 years ago when my church, the Corvallis Seventh Day Adventist Church, began a program of providing care for church members and Corvallis residents. It grew until it was more than the church family could provide, so they reached out to other churches in the area and VIC was formed. Today, VIC comprises eight different churches, each with its own volunteer coordinator and volunteer caregivers. Over the years, I’ve sat on the board until it interfered with other VIC duties and as our Church coordinator, on and off until about 15 years ago when I assumed the task permanently, while still providing service to our many clients. I didn’t keep track of those that I helped until 2014 and there are now over 200 people on my volunteer list, serving many people multiple times over the years—several for over five years—the longest for 11 years.

When I get a call from VIC, I look at my volunteer list to match the person’s needs with the volunteer’s talents. Over the years, I have personally provided the following to those needing a volunteer: shopping, respite care, light housekeeping, gardening (gardening advice, planting flowers, raking leaves, mowing lawns), moving people—packing boxes and loading them into a vehicle, transporting people to various appointments to—medical, hair, covid vaccinations, a cat to the vet, the ICU, Urgent Care, and the airport. I’ve helped them fill out application forms, dropped by for friendly visits, and went shopping for clients.

I love to drive, and I have no problem driving clients to other communities outside of Corvallis: to Portland (a 2-hour trip each way), Salem (1 hour each way), and Eugene (1 hour each way).

Once I had the privilege of driving the VIC director and her husband to Portland, a 2-hour drive away from their home, to visit their daughter who was in the hospital. I dropped them off at the front door, arranging to pick them up at the same place when they were ready to leave. All they had to do was call me to tell me they were ready to be picked up.

Somehow my cell phone got switched to ‘airplane mode’, not allowing me to receive phone calls, a fact I realized later. I did not know the daughter’s last name, or who her doctor was, so I had no way of finding them. Finally, after some tense moments on both of our parts, we found each other and headed home. It was a good lesson for me to check my phone better AND to have a better idea of how to find the client should the need arise.

Another time, one of our clients who had once been a faithful VIC volunteer had to retire from volunteering because of illness. He needed VIC’s transportation service for dialysis treatments two or three times a week. VIC had arranged with several volunteers to transport him for these treatments and a schedule was set up for volunteers to either take him or pick him up from his four-plus hour treatments.

I was scheduled to pick him up on the day I returned home from a visit to Connecticut. No problem, I could pick him up on my way home from the airport—but it had slipped my mind. Fortunately, the office volunteer called to remind me to pick him up. I got the reminder call just as I was entering Corvallis, and I picked him up right on time. The problem was that I was driving my sports car, a Trans Am, which might have been difficult for him to get in and out of. When I pulled up to pick him up and he realized it was me in THAT car, he broke into a huge grin, one that lasted until I dropped him off at his house. It turned out that it was one of the best gifts I could have given him.”

Ginger has a couple of people she has been helping for many years. She has been helping Gerry, a former professor who had lost her eyesight and has arthritis, reading books to her for over 11 years. “She also listens to audiobooks, but many of her favorite authors are not available on audio. I have read many wonderful books over the years that we both have enjoyed.”

*FROM GERRY:*

*‘I lost my eyesight just as many friends were writing books. Ginger came to my rescue, reading for me. Through VIC, I not only heard those books but made a friend.’*

*FROM PATTI: (a lovely lady I’ve been helping for only a year)*

*‘It is catastrophic to not be able to drive and be independent. VIC has been an amazing blessing for me and George. Kind and caring drivers have gotten us to and from appointments. Several have become dear friends. There are no words to express how grateful we are to VIC and the wonderful drivers who have added so much to our lives.’*

“All of our volunteers go through extensive background checks. I often recruit college students to help with gardening and yardwork. It’s fun to work outside with them.”

At 83 and a VIC volunteer for 27 years, Ginger is still going strong. As she says,

“‘Once a caregiver, always a caregiver.’ If I had to stop volunteering, I would miss the people I get to help who share their lives with me. Sometimes I’m overwhelmed by the need for volunteers. I try to do as much as I can, but some people’s needs are too great. I like to stay involved and to keep the program that began at my church, going, but my husband has become more frail, and I can’t leave him for long periods of time so sometimes this limits what I can do.”

***Social media 1:*** *I was ‘drafted’ as a volunteer when I first moved to Philomath (which is five miles from Corvallis). I was the ‘new kid’ at my church and a woman who was a go-getter asked if I would be available to provide respite care for the family of a woman who was near death, and they needed a few hours away.*

***Social media 2:*** *‘Once a caregiver, always a caregiver.’ If I had to stop volunteering, I would miss the people I get to help who are sharing their lives with me.*