**Christi Brenneman**  Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers, Corvallis, OR

1st draft sent: August 17, 2023

2ND DRAFT: August 23, 2023

*Words: 915*

“I never planned on becoming a volunteer caregiver. I simply signed up to answer phones in the Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) office.”

Christi has been volunteering in many positions all her life. Her main jobs have all been in the caregiving realm it seems: from hospital human resources insurance specialist to working and managing a preschool for 20 years, caring for people came naturally. “My father’s Alzheimer’s/dementia made caring for him a family affair.” After he died, she saw her mom lose her spunk and didn’t blossom or bloom with him gone. Her mom sold the house in Santa Barbara and moved in with Christi’s brother in San Diego. After a year and a half, it became evident that her mom would be better off moving to Oregon and living with Christi and her husband. Oregon living provided a slower pace of life and no major freeways to drive on. Her mother is now 87 and has just moved into an Assisted Living facility near Christi’s home.

Her mom lived with them for nine years. Up through early 2020, she could drive short distances to her morning exercise classes or bible studies. “After my mom had a minor stroke in May 2020, she couldn’t drive herself any longer.”

After the Episcopal preschool closed, Christi continued at the church as a volunteer covering the front desk, where she had worked in different capacities for 28 years. “Three of the ladies that I volunteer with at the Good Samaritan Episcopal Church—Phyllis, Tricia, and Desiree—talked about Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) often. They were all phone/office volunteers for VIC. I thought this VIC office phone/office job would work for me a couple of mornings per month, along with the other volunteering that I still do for the church. Since my mother’s stroke, I’m only gone from the house for about four hours at a time. She needed more of my time and would get anxious if I was gone too long.”

“I never intended to be a VIC volunteer driver until I answered the phone from a woman who needed an urgent doctor’s appointment one afternoon in 2019. Stephanie’s cataract surgery recovery was not going well, and she really needed immediate driving help. She could no longer drive because of a fracture in her back, arm weakness, and now one eye that she could not see clearly from. We've since become good friends, and I drive her and her little service dog, Ginger, often. My VIC director agreed Stephanie could contact me directly with her needs if I could accommodate them and did not get burned out. She has so many needs and appointments that her doctors now call me to coordinate her rides.”

*WHAT STEPHANIE SAYS ABOUT VIC:*

*“I first became involved with Volunteer Interfaith Caregivers (VIC) in 2010 when I broke my leg and had to have a ramp put on my house. I also had people come from VIC on two occasions to weed my yard. In 2019 I broke my back and had faulty eye surgery and I am no longer able to drive—the next time I became involved with VIC. At first, various people were driving me, and then I met Christi. From that point on Christi has taken me to all my doctors' appointments and has helped me out and we have since become good friends. I should add that my ramp had to be replaced, so VIC volunteers came out and replaced it.”*

“A new gal called me recently, who also had eye surgery, and wasn’t allowed to lift, push, or pull anything weighing over three pounds. She needed help moving the wash load to the dryer, folding the laundry, and taking her grocery shopping. She originally only needed my help for four weeks, but then she needed another eye surgery that required her not to lift anything again over three pounds again.”

“I enjoy being able to help assist people. I’ve always lived by this quote: “Blessed to be a blessing”. I have the time and I like to help people.” Since Christi’s husband planned to retire in 2023, she prepared her mother the year before, by getting her used to the idea of her moving into an Assisted Living facility. “A year ago, we had Mom stay at my favorite Assisted Living facility for respite care, during our three-week home remodel.” Christi and her mother both really liked it. Her mother said, ‘Yes, I would like to live here someday’. “In early August 2023, my mother moved into that Assisted Living facility, which is just 10 minutes from my home. My husband just retired in April, and he really wanted us to be free to travel. We were very landlocked with my mother living with us. She could not stay alone overnight. We felt Mom, our dogs, and our home was unsafe with Mom staying overnight alone. Sadly, Mom is ‘marching down the memory trail,’ just like my father had 14 years ago.”

“Since my husband retired, Stephanie knows I’ll be less available to her. She has always had a helper who can do the shopping and now another friend who could take her to doctors’ appointments.

We still plan on doing some traveling, once my mother is stable in her new environment. Volunteering is heartfelt and is **my chosen** way of giving back to the community and helping others. I love to keep busy because I know if I was just home 24/7, I’d go bonkers.”

***Social Media #1***: I enjoy being able to help assist people. I’ve always felt ‘Blessed to be a blessing’:

**Social Media #2**: Volunteering is heartfelt and is **my chosen** way of giving back to the community and helping others.