

Book helps to give aging adults 'the life they want to live'

By Peter Lindblad
tribstaff@hngnews.com

Taking care of an elderly parent or spouse is challenging. Christine Klotz has witnessed families go through a lot of pain during the process.

Drawing from past experiences working with older adults, the Waunakee resident has written a book called "All-In Caregiving: A Guide for the Care of Aging Parents." It's full of practical advice for anybody who wants to do right by their aging relatives.

"They don't know what they don't know," said Klotz. "They want to know how to do this right. They want to know how to gain information so they don't make a mistake."

When Klotz moved to Waunakee about five years ago, her workload had lessened considerably. She was an advisor to a health foundation out of Buffalo, New York. With more time on her hands, Klotz wondered what she could do with all of the knowledge about the subject she'd gathered in her long career working with older adults and their families. Writing a book seemed the best option.

It contains valuable advice for caregivers. In fact, Klotz, who began as an occupational therapist, related a story of a 95-year-old woman who had read the first completed chapters before it was published and said she definitely wanted her

daughter to read it.

Prompted by some family issues, Klotz realized that "maybe I do have something to say" on the subject. She was also motivated by a discussion she heard. One of the points made by a commentator was that there comes a time when older parents and their offspring flip roles with regard to decision-making. Klotz argues that creates problems.

"You should never forget that you're the child," said Klotz.

Pre-planning can help alleviate concerns that might crop up in the future. She advises parents and their children to talk to each other about what to do well before aging becomes an issue.

"Learn what their goals are," said Klotz. "Learn what's important to them and their quality of life."

If an aging adult becomes sick, Klotz advises caregivers to learn all they can about the illness and any medications they may need, including how to take them.

Keeping track of crucial information is also important. Klotz said doing so can lead to fewer unexpected events taking place down the road.

Klotz also said to remember that older adults can experience years of decline. She feels that allowing them to make decisions on their future can slow the downward spiral, while also taking the pressure off caregivers, who are often juggling work, parenthood and other



Christine Klotz of Waunakee has written a book to guide individuals helping their parents make decisions during their later years.

responsibilities and may not live close by.

"There are ways to work on engaging other family and friends so that the burden does not fall on one person," said Klotz.

Safety concerns can lead to conflicts. An aging parent who is still mentally capable may wish to remain in his or her own home, rather than move to an assisted-living facility. Klotz argues the parent has the right to make that decision, even if it's a bad one. Even in cases of cognitive decline, when families do step in and make the final call, Klotz said it helps if the aging adult is in on the decision-making process.

Klotz said she was told a heartbreaking story of a grieving 80-year-old man whose wife had died and his children determined he couldn't or shouldn't stay

in his home anymore. They made arrangements for him to move to an assisted-living facility, and the man let them. However, the facility they chose had just one room available. It was in their locked memory care unit. Though still mentally capable and able to take care of himself, despite walking with a cane, he always had to ask a staff person to hold a door open so he could tend to the bird feeders he kept outside his window.

Had his children considered his goals, according to Klotz, another choice could have been that would have made him happier.

Klotz is hoping her book will help anybody in position to care for an aging adult avoid such mistakes. Along with loads of tips for caregivers, Klotz's book includes various useful resources to help them deal with a variety of issues. There's a lot of information out there, according to Klotz. She feels that vetting websites and other sources for reliability is important.

Available through Amazon, for Kindle or as a paperback, the book was released Tuesday, Sept. 4.

In the end, she hopes it will help caregivers do right by aging adults and help them "live the life they want to live."