

Creating fun for caregivers and their loved ones

The fun you create now will mean good memories down the road!

If your loved one is mostly confined to home, he and you are going to appreciate something different in the day ... fun!

You (the caregiver) are primarily focused on your loved one's safety, finances, medical treatment, medications, nutrition and other things that go along with caregiving. You busy yourself with monitoring his progress or decline, and you're doing everything in your power to keep him comfortable.

You worry about his reduced energy level, increasing fatigue, physical weakness and variable mental status. But do you know how important it is for him to just have fun? To laugh deeply, live in the moment, to briefly not just be old and frail and to forget the pain?

I know you're probably thinking your loved one can't do that much, but you might be surprised at all the options. Often, families accommodate so much to their loved ones'

weakening state that they overlook how much they can do and enjoy!

While it's good to try to bring the world to them with visits, letters, phone calls and even e-mail, it's also important and possible to keep bringing them out in the world.

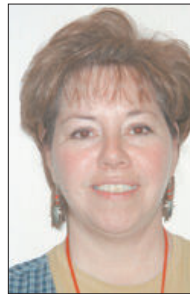
This of course will involve extra work for the caregiver — transporting a walker or wheelchair, assisting in/out of cars, walking slowly, finding bathrooms — so be prepared for a different pace and smaller goals.

Take a mini-field trip. We all look forward to an outing, but as we age, we don't have the stamina or sometimes mobility to go to giant sports events where you have to climb a lot of stairs or hike in the mountains. But a ride up the mountain can bring some wonderful conversation when you see the beautiful flowers, snow



**Center
Stage**

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in shaded areas and hopefully even a moose!

How about an outing to a local nursery — you can spend hours identifying plants and flowers or just enjoy the

beauty and scent around you.

You don't necessarily have to leave your home — there are opportunities to have fun there also. Rent/borrow funny or old movies. Get all dressed up and take some photo portraits — then use these for family gifts; manicures and pedicures are an extra-special treat.

Work on Christmas and birthday wish lists, and let your loved one tell stories of past holidays — it's always amazing what you can learn.

I've discovered that each time I take "fun time" to spend with my

dad, I find out something new that is usually attached to a story. I try to write these stories in a journal, and months or even years later it's fun to go back and reminisce about that particular day.

Caregiving is hard work and sometimes you may feel unappreciated, tired and frustrated, so why not give some of these ideas a try — or come up with some of your own.

Come to a Family Caregiver Support Group and share some of your own ideas with us. We meet each Monday at 10 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. at the Sheridan Senior Center.

Stella Montano is director of the Family Caregiver Program at the Sheridan Senior Center. An estimated 25 percent of Sheridan's population cares for a loved one.

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.