

Senior Center can give caregivers a break

Earlier in the decade my husband, Walton Smith, and I found us as the caregivers for two ladies who had reached the 85-year milestone.

My mother, Marion Cherni, and my second cousin, Lorraine Hills, came to live with us in the summer of 2002.

Best friends all their lives, Mom and Lorraine attended normal college in Chicago and spent their early careers substitute-teaching in Chicago. Mother met my Sheridan County-native father during World War II and moved to Wyoming in 1949.

Lorraine, who never married, remained in Chicago, where she taught the primary grades. Both women retired in 1982.

After Dad died, it just seemed natural for Lorraine, who was beginning to experience mild cognitive impairment, to move to Wyoming. She left the Windy City for a new life in Ranchester in the autumn of 1997.

Walton and I had to make some big adjustments to adapt to life with Mother and Lorraine and vice versa. It was tough for my laissez-faire mother to be roommates with her organized daughter.

Mother and Walton had a good relationship, but no man is ever anxious to share digs with his mother-in-law! It was a frustrating time, too, for Lorraine, ever spry and who earned a master's

degree in statistics, to witness the insidious loss of her memory to dementia.

Mother, whose mind was sharp, spent most of her time in a wheelchair as a consequence of several debilitating joint problems. I would often say to friends and family that Mother functioned as Lorraine's brain and Lorraine as Mother's feet; however, this unique arrangement kept them both out of long-term care facilities.

Mother died in late 2005, and Walton and I were determining how to care for Lorraine. She could not remain at home by herself while we were at work, but we knew Lorraine really enjoyed her life with us.

Some good friends suggested we contact Day Break at the Senior Center. Thank God we did, for we discovered an alternative care miracle right under our noses!

Soon after, my sister and I met with Barb Gibbons, the director of the Day Break program. Opened in 1992, the program offers a myriad of services, often subtle in nature, that facilitate



**Center
Stage**

Dr. Rita
Cherni-Smith



caregivers' lives.

Day Break staff assists disabled persons with bathing. The facility offers a hydrotherapy tub to facilitate physical therapy needs.

Staff is happy to make arrangements so that clients may

attend medical and dental appointments and will often accompany those clients who need extra assistance to the doctor's office.

Fees are based on an individual's ability to pay and are a drop in the bucket compared to nursing home charges. For instance, staff members can prompt clients to take their medications.

Clients who arrive early have a hot, free breakfast waiting for them. Lunch, a daily social event, is healthy and delicious.

The dining room at the Senior Center is like Cheers, that famous bar in Boston where everybody knows your name. A highlight at Day Break is the free monthly outings underwritten by the Rauzi Endowment Fund.

Lorraine received services at Day Break for over two years and thrived there. Her smile always conveyed that she had a great day.

I wished my family had discovered Day Break sooner. My mother would have so enjoyed the activities and daily lunch at the Senior Center.

Because of her disabilities, Mom was largely housebound. We just never realized how user-friendly the Mini Bus is. Both Lorraine and Mother could have both benefited from this wonderful community service.

More people in Sheridan County should avail themselves of Day Break. In other communities, there is a waiting list for adult day care!

For all of you present and future caregivers, please do consider taking advantage of this wonderful resource.

Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.

Dr. Rita Cherni-Smith is a native of Sheridan and an internist at Sheridan VA Medical Center. She and her husband were caregivers to her aunt Lorraine, who was a client in the Senior Center's Day Break program.