



HOME SWEET HOME NEWS

LIVING ALONE—PART I

A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO HELPING SENIORS STAY IN THEIR OWN HOMES

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EDITORS' NOTE

Our mission is to help seniors live longer and more enjoyably in their own home. You can contact Larry and Anne Alexander, co-editors of Home Sweet Home News, at 1-540-951-8172. Some 46 churches, senior centers, libraries, retailers, etc. get this free newsletter. This and past issues are available on our web page www.thesweethomenews.com.

The authors here are:

- Editor Larry has a Ph.D. in management from UCLA and is a retired professor of management from Virginia Tech.
- Jo Ann Underwood is a retired Registered Nurse with a master's degree in Health Education. She worked in Student Health at Virginia Tech.

Part II of "Living Alone" will appear next year.

THINGS TO CONSIDER IF YOUR SPOUSE DIES

Here are some ideas to consider right after one's spouse or partner has passed on.

- Don't make any major life changes right away. You can think about them, but wait a while. Larry's grandmother's one story, two bedroom home in a nice neighborhood is shown in the photo below.

Grandma Gould felt so bad when her husband died that she sold their wonderful house. It was to get away from the sadness she felt in their house after 56 years of



Grandma Gould sold this wonderful home immediately after her husband died.

marriage. She moved into an apartment and was sadder in it in a unfamiliar neighborhood. Had she rented out her home for a year, she could have moved back if she didn't like living in an apartment.

- Honor and grieve for your

spouse before, during, and after the funeral. However, don't spend too much money on the funeral. Your spouse didn't want you to use up too much of your savings just to give them a big funeral.

- Get your spouse's affairs in order, their will, life insurance, pensions, etc. This will take time and may require help from your accountant, lawyer, and a savvy neighbor or relative who has gone through it previously.

- Learn the chores and tasks that your spouse regularly did. If you can't do them yourselves, get help from family members, friends, neighbors or outside service firms (e.g. a lawn mowing service) to get them done.

- Force yourself to get out and socialize with other people. Your best bet is probably other single seniors of the same sex. Here is your opportunity to become real friends with some people you have known, but were not really close to. Realize that you live in a "couple's

world” and unfortunately some couples may exclude you from social activities.

- Find an activity centered around people. It may be a class or church committee, a part-time job or regular volunteering. Whatever it is, it can help you stay busy.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JO ANN UNDERWOOD

Jo Ann is now in her 80s and has been a widow since she was 49. We can learn a lot from her, but first lets learn how she met her husband Richard.

While Jo Ann Underwood had a nursing certificate, she lacked a college degree. She applied to Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio. Noticing her R.N. (diploma nurse), the college made her an offer she could not refuse. A college administrator said, “If she would be the nurse for the college and have some hours during the week to see sick students, they would pay for her tuition, books, and provide free room and board!”

She took the Hiram representative up on his amazing offer. Later that week she met her advisor, Richard Underwood. They dated for a couple of years and married when Jo Ann was 23 years old.

Move forward several dec-

ades and Jo Ann and Richard were in their late 40s. They had been married for approximately 24 years. During those years, Richard was the editor of a national Methodist magazine “Together.” Then he was editor of Boston University’s “Bostonia Magazine,” and later worked in Water Resources at Virginia Tech. Jo Ann worked part-time and was mother to their two children.

Richard came down with an aggressive cancer which took his life just four months later. As the seriousness of his condition worsened, Jo Ann realized she would be soon living alone.

Richard did not have a will, nor never seemed to want to



Jo Ann and Richard Underwood in younger years.

discuss the subject. As his health was declining, he simply told Jo Ann, “Whatever

you want for my funeral is fine with me.” He added, “I’ve always trusted your judgment.”

At his death, Jo Ann was living in Virginia and mother to two children, a 17 year old boy and a 12 year old girl. Jo Ann realized she not only had to deal with her own grieving, but the grieving of her two children, each with their own emotions.

Jo Ann feels lucky to have had tremendous support from her extended family back in Ohio. Not only for the funeral, but also the high school graduation of her son two months later, and continuing support over the years. As Jo Ann puts it, “The death of her young husband brought her large family much closer together.”

A few months after Richard’s death, Jo Ann interviewed for a unique full-time position at Virginia Tech. It was to head up a new program educating students on human sexuality and drug abuse. After the job interview, she wasn’t sure if she was really interested. After all, she had taken courses in art at Virginia Tech and she wanted to be an artist. Sometimes a change in direction is appropriate after such a loss.

