



COMING of AGE

A Publication of the Saskatoon Council on Aging

Isolation Project Gets Go-ahead

The Saskatoon Council on Aging has received federal funding for its proposal to develop a community initiative to address isolation among the city's seniors.

Health Canada's Seniors Independence Program has granted \$85,133 a year for the three years of the project, steering committee chair Wilma Mollard says.

The project will involve community agencies in finding ways to reduce the isolation many Saskatoon seniors experience, and strengthen their independence. "Wellness and independence enhance integration in the community," Mrs. Mollard said.

The project should begin very soon, she said. The day the federal funding was approved, some people had already agreed to sit on the 12-member steering committee.

"The enthusiasm is great. People didn't even hesitate," she said. "There is a real enthusiasm and appreciation for the federal government doing this."

The steering committee, with 10 individuals and representatives of community agencies and two Council representatives, will decide just how the Isolation and Aging project acts on its different thrusts: wellness, relationships, environmental issues and support and respite for caregivers.

It depends, Mrs. Mollard, said, on who else is working in these areas, what they are doing, how much co-operation there can be, how ideas and resources can be shared in the community.

"We invite the support of all seniors in Saskatoon and district," she added.

Save your memories for your children

By Lorne Glauser

Next time your grandchild or great-grandchild says, "Tell me a story," remember that your own life with its rich and varied experiences is the stuff of which stories are made — with interesting characters, adventure, struggle and achievement.

When my mother was in her 85th year, my brother taped six hours in which she told about her parents and grandparents, her childhood, life in Saskatchewan in the early years of this century, and raising a family through sometimes troubled times. What a wonderful gift she gave us in those tapes and written transcripts!

With an inexpensive tape recorder and a few tapes, it's easy to make such recordings. If you play an instrument, why not tape some of your music for future generations? These are treasures worth passing on.

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Preserving All Those Memories

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More and more people are exploring ways to preserve the stories of the past, record personal anecdotes and develop family history. Some are caught up in tracing their roots. Three years ago I received a phone call from a woman in California who said, "I think you are my cousin!" She was in the midst of genealogical research. That call has produced many letters and phone calls, an exchange of photos and many fascinating stories.

Sometimes the impetus to record family history results from a community's decision to produce a local history, but the most important reason, I believe, is to provide linkages between the generations. Yes, I know not all young people want to hear stories of the past, but as they mature and have families of their own, links with yesterday become more and more important.

"I have nothing exceptional to tell," you say. "I've led an ordinary life." The Senior Memory Writers wouldn't accept that. They are very serious about writing their life stories. For five years, they have met on the third Thursday of each month at Albert Community Centre. Kathy Szalasznyj guided them through the process of writing and editing the stories that appear in their recent book *For All Seasons*. (President Joe Zeman, 343-8986.)

If you become serious about your family history, you could investigate the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society and its reference library in Regina. The Saskatoon branch meets the second Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m., also at Albert. Provincial membership (\$27.50 for seniors, plus \$6 for local membership) lets

you borrow material from the library and receive a quarterly bulletin. (Saskatoon address: P.O. Box 8561, S7K 6K8. Contacts: Jean-Marc Voisard, 683-0951; Jay Dynes, 373-9196.)

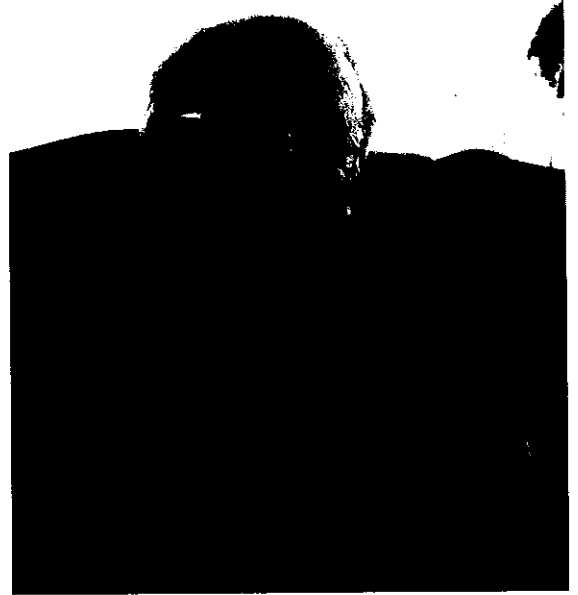
The genealogical libraries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints are important research aids. (Saskatoon Stake Branch Genealogical Library, 1429 10th Street East, phone 343-1239.)

