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When It's Time to Take the Keys Away

(ARA) - How would you react if you were sitting in the back seat, one of your parents were driving, and they became slightly confused when it came time to take an exit?

Or if they brushed a curb while driving down the road?

Most people wouldn't consider either situation alarming, but what if your loved one got lost on the way to the grocery store or some other place they had been to dozens of times before?

It happened to 84-year-old "Mary" of Charlotte, N.C., about two years ago. She was supposed to drive herself to a dentist appointment, but somehow ended up about 10 miles away at a post office. Fortunately she remembered her home phone number and was able to call her husband for help. When he arrived, he hugged her and with tears in his eyes told her it was time to take away the keys.

As the baby boomers age, taking away the keys is a decision more and more of their children and spouses are going to have to make. Safe driving is no longer possible once a person's vision, hearing and/or reaction time have become impaired by old age; or once diseases like Alzheimers and dementia have robbed them of such cognitive abilities as memory, judgment and understanding.

"In Mary's case, it wasn't the first time she had taken a wrong turn. Fortunately, her husband found the strength to take away the keys, but a lot of people are reluctant to do so because they fear their loved one will see it as a loss of their freedom and dignity. We make sure that is not the case," says Pat Drea, vice president of Visiting Angels, the agency hired to help Mary just days after she lost her keys.

Some days the Visiting Angels would play cards with Mary or help her do housework and make dinner; other days she'd drive Mary to doctors' appointments or the store, or just take her to the park for an afternoon stroll. "Our Visiting Angels did everything possible to make life seem normal that year before Mary entered the nursing home which I'm sure both she and her husband appreciated," says Drea.

In addition to helping out at home, Visiting Angels can also be hired as companions for people in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Their services are covered by most long term care insurance plans.

Visiting Angels is the nation's fastest growing franchisor of non-medical senior homecare. The company now has 300 offices across the country.

To find the one nearest you, log on to www.visitingangels.com or call (800) 365-4189.

Courtesy of ARA Content

SIDEBAR

Warning Signs of Unsafe Driving

- * Abrupt lane changes, braking or acceleration
- * Reacts slowly to changes in driving environment
- * Has close calls or more fender benders than usual
- * Fails to use turn signal or keeps signal on without changing lanes
- * Drifts into other lanes
- * Drives on the wrong side of the road or in the shoulder
- * Appears fearful or scared of driving or excessively tired after driving
- * Has trouble reading signs or navigating directions; gets lost more than usual
- * Notices the irritation and honking of other drivers but doesn't seem to understand, or seems oblivious to the frustration of other drivers
- * Fails to pay attention to signs, signals or pedestrians
- * Misses exits or backs up after missing exit
- * Experiences physical difficulty or range of motion issues (looking over the shoulder, moving hands or feet, etc.)



Worrying does nothing