

Letters from Home

Nurturing family, fostering friendships, honoring God & preserving life until its natural end

Responding to a Growing Need

As the number of people living with Alzheimer's disease skyrockets, the personal and social impact of this disease has reached astounding proportions. Fifteen years ago there were approximately 500,000 Americans with Alzheimer's disease. Today there are ten times as many—almost five million, including more than 90,000 Minnesotans.

Gianna Homes—Sursum Corda is organized as a not-for-profit corporation committed to a mission of care for vulnerable seniors in our community suffering from Alzheimer's. As the need for this care grows we are also making plans to expand our capacity to give care through an expansion of our residence. This summer the City of Minnetonka granted us permission to proceed with an addition and renovation to our home that will enable us to serve more families as well as create new opportunities for our residents to appreciate each day more fully. Enclosed with this letter are some drawings of the improvements we have planned.



During a picnic on a recent summer day, a group of Gianna Homes residents enjoyed a visit with a team of champion Clydesdale horses that brought back fond memories of earlier days.

Each individual and each family experience Alzheimer's in a unique way. Although the general tendency is to focus on what is lost, here at Gianna Homes our staff members help residents and their families to focus on the abilities that are retained. As our guest columnist shares in her story on page two, some unexpected joy can be found as a loved-one progresses with Alzheimer's.

This focus on the abilities that are retained springs from our mission: "Providing memory care with a loving kindness that celebrates the dignity of each resident. Welcome home!" Here at Gianna Homes we celebrate that dignity in our daily interactions with each resident, as well as in our planning for an expansion of our home. In the coming months we look forward to providing you with updates on our progress with this exciting new project.

Sincerely,

Anne Marie

Gianna Homes, memory care that celebrates each moment

SUMMER/FALL 2004

Gianna Homes
Memory care that celebrates each moment.

The Unexpected Joy of Alzheimer's

by Colleen Carroll Campbell, Guest Columnist

Lately, my dad has been talking a lot about heaven.

He talks about it all of the time, repeating the word again and again. That's not entirely unusual: My father has Alzheimer's disease, and repetition is a staple of his conversations. Still, his single-minded focus is impressive.

When he rises out of his Lazy Boy and heads for the door, I ask where he's going.

"To heaven!"

When he wanders out of line at the baseball stadium, my husband wonders where he's headed.

"To heaven!"

When he arrives at our home for Easter dinner, looking utterly astounded to find me there, he opens his arms wide and grins from ear to ear.

"I'm in heaven!"

It's not just a figure of speech. It's the focus of his life.

My father has always been a man of faith. When he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's eight years ago, he was also a man of keen intellect. But he was forgetting to pay bills, getting lost behind the wheel, and acting depressed. The test results showed signs of Alzheimer's, a progressive, degenerative disease caused by plaques and tangles in the brain.

Today the man who once recited Joyce Kilmer poems from memory, spoke conversational Latin, and testified before Congress on behalf of the disabled is disabled himself. He can no longer make sense of what he reads or get dressed without help. He gets lost in his own home.

The man who coached me in every sport I ever played, attended every theatrical performance I ever gave, and praised every article I ever wrote now calls me his "friend Colleen" because he has forgotten the word "daughter."

Someday soon, he may forget me.

And yet he has joy. Immense, contagious joy. It's noticed by everyone he meets—from aides at his adult day-care center, who marvel at his compassion for the other dementia patients, to the nephews who once considered him their hero, and still do. My father is forever laughing and singing, smiling and comforting. After meeting him recently, a friend said to me, "He brings so much joy. How can he have so much joy?"

Joy amid suffering is one of the great mysteries of life. And it's one of the great themes of Catholic Faith that my father passed on to me: that our sufferings, if accepted with patience and love, can sanctify us. They can make us more pure, more holy, more joyful than we would be without them. They can become a gift that we offer back to God. And God can use that gift to draw us—and, through us, other people—closer to Himself, closer to heaven.

I believe it because I've seen it. I've seen my father light up a room laden with grief—as he did recently when my uncle died. My father's warmth and innocence

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continue living...continue sharing...continue loving...continue enjoying...continue participating...

Colleen Carroll Campbell is a former speechwriter to President George W. Bush and author of *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* Reprinted with permission from *CRISIS* magazine.



A group of residents and staff gather in the Gianna Homes gardens to enjoy the sunshine.

Dr Gianna was a timeless woman in her love for the family and for God, in her complete dedication to life, the lives of her patients and everyone around her.



Quality Nursing at Gianna Homes

by Jeff Brummer RN

What is quality nursing care and how is it achieved at Gianna Homes? Before I answer these questions let me tell you about my background and my understanding of nursing.