A Saskatchewan Archives Board publication, *Exploring Family History in Saskatchewan* (\$3 plus tax), explains how to research a family history. (933-5832.)

You may want something less ambitious, like bringing together items that are part of your life story, with notes to explain their significance. Some possibilities:

- **Photograph albums and individual photos.** Record names and approximate date on the back of each photo.
- **Letters and diaries** tell about the times and the authors.
- **Official documents:** records of baptisms, education, marriages and other such documents.
- **Keepsakes:** wedding invitations, birth announcements, scrapbooks, school yearbooks, etc.

Whether you embark on an ambitious genealogical search or simply record your memories on tape or in writing, or decide to collect and document your family treasures, you will enrich your life and the lives of others with the legacy of your experiences.



*Lorne Glauser displays the Saskatchewan Archives Board publication, *Exploring Family History in Saskatchewan*.*

While historians document public events, we also need to pass on to succeeding generations the stories of individual people and their responses to life in a new country, to economic depression, to the wars, to the rapid changes of the 20th century.

We must not lose these stories.

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Publications Chairman.....Margaret Mack
 Committee.....Lorne Glauser, Mary Helen Richards
 Editorial Consultant.....Jenni Mortin
 Photography.....Mary Helen Richards

A poet of, and for, our times

By Jenni Mortin

Saskatoon poet Anne Szumigalski doesn't like to see people characterized only by age, but she has learned one thing about being older: "I now realize I should get on with the things I want to do."

For years, while writing nine books of poetry, plus essays and short stories, she wanted to write a play based on her memories of working with survivors of Nazi concentration camps after the war, as a British Red Cross volunteer translator. That experience "stays with you always," she has said.

"You're never going to be the same again."

She believes anyone could do the terrible things the Nazis did in the concentration camps. "It's true that human nature has a very nasty side to it and we can't get rid of it. Think of original sin ... How do we bring people to accept their noble side and reject their bad side?"

In 1992, she began work on the play which she calls "Z" for the letter gypsy prisoners wore in the camps. It will be produced at Twenty-Fifth Street Theatre Centre April 29-May 8. A complex work on themes of oppression, desire and freedom, it involves dance, music, poetry, clownery and visual art. Choral speaking reflects the way prisoners had to do everything in unison, and dance her belief that gestures are essential means of expression.

Anne, as she prefers to be called, grew up in England, worked in Europe and met her Polish husband there, farmed in Wales and considered immigrating to Australia, but in 1951 found her place in Saskatchewan, with its space. The family lived in the Big Muddy area before coming to Saskatoon to ensure their four children better schools.

What is it about Saskatchewan? "I like the idea of being on the edge of things. I like the idea you could freeze to death and in summer you could get sunstroke. You can't really get cosied up."



Amid the books and artwork in her Saskatoon home — the plants which died when her furnace conked out at Christmas are slowly being replaced with slips from friends — her conversation ranges widely but anchors on words, writing and language.

Anne speaks Flemish, German, French and Polish as well as English and wishes she could learn American sign

language, which doesn't depend on words. "We could all learn it, and could speak to everyone."

An essay in her book *The Word, The Voice, The Text* examines the idea of people learning to write before they speak, a concept that has always interested her. It's generally thought that speech came first, but "that may not be so," she says. "Probably they could make signs in the sand before they could speak."

She remembers her childhood interest in the signs the gypsies left for each other near people's homes.

She grew up playing the family poetry game, and poetry is her overriding interest. "If literature is a mountain, then poetry is the pointy top. Smaller, but higher, and sharp."

What is particularly interesting about poetry, she says, is that it is so compressed. "It has insight and vision which prose doesn't have time for. I'm sure before people wrote prose, they wrote poetry."

She loves to speak her poems aloud, though she admits it's difficult to get an audience for poetry today. Partly, she says, that's because people want things easy, while poetry may be ambiguous. For that reason, she tries to use straightforward, clean language in her poems.

"I'm not trying to hide myself. I take off all my mental clothes."

Seniors

hit the road



By Mary Helen Richards

September comes: kids go back to school, traffic thins out and motel rates drop. With the pretty fall colors and some nice weather, it's a good time for seniors to hit the road.

