

# Caregiver's Corner Column (April 2014)

## A Caregivers Reaction to Driving

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I have known many caregivers who have faced this problem: what to do when they no longer feel their loved one is safe driving. Who do you go to? Who can you talk to about this very sensitive subject without feeling like you are undermining your parents at their core, taking away their independence, etc.? Some loved ones are reasonable about it and will give up driving before a crisis hits. They may fear having to live with the consequences of a tragic event which occurred at their hand. Yet others feel this is the last piece of independence they have, and they are not going to give it up. Sometimes it is hard to argue with them, especially if the feared traffic accident has not yet occurred.

As a family caregiver, the driving is only a fraction of what I fear. I know that if my mother drives somewhere, she will likely be on her own and may not be with other people to get the assistance she needs. I can find many things to worry about that are only part of the problem: will she slip and fall in the parking lot, will someone see her as an "easy target" and assault her, or will she have difficulty seeing if it gets dark out? Will there be a Good Samaritan out there when she needs one? What if the car has mechanical problems? What if she can't get her walker out of the back seat, what if her medications have a negative effect on her decision making abilities, and on and on.

I have worked with many families and individuals and it seems to me that those who give up driving willingly often have a more relaxed outlook on life. They know their transportation needs will be met, they just need to find a new means of getting from point A to point B. Somehow they understand that not driving does not mean total dependence on your kids or anyone else. They may discover our city transportation system (Ride the Rapid), they may require special assistance and need to use Go! Bus, Hope Network, Ride Link, or American Red Cross. In using these services, they may also find a new friend or companion on the bus. They may enjoy the travel across the city without having to actually drive it, and they will certainly enjoy the cost savings of not having to provide fuel and maintain a car.

In summary, I know driving is a very emotional issue in most families. We are scared if they do drive, and they are scared to lose the privilege of driving. When we had this discussion, my mother looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "But Kendra, I don't want to lose my license." I said, "Mom, you are not losing your license. The doctors don't think you are strong enough to drive, and I worry about you when you are out. You will not lose your license as long as you don't drive!" As simplistic as this statement was, she finally did understand that she would not lose her license as long as she did not physically get in the car and drive!

*Caregiver's Corner* is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title IIIIE, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.