

aging process and aides life completion to our journey. It also affords family a way to honor and celebrate the memories of those achievements, life experiences and lessons.

This is how we note the patterns of connections in our life story, encounter what we value or regret, and decide what needs to be attended to before we die. It also is the way we pass along the rich legacy and accumulated wisdom of our lives to younger generations.

One on one, or with a gathering of family, key values and lessons, defining accomplishments and humorous stories can be shared, with audio or video tape running even. Family photo albums, personalized memory boxes, or created journals can aid the story's telling. Ethical wills are another means to pass along in written form one's lived values as a spiritual legacy that can continue to guide one's family.

For family members who attend such story sessions it offers a journey to the family roots and can initiate their own journey of "conscious aging" and life story telling.

## JOURNEYS TO SOMEDAY SOON

Journeys taken in the company of an aging loved one are guided tours over the landscape of the aging process as well as to our aging future selves. This is one of the final gifts elders bestow us, how to take those final steps with dignity. Rather than shun this opportunity and the loved one who would be our guide, it is a chance to honor them and come to know both this gift

and the how to receive grace to live fully until we die.

If a life worth living is to be approached with honesty and integrity, how better to discover it than in the company of the experts? They will show us the "Sabbath" end of life is a holy time: of being, remembering, celebrating, and passing on life's wisdom and other gifts. It is an opportunity to learn how to let go and let be.

For those with the courage, this can be life-transforming. Poet Mary Oliver challenges us to approach life's journeying with purposeful intention:

*"When the end comes, I don't want to wonder if I made of my life something particular, and real. I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened, or full of argument. I don't want to end up simply having visited this world."*

So she asks, "And tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

# A TRAVEL GUIDE FOR Journeying Together:



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## SPENDING PRECIOUS MOMENTS WITH OUR AGING LOVED ONES



## JOURNEYING . . . TOGETHER

Life is full of beginnings and endings, with a series of journeys along the way. We all receive companionship and assistance as we travel through life.

It is the privilege of families to accompany their loved ones on the final journeys of life's travels and to both give assistance and receive the benefits that companionship offers over the final miles.

Having a map is a helpful way to navigate whether on the interstate or the journey of life. It enables us to anticipate the conditions we may be traveling under; it allows us to take advantage of scenic overlooks, and permits us to plan detours or alternate routes.

Our staff is often asked, *"What do I do when I visit my loved one in the nursing home?"* What follows may offer guidance as it draws on the experience of those who regularly walk with elders and it benefits from our growing collective understanding of the important developmental tasks that need to be engaged along those winding paths.

This travel guide offers families and friends of our residents and patients three such journeys that can be taken with your beloved family member. They offer tips for ways to realize the benefits of spending time

together fruitfully, creatively, and respectfully.

## JOURNEYS TO HERE AND NOW

**“** **A** *nd remember, time waits for no one.*  
*Yesterday is history.*  
*Tomorrow is a mystery.*

*Today is a gift. That's why it's called the present.”*

So goes the current saying. Today is the gift present-ed to us with the rising of each new day, an irrepeatable opportunity to receive the blessing of relationship and being together.

Because circumstances change as life passes, our way of being together is affected. Physical changes, mental status changes, fears and anxieties alter the nature of time and activities shared when we become frail elders. Our culture values action and activity over time shared together, achievement over celebration, doing for over being with.

Not surprisingly, those still engaged in the active working phase of life place a high premium on activities for their loved ones. And indeed a calendar of scheduled activities is regularly provided in group and individual settings.

We should also be aware that at times elders choose not to structure activities and decline to participate when invited. When

this is not a sign of depression or resignation about life it often reflects their increasing need to rest and conserve energy, their preference to observe others enjoying themselves, and to engage in doing “no”-thing, i.e. just being. This is foreign territory to the temporarily youthful and able-bodied.

We can honor these choices and get in sync with elders' need to “be” as opposed to “do.” Conversation, non-conversing holding hands, listening to favorite music, sitting in the gazebo with the breeze blowing and bees buzzing are fully qualified “visits” that retain the essence of connection which most elders desire. These ways of being together offer the chance to savor the special moments and treasure the large and small victories every day.

These altered expectations of what is a meaningful visit may help those who become frustrated or guilty that “more” isn't happening. Sometimes, being “in tune” while being together is more than enough.

## JOURNEYS TO REMEMBER WHEN.

**M**ost any time spent with an elder quickly leads to reminiscing. A favorite request grandchildren make of their grandparents is to tell them about “the olden days.”

When elders can share the story of their life experiences it provides a needful “life review” that involves harvesting the fruits of their life achievements. It offers a way to come to grips with the meaning of the