After graduating from the nursing program at St Mary's Junior College I worked as a staff nurse at North Memorial Medical Center, first on an orthopedic unit for two years and then as a hospice nurse (both in-patient and home care) for 17 more years.

A basic definition of nursing is to provide physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual care to patients who are unable to care for themselves. To fulfill this role, nurses enter into a sacred trust with their patient and their patient's family. Nurses are part of the interdisciplinary team (nursing assistants, therapists, doctors, etc) that strives to deliver the best care possible to the patient. For each patient, nurses assess, prepare a specific care plan, intervene, and evaluate.

So how do we deliver quality nursing care at Gianna Homes? With our small home-like setting and our mission, Gianna Homes is exceptionally conducive to great nursing care. Here I am able to personally observe and interact with our residents for forty hours or more every week.

I accompany our residents to and from medical appointments as needed. I do nail care on a regular basis. I train our nursing assistants in proper care procedures and then monitor the care they give. The staff report to me about any concerns, problems or improvements they may have about the care we give our residents.

Our philosophy is that every resident is of inestimable worth and deserving of our best care regardless of his or her condition. The outstanding care with dignity that we give to our residents is not based on the quality of life they may demonstrate, but rather on our belief that theirs is a life of great quality.

Unexpected Joy, continued from page 2

consoled his sister and her children. He sang for them, told them Uncle George was in heaven, and reminded them, "We're all in God's hands." His insights were mingled with otherwise nonsensical stories and garbled thoughts. But that's the mystery, and the beauty, of who he is now: a man whose wisdom is disguised by dementia, a man who can lift our spirits as he loses his mind.

When some people see the ravages of a fatal disease like Alzheimer's, they see only senseless suffering.

My father still has his dignity. I see this more clearly now than ever, because he has so little else left. I see that his dignity is not a byproduct of his intelligence or his achievements. It never was.

It's an everlasting and irrevocable gift from God. So is the life of his soul.

Despite all of his confusion and loss, my father still knows this. Sometimes I think it's all right. It's all he needs to know now. And I'm grateful that he tells us about it—in whatever way he can whenever it crosses his mind.



Pope John Paul II receives St. Gianna's husband, Pietro, and daughter, Dr. Gianna Emanuela, following the Canonization of St. Gianna at the Vatican on May 16. Our residence in Minnetonka is named in honor of St. Gianna Beretta Molla.

Resources We Recommend

Gentlecare - Moyra Jones

In her book, Jones presents a whole new model of care when it comes to Alzheimer's patients. She shows caregivers how to treat the whole person and not just the disease. The foundation of her model is to stop trying to modify behavior and meet a patient where they are at which helps make the consequences of the disease less traumatic for the patient. Following the steps that Jones outlines will not only improve care but it will improve the quality of life for the patient.

www.alz.org - An excellent source of information for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. This site provides various links to resources, programs and services.

Our Mission

Providing memory care
with a loving kindness
that respects the dignity
of each resident.
Welcome home!



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Dear Reader...

With **Letters from Home**
we hope to share with you,
our friends and family, a little
bit of what life is like here at
Gianna Homes.

Each stage of life brings its
own changes. At Gianna
Homes we create a place
where our residents can feel
at home and where they will
find care, companionship,
and dignity.

Anne Marie Hansen
Founder & President

Letters from Home is
published for family
& friends of
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What Can I Expect in the Days to Come?

Each individual with Alzheimer's is affected by and exhibits behaviors differently with this disease. Other physical conditions of the patient can impact how and when someone will progress through the varying stages of the disease. [See the resources listed on page 3 for more on the stages of the disease.] The best way to prepare for what is coming next is to educate yourself and consider joining a support group. Be sure you are comfortable with your loved one's physician and that the doctor is able to respond to your questions.

The best advice we can give is to not try to fit your loved one into a certain stage. Be flexible in your planning and with the expectations you have for them. Remember that they cannot change what is happening to them nor are they responsible for it. You can control your response to this disease – they cannot.

As the disease progresses certain motor skills, behaviors, speech, and ability do to activities of daily living will be lost. Encourage your loved one to do as much as possible for themselves by cuing. Also be willing to help out when they are frustrated or you notice their inability to perform certain functions.

Be sure to take care of yourself. Hire help to relieve you so you can still do things that interest you. Volunteers, neighbors, family and friends often just need to be asked to assist you when needed. Some communities offer Adult Day Programs that can allow both of you some individual freedom.

There may come a time when you may not be able to meet the needs of your loved one at home. The Alzheimer's Association and a nurse case manager are great resources to help you find the appropriate care setting for your loved one.