We older people have our own style of travel. We take our time, look at the sights, change our minds about routes. We make leisurely starts in the morning, cruise down the road at reasonable speeds and pull over to look at the countryside. We make frequent stops, and we'd better! After sitting in a car for more than two hours, it takes several minutes to straighten our backs.

Well before sunset we start the motel search: something quiet, clean, with a discount. Then maybe a drink,

Author Mary Helen Richards and her husband Howard take a break by Georgia Strait on Vancouver Island



a walk and dinner in a family-type restaurant. Perhaps there's a brief encounter with another senior who asks the inevitable: "Where're you folks from?" In the evening come such challenges as

learning to operate yet another strange shower faucet or finding a familiar TV program.

For some travellers, the evening meal is the only one purchased. To cut down on fatty foods and calories, we carry an electric kettle and a few groceries in the car. Breakfast may be just coffee and a bowl of cereal in the motel room. Lunch can be bread, cheese and some fruit eaten beside the road. A thermos of cold water substitutes for soft drinks.

Touring in our own car means we can do what we like and go where we want to go, but it calls for a competent driver, a companion-navigator and some stamina.

BY BUS

Much less complex are the coach tours. Some are for singles, some for handicapped persons, but all offer a way to see new sights with a minimum of hassle. Advantages are having luggage handled, meals and accommodation arranged and a tour director to look after the details.

Unlike cruises with a boatload of strangers, or a car with a couple in isolation, the coach carries just enough people to get to know one another. To speed this along, there is usually a get-acquainted reception, and seating in the bus changes daily.

It's not all leisurely, though. If the bus has to park well away from scenic areas, some walking is required. And to cover the long distances in Western Canada, there will be early starts after a quick breakfast. About every two hours the bus pulls into a rest stop, giving passengers a chance to stretch their legs. If the driver happens to want a cigarette, these stops are more frequent, because smoking is prohibited on tour buses.

There is a great variety of escorted coach tours, says Maureen Boa, manager of The Travel Connection. They can range from short drives within Saskatchewan to three- or four-week journeys to Mexico or Alaska. Special interest holidays, to see gardens in Britain, for example, will combine air flights and bus tours.

Cruises can be a great buy, Maureen says. Although they sound expensive, they are all-inclusive: cabin, food and entertainment are part of the package. And it's wonderful to go aboard, unpack and settle in for the duration of the holiday.

Tours take some advance planning. Travel agencies are the first stop to pick up brochures and state preferences. At no charge to clients, agents give a variety of options on tours and airlines and make all arrangements for us. Seniors are the bulk of their tour business, according to Maureen.

Next, read the brochures about places you always wanted to see. What's included? What's so special about this tour? Are the hotels first-rate and are meals part of the deal? Check the prices and the back pages about insurance and penalties. Are the travel agency and the tour company well established?

We should match the tour to our powers of endurance. Is every night spent in a different place or are we in the same hotel for several days? Is the schedule packed with sightseeing, or is there time for ourselves? Is my roommate a pleasant travelling companion or are we just doubling up to save money?

Travel insurance is a must, no matter where or how we travel. Cancellation insurance is far cheaper than having to pay a penalty for changes in travel plans. Buy it at the same time as the ticket. Medical insurance is highly recommended for any travel outside Saskatchewan and essential for out of Canada. But we should read the very legible print about what is not covered. If in doubt, we can have the travel agent check with the company before we leave.




On bus tours, daily seating changes help strangers get acquainted

FOR COMFORT, SAFETY

We seniors should not be afraid to travel, but should be cautious. On road trips, avoid late night driving. In hotels, ask the desk clerk where it is safe to walk. We should leave valuable jewelry and extra credit cards at home, taking only what we need, and use the hotel safe to store our tickets and excess cash.

For comfort, loose shoes are best for long plane rides. Extra glasses, dentures and medications should be in a shoulder bag.

Having time for travel is one of the big pluses of retirement. As seniors who love going places, we can plan wisely and then relax and enjoy the trip. 

Why I have a living will

By Dr. Stuart Houston

When my father began practising medicine in 1926, expensive investigations such as barium studies were rarely performed on anyone over 80. Grandpas and grandmas were rarely brought to hospital unless they broke a bone. When told that cure was not possible or that death was near, most families would take their loved ones from hospital to die at home.

