Another Perspective

By Lori Pankonin

Hip hip horray. Hip hip horray. Hip hip hooray for Wauneta and its extended family for joining forces to save the local nursing home. Kudos to the organizers who diligently spent countless hours to develop a plan and to all who came forward to surpass the financial contribution goal. WoooHooooo!!

A feeling of deep concern overcame the community when Vetter Health Services announced that Heritage would close in a year if a new owner didn't come forward. What? The shock soon turned to fear. What would this do to Wauneta's economy?

Obviously the threat of job loss for that many people in a rural community is huge. Employees support downtown businesses with needs for food, gasoline, insurance, vehicles, vehicle repair, flowers, gift items, banking services, newspaper service and the list goes on.

Consider the dollars that benefit the local utilities department in water and electrical usage for that big of a building. Consider property taxes. It would definitely be an economic jolt.

But beyond realizing the potential financial crunch, one has to think of the emotions of all the people who call Heritage home. What about the families who appreciate having loved ones close at hand?

Memories of special friends at Heritage will always be lasting for our family. My grandpa was 98 when he died in a Colorado nursing home. It was so rewarding to see the faces of residents

light up when we passed through the halls with young children. I realized we could light up the faces of Wauneta folks more regularly.

So on our way home from bike rides or strolls to the park, we started stopping at Heritage. We soon determined a special person where we would direct our visit and chatted with others as well. Howard requested pie when he came to our house for his birthday supper. Although he didn't have many teeth, he had no problem downing his meal with a big smile, ending with pie al a mode.

His death was hard on me but the girls seemed to understand and we started visiting Lue regularly. She saved some of her bingo prizes to give to the girls and was always happy for a visit, no matter how brief. I sat with her in the hospital when she took her last breath and it was a special moment. But it ripped at my heart and I thought we might take a break from having a "special" person.

Then Brooke suggested we have Percy as our special friend and when he died, we could visit Bob more often. At first I thought that was rather insensitive, but I realized they were looking at death in a different light. Our Heritage friends were older and had lived good lives. It was actually quite natural for them to die and go live with Jesus.

Percy very proudly presented the girls with his paint-by-number creations of puppies. Bob revealed his chocolate stash and invited us to enjoy his treats with him. One gentleman never did forget that I danced with him on the day they had special music and that made me feel good. As a centenarian, Edna fascinated me when she'd recite the poem about the presidents that she learned at age four.

Daughter Celeste started doing ladies' nails on Tuesdays after school. I really can't imagine a first grader doing an ideal nail painting job, however just think what that gift of time did for the older ladies. Picture an elderly woman having one-on-one time with a young girl, having her hands touched gently and sharing conversation. Wow. One day Celeste told me that one of the ladies had a lot on her mind. I asked what they talked about and Celeste said it was just between them.

Several years later, Celeste is now studying speech and language pathology in graduate

school. “I just love old people,” she said with sincere respect when referring to one of her adult clients. And she admits that it was probably her Heritage days that instilled that compassion. What a valuable characteristic to have acquired.

In more recent years, I’ve enjoyed visits with Lucille, Edna, Ruby and others. They are indeed special friends full of wisdom.

Thank you to everyone who made it possible for seniors needing assistance to continue to reside in Wauneta. It would be a shame to stop the growing pool of memories there.

I will forever cherish our memories.

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