

Bits & Bites

By Jacqueline Ramsay



October 12th, 1:30 p.m. — I thought I was hallucinating, but then Janice was with me, as we were walking the dogs. At the lake, of course. On the back side of the lake I spied big black, ripe, juicy blackberries and lots of half-ripe ones. I ate, Shadow ate as did Janice. Penelope declined.

I've got a lot to think upon, as I just got home from a Wellness Clinic for Seniors.

Seniors, look out for tips on how to be slim, trim, healthy, happy and hopefully wiser in our old age.

What do you get in the mail that really pushes your ink button?? Mine is stuff that asks "do you know what can become of...bla bla — it's on page 54, or discover why coloring your hair may endanger the beating of your heart — page 98 — get our book right away — learn how to take off 20 lbs. and 20 years in 20 days" — Etcetera.

In September, two Vernonia ladies went to Cheyenne, Wyoming to take part in the National Senior Spelling Bee. Congratulations to them. Carol Sawyer came in 1st and Tobie Finzel came in 3rd.

From where? You say. Vernonia, Or., that little town lost in the woods of Columbia County.

I went to a Wellness Conference for Seniors at Seaside October 19th through the 24th.

It was fantastic Sun, Sea, Surf and gully washers — storms and gales — but I learned a lot about myself and much about seniors in general. So be advised. The Senior Center may be sending out invites to all interested seniors to a few seminars; learn how to cope with life, others and self, even chair aerobics. Ta, ta.

At last count (in 1997) Paris, France had 80 flushing toilets for dogs.

Holiday care packages for troops

The care package is a traditional favorite morale booster among military men and women who serve our country overseas. Friends and families of service members are sending many care packages to the arid Middle East. Some careful planning will help ensure your care package arrives safe and sound.

If food is included, it should be non-perishable, heat-tolerant, and resistant to rough handling. Moist foods like pumpkin bread might mold. Real chocolate chips in cookies might melt and delicate cookies might break. To avoid spoilage, send dry or semi-dry foods that don't require refrigeration. When moisture is low, microorganisms can't grow.

Here are a number of safe alternatives:

- Thoroughly dried beef jerky and commercially dried fruit



with added preservatives.

- Powdered fruit drink mixes.
- Commercially packaged snacks, popcorn, crackers, cookies, ready-to-eat cereals, granola and trail mix.
- Vacuum-packaged nuts and individually wrapped hard candies such as toffee.

Dense and dry baked foods, such as biscotti, mail well and shouldn't mold. Oatmeal cookies, unfrosted brownies and other bar cookies will arrive in good condition if they aren't super moist. Although sugar cookies and gingersnaps aren't perishable, they might break. Wrap cookies individually in plastic wrap to protect them. Then use unbuttered, popped corn to cushion the cookies as you pack them in a container such as a coffee can or other plastic airtight container with lid.

Place the food gifts in a sturdy box. Add baby wipes or moist towelettes for hand washing. Seal the box securely with packing tape. Then address to the recipient as required by the military.

Older drivers can be safe drivers

Last July, an elderly driver had a terrible accident. He lost control of his car while it was pointed toward a "farmer's market." In a few seconds, ten people suffered mortal injuries and subsequently died. Suddenly, there were cries that "Old people shouldn't be on the road," and "They're just too dangerous!"

But older drivers are neither a menace nor experienced saints-on-wheels. As a group, they have fewer accidents than teenagers, who lack experience and, sometimes, good judgement. But, according to a report from the American Medical Association (AMA), elder drivers die at an alarmingly high rate in motor vehicle accidents. As a group, elder drivers are frailer than the general population, so an accident that a younger person might walk away from, could result in serious or fatal injuries to a senior driver. Drivers aged 75 or older have, on average, twice the number of accidents than the average driver.

The AMA considers motor vehicle injuries as a "public health" problem and looks at each category of driver individually. In conjunction with that point of view, they released a 200+ page "Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers," which was produced in association with the U.S. Department of Transportation. The guide offers ways physicians can help their patients decide about whether to drive, and, if so, under what circumstances they can still be safe drivers.

Excessive crash rates for older drivers are attributed to the decline of three things: vision, cognition, and motor function. As people age, it is normal to experience problems from glare, impaired sensitivity to contrast, and an increase in the

time needed for eyes to adjust from bright to dim lighting conditions. Because driving is a complex activity, it requires a variety of high-level cognitive skills, including memory, visual processing, attention, and executive skills. Some medical conditions and some medications that are common in the older population have a large impact on cognition. Muscle strength, joint flexibility and a sense of motion and position all can change as people age.

When people experience any of these changes, it doesn't necessarily mean that they should quit driving. Most drivers "self-regulate," stop driving on fast roads, or limit where they go, and the time of day they drive.

In a "focus group" conducted by the AMA, one panelist said, "When the doctor says you can't drive anymore, that's definite. But when you decide for yourself, there might be questions."

The AMA doesn't want doctors to just shut the door on patients driving. They want physicians to play a more active role in preventing motor vehicle crashes by assessing patients' medical fitness to drive and by recommending safe driving behaviors, driver rehabilitation, or driving limitations as needed. "In many cases," the AMA says, "physicians can help patients stay on the road longer by identifying and managing medical obstacles to safe driving, such as vision problems or arthritis."

Am I a Safe Driver?

A tool to help you reflect on your driving skills from the American Medical Association. Check the box if the statement applies to you.

- ☐ I get lost while driving.
- ☐ My friends and family members say they are worried about my driving.
- ☐ Other cars seem to appear out of nowhere.
- ☐ I have trouble seeing signs in time to respond to them.
- ☐ Other drivers drive too fast.
- ☐ Other drivers often honk at me.
- ☐ Driving stresses me out.
- ☐ After driving, I feel tired.
- ☐ I have had more "near misses" lately.
- ☐ Busy intersections bother me.
- ☐ Left-hand turns make me nervous.
- ☐ The glare from oncoming headlights bothers me.
- ☐ My medication makes me dizzy or drowsy.
- ☐ I have trouble turning the steering wheel.
- ☐ I have trouble pushing down on the gas pedal or brakes.
- ☐ I have trouble looking over my shoulder when I back up.
- ☐ I have been stopped by the police for my driving recently.
- ☐ People will no longer accept rides from me.
- ☐ I don't like to drive at night.
- ☐ I have more trouble parking lately.

If you have checked any of the boxes, your safety may be at risk when you drive. Talk to your doctor about ways to improve your safety when you drive.



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