Even after the Saskatchewan Hospital Insurance Plan began, some families followed the old traditions. I remember a woman near 70 whose brother had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). She cared for him at home. When he could no longer swallow his secretions, life held little pleasure for him. Frequent suctioning in hospital might have prolonged his existence for another month, but would not have prolonged life with any meaning. Despite the stress placed upon his sister, he died at home. With dignity.

During my general practice experience in Yorkton, I did one year of internal medicine at the new University Hospital in Saskatoon. I will never forget the wise priest who gave a lecture on ethics. Agreeing that it was our job to protect life and promote health, he made an



Dr. Houston, a professor in the Department of Medical Imaging, Royal University Hospital, gave permission to excerpt this article from one which appeared in the Canadian Medical Association Journal in August, 1988.

important distinction between prolonging life and prolonging the act of dying. While we often lack the wisdom to differentiate between the two, I feel that some modern doctors do not even try, even if many of us have had plenty of lessons.

When Uncle Henry, at 82, blew his nose, had a sudden excruciating headache and lapsed into unconsciousness, he was taken to hospital. Because my conversations with his young internist were not entirely satisfactory, on the 10th day of coma I phoned the senior doctor in the clinic and asked him to look in on Uncle Henry. He ordered an electroencephalogram, found no electrical activity, and turned off the respirator.

That wise old doctor provided relief to the family and to taxpayers. Modern respirators and other life-support systems have their place, but they make decisions much more difficult. Once a respirator is turned on, the easiest thing to do is keep it running indefinitely.

Because of such experiences and the strong wish that I might die with dignity when my time comes, I had my lawyer draft a living will. He has a copy; so do my wife and children.

Admittedly, if I am carried unconscious to a different hospital, the attending doctors and nurses won't know about my living will until a family member arrives. Even then, there is some danger that the doctors will not pay attention to its requests. I fear this possibility much more than any slight risk of being denied appropriate and effective life-saving measures because someone tries too hard to meet the terms of my living will. However, I know my family will support my declaration.

Why do I support the concept of living wills? I have a moral-ethical concern about "death with dignity" and I abhor the unnecessary and inappropriate prolongation of life at inordinate expense.

Let me be clear. I am not talking about euthanasia, to which I am irrevocably opposed. My concern relates only to all-too-common instances where the act of dying is unnecessarily and unwisely prolonged. I grant that it is too easy to judge doctors who try to do their best and, in case of doubt, give the nod to continuing the effort. Until all hope of recovery is extinguished, especially with younger patients, one must wait a while. But in some of these situations, my old family doctor traditions would not allow me to wait nearly as long as many modern doctors do.

My living will is a personal response to a very real concern.

This is Dr. Houston's living will

To whom it may concern:

This directive is written while I am of sound mind and fully competent.

Death is as much a reality as birth, growth, maturity and old age — it is the one certainty of life. I do not fear death as much as the indignities of deterioration, dependence, and hopeless pain. If the time comes when I, C. Stuart Houston, can no longer take part in decisions for my own future, let this statement stand as an expression of my wishes, while I am still of sound mind.

If I become incompetent, in consideration of my legal rights to

refuse medical or surgical treatment regardless of the consequences to my health and life, I hereby direct and order my physician, or any physician in charge of my care, to cease and refrain from any medical and surgical treatments which would prolong my life if I am in a condition of (1) unconsciousness from which I cannot recover; (2) unconsciousness beyond a period of 8 weeks; (3) mental incompetency which is irreversible. If my condition is hopeless, I do not wish my suffering to be prolonged and the act of dying prolonged by artificial ventilation or intravenous or nasogastric feedings.

This request is made after careful consideration. I hope you who care for me will feel morally bound to follow its mandate. I recognize that this appears to place a heavy responsibility upon you, but this will is made with the intention of relieving you of such responsibility and of placing it upon myself in accordance with my strong convictions. I hereby absolve my physician or any physician taking care of me from any legal liability pertaining to the fulfilment of my demands.

— Clarence Stuart Houston

Growing numbers of seniors can play major role in province's wellness plan

One in seven Saskatchewan residents is a senior, and the numbers will jump when the baby boomers begin retiring. Sheer numbers will give seniors more political and economic power, so they can play a key role in helping to develop the Wellness Model for Saskatchewan.

