

## *Transitions*

May 2018

*“Life is a journey, not a destination.” – Lynn H. Hough*

Years ago, I remember saying that I couldn't believe that it was year 2000. Eighteen years later, I find myself realizing (finally) that time stops for no one, and we should remember that life is a series of experiences, a journey. As we age, one of the toughest issues to deal with is the fact that our bodies and minds will be less cooperative (as the saying goes, “getting old is not for wimps!”). So, we must also remember that the only constant in life is change, and if we do not adjust it may cause more harm than good.

When it comes to lifestyle and living accommodations, it's never too early to plan; for those in their 60's and 70's, it's prudent to map out an eventual, possible transition to a new retirement residence. For those in their 40's and 50's, although it may be too early to plan for yourself, you should probably discuss your parents' plans with them, since inevitably your folks could/should lean on you one way or another. With that being said, we know how difficult these conversations can be, and how fraught with fear a potential transition or relocation can be; change may be constant, but as we get older it becomes more frightening as well.

The fear of relocating to a different, albeit potentially better, residence/lifestyle for your later years can come from several different worries: some perceive giving up their independence, some fear leaving their home, some fear losing friends, while others simply do not want to confront their mortality. But the fact of the matter is that their fear may be misplaced. We believe this is true more so these days since the Boomers are changing, once again, the landscape of retirement living. In preparation for this huge demographic shift, the retirement industry has been preparing for better and more diverse options. In fact, the CCRC's (continuing care retirement communities) of today do not resemble the “nursing homes” we knew 20-30 years ago. While the communities usually have some transitional care rooms for assisted living and/or memory care, most residences look like apartment complexes with great amenities.

Another common objection is price. Indeed, CCRC's can be costly, with entrance fees (some refundable in whole or part) generally equaling what people might pay for a home in the local market, as well as monthly maintenance fees. But when you consider what you're potentially getting – such as meals, dining rooms, swimming pools, classrooms, fitness centers, beauty shops, spas, and/or clinics, all within walking distance - it can be well worth the cost relative to maintaining an older/larger detached home.

Interestingly though, 90% of people over age 65 still plan to age in their homes. (“Can You Afford to Age in Place?” AARP, 2017) Why? Because they are comfortable in their own homes, they like their routines, privacy, and freedom that comes with home ownership, and don’t like the thought of moving into a smaller place and having to get rid of lots of “stuff”. Plus, many are confident in their ability to age in place as they may see themselves younger than they actually are (33% of adults surveyed between ages 65 to 74 feel 10-19 years younger than their age; AARP Public Policy Institute, 6/15). Yet one in four people over age 65 falls each year, and over 300,000 people are hospitalized each year from broken hips. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2/10/17).

So, the reality is that we will all continue to get older, and eventually we will need some help. This may explain why a neuropsychologist once told me that the sooner you plan and take action, the better. She also noted that it can be tremendously helpful for older adults to be close to an adult child, because like it or not, one day we will depend heavily on our children, just as they did on us when they were young. And, in turn, the children will be more than happy to help (hopefully, of course!), with the upside gift of being able to spend more quality time with their mom and dad. But this is not to say that the change will not be scary when and if transition comes; but it’s best to remember that life is a journey and not a destination, and when you embrace a new adventure, fear can turn into joy, fulfillment and safety.

Last but not least, I’d like to thank the men and women of the armed services. Previously known as Decoration Day, Memorial Day commemorates these patriots who died while in service to this country. Never forget that our liberties were earned by these heroic people who put love of God and country before all else. So, when you enter into a debate about what is right and wrong with this country, make sure you first consider the sacrifices others have made to allow us the right to debate. Honor these true heroes this weekend, and remember that they are the people who made the United States of America such a wonderful country and symbol of freedom!

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