

## **A New Year for Health**

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I am dedicating this first column of the New Year and the first column I have written in a while to my Mom. Even more than a mother-daughter relationship, we had become good friends. Mom passed away this past October, succumbing to the advanced decline that often accompanies diabetes.

As many must do with aging parents, life over this past couple of years has been one of frequent trips home, sitting in hospital rooms and lots of care-giving and care-arranging. One's own life gets put on the back burner.

Here's some helpful pointers learned from my experience:

Treat your family, children and friends very well – as did my Mom. You never know when you will need them to watch over you and make life decisions for you. You want loving people on your side.

Be willing to be an advocate. Time and time again my Mom was overmedicated, given drugs that would make her incoherent and unconscious. Acting as detectives, it would be up to my sister and me to piece together the medication puzzle and insist that certain medications be forbidden. With that we could get her awake, alert and at home to the surroundings she loved. I did have to wonder, though, how many of our elders are sitting comatose as a result of an error or overdose in medication. I wondered, too, what do people do when not having children to carefully watch over them and be their advocate when needed.

Never, ever think that as you age you will in no way be belligerent, forgetful and sometimes say mean things. It seems to come with the territory and the pain we can find ourselves in. The more you prepare yourself for the process of aging and just understand that it brings all sorts of surprises with new parts of personalities showing up, the less you will take it all personally.

Do have the direct conversation way ahead of time as to end of life desires. Had it not been for our frank discussions and our knowing of Mom's wishes, the moment we were faced with the decision of an amputation or bringing a life well lived to a close would have been otherwise fraught-filled. Instead, the course had been clearly set ahead of time and in place of bewilderment, we had a clear direction. As a result, we were able to experience a very intimate two weeks of loving with Mom as she let her body go.

Take care of your body now. Surgery and medications have a respectful place, but there is a better way to health than disease-care: it's called prevention. Take the time now to learn about your body and its self-care; how to nourish and support it. That includes body movement: aka exercise. Don't wait until alarm bells go off to be interested in your health. It is much more difficult to turn the ship of health around under choppy seas.

Reflect on the quote said to be by Thomas Edison: "The doctor of the future will give no medicine but will interest his patients in the care of the human frame, in diet and in the cause and prevention of disease." As health care choices come before us as a nation, may we be motivated by this vision.

I look forward to being back in the Planet, with you this New Year and this new decade. As always, my desire is to deepen your appreciation of the wisdom of nature, the wisdom of your body and to inspire you to take personal responsibility in your health care.

With much love to my good friend and Mom. I am missing you.

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