Wellness means improving overall health by emphasizing health promotion, disease prevention and integrated, community-based services. It calls for consumer involvement and participation. Its basic concepts are:

- ✓ the natural human condition is health, well-being and independence, not illness and dependence.
- ✓ the health system must provide support for people to take control of their health and well-being.

✓ 90% of health problems are caused by lifestyle choices, social conditions and physical environment.

Seniors can play a vital role in changing to this wellness model through input in local decision-making and by becoming more responsible for their health. Most of the responsibility for preventing and curing still rests with the individual.

Personal wellness strategies for any age:

- ✓ Stop smoking, the single most important thing you can do for your health. Second-hand smoke harms others.
- ✓ Eat a healthy diet: more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; less fat, salt and sugar.
- ✓ Exercise regularly: It helps you sleep better and wake refreshed,

keeps your mind alert and your body fine-tuned and energetic, and slows the aging process.

- ✓ Keep a healthy weight.
- ✓ Get plenty of rest and sleep.
- ✓ Ensure your home is safe: Injuries are the fourth leading cause of death in Saskatchewan.
- ✓ Have regular medical, dental and vision checkups.
- ✓ Get involved in your neighborhood and community.
- ✓ Take time for yourself.

Wellness also involves other aspects of your life. Broaden your horizons. Teach a new skill, or learn one. Volunteer. Develop the spiritual side of your life. Share your knowledge about health and wellness.

Saskatchewan Health

What to ask about estate planning

By Garth Courtney

Some of us hesitate to make an estate plan because we don't know our alternatives or are embarrassed to ask 'silly' questions. But no question is out of place when dealing with an estate plan; the most basic questions are the place to start. For example:

"I'm told I should make a will, but doesn't everything I have go to my spouse and children when I die?"

Yes, in a way. Saskatchewan's Intestate Succession Act will provide for distribution of your estate, but this may not be in the best interests of your family. Through a will, you can direct the distribution that best suits your wishes and your family's needs. If you have no will, the court may have to appoint an executor, possibly someone you would not have chosen. You can avoid this by having a will and naming an executor.

"Can I prepare a will myself or use a do-it-yourself will form?"

You can, but it is not recommended. You should have someone experienced in estate planning take your will instructions and have a lawyer finalize the will document. A will's legalities may be confusing, but each has a purpose. An experienced estate planner can suggest ways of dealing with your estate that you may not have considered, or perhaps offer suggestions which may save estate tax, legal or probate costs.

"Will my will have to be probated?"

Not necessarily, depending on how your assets are owned. It may be possible to avoid probating all or part of your estate by, for example, holding assets jointly or by naming beneficiaries on RSPs, RIFs and life insurance policies. But the size and nature of your estate may make these strategies counterproductive. A joint account with a spouse can be a good idea but a joint account with someone else, to avoid probate costs, can cause problems. Someone experienced in estate planning should help you.

"What will the government get from my estate?"

There are no succession duties or estate taxes now. Revenue Canada treats your estate as if you had disposed of everything you owned at the moment you died. This may give rise to some capital gains or other 'tax events' which must be reported on your final tax return. Any tax liability

can sometimes be reduced if you have a knowledgeable executor aware of all the tax elections and rollover provisions available under the Income Tax Act.

"How long does it take to settle an estate?"

Depending on its complexity, completing most of your estate may take only six months. Much depends on your executor's judgment and experience. However, the estate is not truly settled until Revenue Canada clears it, which can take up to a year.

"How should one start an estate plan?"

Gather information about yourself and your family, and prepare a list of your assets, identifying how you own them, solely or jointly. Consider charitable bequests and decide on your primary beneficiaries. Next meet with a trust officer or a lawyer to discuss your estate plan and the preparation of your will.

Garth Courtney is an account executive with Canada Trust

News from Your Council



- **Muriel Jarvis**, advisory president of the Saskatoon Council on Aging from its beginning, has been honored with its 1994 Award of Excellence by the Saskatchewan Gerontological Society for her work for seniors.
- **Helen Jones**, a founder and board member of the Council on Aging from the beginning, has resigned for personal reasons. She has been a very valued member.
- The Council's new publication, *Financial Abuse of the Elderly*, is available free of charge from the Resource Centre, 240 - 22nd Street East, phone 652-2255.