



AGRABILITY CHIT CHAT

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CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

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A TRUE PARTNERSHIP – THE STRUMS

For 33 years, Lon and Sandy Strum have built their life together in central Iowa. Lon admits that though his family moved off the farm early in his childhood, he has always been a farmer at heart. Fifteen years ago, Sandy and he decided to begin their own farming operation. Currently they have 600 acres of farmland for corn and beans, ‘many’ hogs, and horses.

Their family includes several children whom they have cared for since becoming foster parents in 1973. Lon and Sandy have welcomed some challenging children into their home over the years.

Another challenge they have faced for more than 25 years is Sandy’s diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. It is difficult for Sandy to perform many daily activities on her own, so Lon is her caregiver.

Farming provides a way of life that allows Lon and Sandy to meet the needs of their family. They emphasize that the farm has been a wonderful setting to raise children. Farming also offers the flexibility Lon needs as a caregiver. He is never without his cell phone so Sandy can reach him when she needs help. They both concede that if Lon were involved in any other occupation, Sandy would probably be in a nursing home.

They have designed their farm operation to accommodate their needs. Three years ago they built a 10-bedroom, fully accessible house on an acreage equipped to offer equine therapy. In the past year, they sold some farm ground because it was located too far away. Lon was uncomfortable being so many miles from the house and he anxiously waited for Sandy’s calls. Together they decided it was time to sell that parcel of land. Lon commented, “You have to be happy with what you do and where you are or it’s not worth it.”

Lon and Sandy Strum have a truly unique partnership. Over the years, they have developed their own system for meeting the needs of their family and each other. Lon truly feels that his wife is his life. Moreover, they receive wonderful support and assistance from their children and other family members.

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Lon confesses, though, that things are not always rosy. At times, he mourns the losses they have experienced because of Sandy's condition. Spring and fall fieldwork often bring sadness. Lon misses the satisfied look on Sandy's face as she drove the combine during fall harvest. It saddens Lon that Sandy is no longer able to help with these activities – even more so as he knows that Sandy misses it too.

Lon has come to appreciate the simple day-to-day accomplishments, and he reminds himself to step back and see things from Sandy's point of view. Their morning routine includes working together to get Sandy into the pool. Lon sips his first cup of coffee in an effort to wake up while Sandy walks in the water with a freedom that she does not have otherwise. Moments like these help Lon to appreciate the importance of his care giving in Sandy's life – and the inspiration Sandy offers him.

BE A HEALTHY CAREGIVER

More than 285,500 people in Iowa care for chronically ill, disabled, or aged family members or friends. These Iowa caregivers provide an estimated 306 million hours of care valued at \$2.7 billion. (Source: National Family Caregivers Association, 2003). The following suggestions can help you be a healthier caregiver:

- ◆ Take time for yourself each day ~ Take a short break to do something fun.
- ◆ Stay involved with your interests ~ Continue with hobbies, clubs and community organizations, and church.
- ◆ Create a support system ~ Ask for and accept the help of support groups, friends, family, neighbors, and church members.
- ◆ Ask about respite ~ Respite care provides temporary relief and a chance to spend time with other family members and friends.
- ◆ Grieve ~ Allow yourself time and permission to grieve.

- ◆ Keep your body healthy ~ Take time to attend regular physician visits, remember to exercise, and eat nutritious foods.

(Source: Des Moines Register – Dawn Sagario, 10/13/2005)

CAREGIVER RESOURCES IN IOWA

- ◆ ***Iowa Respite & Crisis Care Coalition:*** They work to increase access to respite and crisis care services for families in Iowa through information, training, and financial assistance. Visit: <http://irccc.affiniscap.com>.
 - ◆ ***Easter Seals Iowa Respite:*** Easter Seals Camp Sunnyside offers respite sessions throughout the year for families caring for disabled individuals in the home. Sessions provide recreational activities and socialization opportunities. See: http://ia.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=IADR_respite, or call (515) 289-1933.
 - ◆ ***Powerful Tools for Caregivers:*** These classes empower family caregivers to care for themselves. Participants learn tools to reduce stress, establish balance in life, communicate needs, make tough decisions, and locate helpful resources. For information on classes in your area contact: Colleen Jolly, Extension Specialist, (515) 294-4824, or visit www.extension.iastate.edu/aging/tools.
 - ◆ ***National Family Caregivers Association:*** This agency focuses on the needs and concerns of family caregivers through advocacy, information, education, and resources such as the *Take Care* newsletter. To learn more: www.thefamilycaregiver.org.
- ### ITEMS OF INTEREST & UPCOMING EVENTS
- ***Dial 2-1-1?*** ~ Did you know you can get information on health, human services, and other community resources by

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dialing 2-1-1? A 211 program covers most of Iowa though information available varies by community. The call is free if made from a landline phone, but charges apply for calls from a payphone or cell phone. For more information: www.211.org.

Get the Newsletter Hot Off the Press: We deliver nearly one-half of the Chit Chat newsletters by e-mail. To receive your copy of the newsletter by e-mail contact alundval@iastate.edu

IOWA AGRABILITY - A joint effort of ISU Extension and the Rural Solutions Program of Easter Seals Iowa. The program can help farm family members with a disability stay in farming.

This newsletter from the Iowa AgrAbility Project will be sent monthly to AgrAbility families and other interested individuals. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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