

Of a certain age...

By Diane Goble
Columnist

"But now the days are short, I'm in the autumn of my years and I think of my life as vintage wine..." I can remember mooning over old blue eyes as he crooned that tune many decades ago (Frank Sinatra, for those too young to remember). But now that I am actually in the autumn of my years, I feel more like an old bottle of muscatel.

I sit here and watch the leaves outside my window gradually turning deeper shades of red and remember all the trails I used to hike through some of the most spectacularly beautiful landscapes from California to Oregon ... and all the photographs I took along the way. I especially loved fall for the spectacular display of colors.

For several years before I moved to Sisters, I used to drive up here, just me and my dog, a few times a year from Mammoth Lakes, California, to visit my daughter and her family — an 11- to 12-hour drive depending on the number of photo ops as I

veered off Highway 395 to check out a captivating view. I always looked forward to my fall trips either north or south to experience the range of colors. I'd seek out hidden lakes just to catch the reflections and wild rivers to contemplate the variety of colors among the groves of deciduous trees interspersed among the evergreens.

To just sit alone and be present with the quiet beauty of nature, surrounded by a kaleidoscope of colors sparkling in the sunlight, reflected in a mirror pond, brings me to a sense of peace and profound connection with the universe. My beautiful Aussie-lab, Spirit, was my perfect companion and never failed to amuse me with her antics. She would run into any body of water with reckless abandon, including snow-covered icy rivers and lakes, then just sit there in the middle of it and look around like she was at the spa. Really! I have the pictures!

Ah, but I said "used to" hike because I don't hike anymore. Spirit is gone and I can no longer trust my

body to make the trip without something going awry. The last few hikes I went on a couple of years ago, my knees ached and my feet felt like they were on fire... I thought they were going to have to carry me out.

I live in town so I do walk as much as I can, and I have a friend who motivates me to get out several mornings a week. I can still see the Sisters from a distance but I can only take so many photos from town. One thing on my Bucket List is to go through the tens of thousands of photos I've taken and pick out the ones worth saving. When I was doing all that driving and photography, I kept a journal and even did some tape recordings while on the road. I've thought about getting back into that material and maybe turning it into a book. It's also on my List.

Then a few months ago, I was suddenly, for no apparent reason, in so much pain I couldn't stand upright. I had to stop everything I was doing and just deal with the pain factor. I started to think about what would happen if

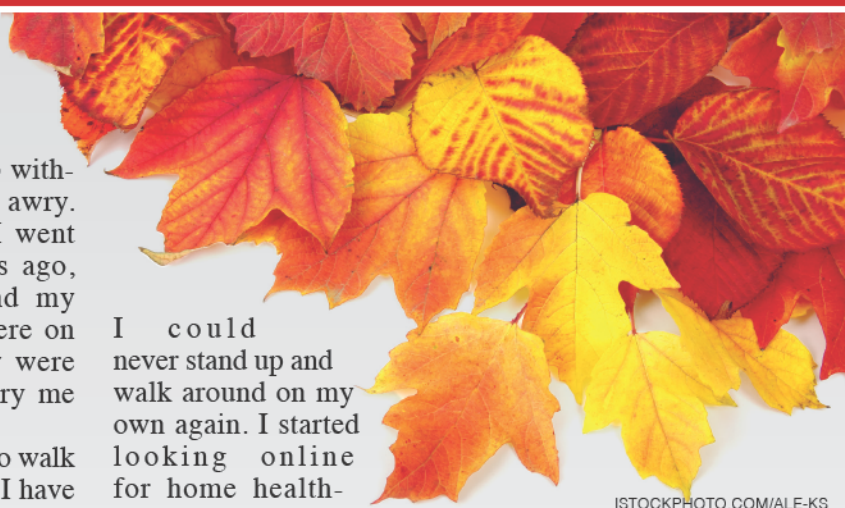
I could never stand up and walk around on my own again. I started looking online for home health-care devices like safety grab-bars and raised toilet seats. I got out the home health services brochures I've collected from various agencies to figure out what help I could afford.

I started thinking about assisted living. OMG, no! I'm so not ready for assisted living. I've been to Helen's Home several times to interview the Tolles for articles and their adult-foster-care home concept is great. Anna's Home is very pleasant and the residents seem quite happy. I have been in many facilities as a hospice volunteer, and as nice as some of them are and as great as the people are who work there, I'm far too independent to live within their necessary restrictions. Never was very good at following

the rules. I'd have to be in a coma.

Well, my hip is much better, 90 percent better, since I had the epidural steroid injection a month ago, but I still feel the burn often enough to question whether I dodged the bullet or there's more to come. Doctor said some people need several shots before they get it under control.

So I can't end Frank's song with "It's been a very good year," but it has made me look into other options if I needed extra help at home or could no longer drive or manage on my own so it won't be such an ordeal if it does come up. Bummer, but when you get to be a certain age, these things do come up and we do have to deal with them.



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