Then her advisor urged her

to take the job. "Jo Ann," he said, "What's there to think about." "It's a full time job with benefits," "There are not many jobs in art." She took the job and held it until she retired. She became known among students as the "sex lady" or as Jo Ann says "Add a Y and I'm the sexy lady." Tip number one for single women (and men), be flexible but get a full-time job with benefits especially if you are younger.

JO ANN'S TIPS FOR LIVING ALONE SUCCESSFULLY

Jo Ann was asked what her top recommendations were for others who face living alone. Here they are:

1. Volunteer We need to be needed and there are many who need us. Jo Ann was just awarded the first humanitarian award for volunteering at Lewis Gale Hospital — Montgomery.
2. Jo Ann lives in Warm Hearth Village in Blacksburg, Virginia. She volunteers through RSVP which is a national organization matching people 55 and older who want to volunteer with organizations needing help.
3. In addition, she is active with AARP and has been a recent chapter president and health fair coordinator.

4. Keep old friends, if possible, but make new ones. Some old friends may drift away from a single senior, especially if that "friend" is married.
5. Join a singles group that is appropriate for you. Jo Ann found some groups were very helpful. One singles group she particularly liked was the singles table at a church for Thursday night supper. One singles group she didn't fit in well with had mostly divorcees, who had a different orientation.
6. Keep in touch with your faith connection. These people know you spiritually and will help you adjust. A campus minister, Woody Leach, at Virginia Tech was most helpful to Jo Ann for some time.
7. Reach out to your family members, sisters, brothers, and even their children. Be careful not to lean too hard on them. Be a friend, but not a burden.
8. Sit down for meals at your table and celebrate life, even if you are alone. Don't just snack while watching television and skip formal meals.
9. Entertain yourself with movies, radio, videos, story reading, and studying something new. Don't do

activities just at home, but get out and do things with other people.

10. Go back to school. Jo Ann earned another degree, an M.S. degree in health education. You can also take fun courses that are just for a semester or a few nights.
11. Get a full-time or part-time job. Working is a wonderful escape from being alone. If you are older, at least volunteer if you aren't looking for a paying job.
12. Choose something creative to do such as painting, drawing, quilting, carpentry, or whatever. Or do an outdoor activity such as hiking, gardening, bird watching, photography, a sport, etc.
13. Love people, life, and nature. Jo Ann particularly loves the local Appalachian Mountains around her which have sustained her along with her painting.
14. Laugh a lot. The editor has always noticed Jo Ann's laughter which says a lot about her personality. It has served her well.
15. Get a pet like Jo Ann did with her dog Cassie.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Stone, Pamela. A Woman's Guide to Living Alone: Dallas, 2001.

- Feldon, Barbara. Living Alone and Loving It: New York, 2002.

loved ones to know. Refer to Home Sweet Home News issue 22 on "What My Loved Ones Need to Know" (www.homesweethomenews.com).

their experiences and what advice they offer you about living alone successfully.

MAKE A WILL

Follow the suggestion of long term reviewer Carl McDaniels. Make a will. He points out that you don't need an attorney, you can more cheaply have your bank be your executor. Write up a list of things you want your

HERE'S HOME SWEET HOME TO YOU

Larry & Anne Alexander

DISCLAIMER

Before relying on information presented in this newsletter, consult with family and friends, especially those who are successfully living alone themselves. Listen to

SELF GRADED QUIZ ON LIVING ALONE

MY HOME ITSELF	▪ I can maintain my house and yard by myself.	Yes	No
	▪ I regularly get rid of stuff so it doesn't accumulate.	Yes	No
COOKING & EATING	▪ I can prepare nutritious meals at home.	Yes	No
	▪ I am able to shop regularly at my grocery store.	Yes	No
TRANSPORTATION	▪ I have a good driving record.	Yes	No
	▪ I can get rides from friends, buses, and taxis.	Yes	No
MY SUPPORT GROUP	▪ I have family members nearby who can help me.	Yes	No
	▪ I have friends whom I get together with regularly.	Yes	No
PERSONAL HEALTH	▪ My health is okay for me to live at home alone.	Yes	No
	▪ I am able to get up and down stairs.	Yes	No
FINANCIAL SITUATION	▪ I have enough money to continue living in my house.	Yes	No
	▪ My children/relatives will help me financially if needed.	Yes	No

Analysis: The more "yes" answers you have the better. If you scored "no" for both questions in the same category, you may be deficient there. For example, if you are a male and answered "no" for both questions under the cooking category, perhaps your wife can help you boost your cooking skills. Conversely, you may help your wife learn some basic home maintenance skills if that has been your expertise.