

What Do I Do Next?

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June 2021

As many of you may be aware, Julian Gray and I have been doing a monthly Elder Law Guys column on the 4th Sunday of each month in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette for the last ten years. One of the recurring themes of our columns has been the need to be prepared for the inevitability of the problems, mental and physical, of the aging process, let alone those of a major catastrophe.

The ongoing Covid crisis has exacerbated the situation for many of us, particularly with the state and self-enforced isolation to which many of us have been subject. Declines in physical and mental status may have not been recognizable to those who otherwise may have been in frequent contact with us, including cognitive decline, especially dementia.

Dementia is the loss of cognitive functioning—thinking, remembering, and reasoning—to such an extent that it interferes with a person's daily life. Dementia is not a disease itself, but rather a set of symptoms. Memory loss is a common symptom of dementia, although memory loss by itself does not mean a person has dementia. Alzheimer's Disease is the leading form of dementia.

Dementia can affect an individual's health, quality of life, and ability to live independently. It can also diminish a person's ability to effectively make financial decisions (often one of the first signs), carry out Activities of Daily Living (ADL's) such as bathing, dressing, toileting, feeding, transferring, etc., These ADL's are in addition to other activities such as driving, managing medical conditions and medications and those of a social relationship nature.

A recent Journal of the American Medical Association article, stated that for 2019, dementia was the sixth leading cause of death in the U.S. The Alzheimer's Association in its 2021 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures, estimated, that based on updated calculations, 6.2 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's Disease in 2021. Seventy-two percent are age 75 or older and more than 1 in 9 people (11.3%) age 65 and older has Alzheimer's Disease.

OK, enough of the statistics. We think many of our clients, friends and acquaintances are aware of some of these issues. The threshold questions revolve around what to do before a crisis arises. Thus, many of our Post-Gazette columns in the past focused on the need for preparedness. We had even given thought to writing a book on this topic.

However, an esteemed colleague of ours, Lawrence Frolik, Esq., has recently co-authored such

a book which we can highly recommend. The book is entitled "Why did I Walk into this Room? A Thinking Person's Guide to Growing Older." Larry, a Professor of Law Emeritus (which means he is also a little older), at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and Kenney F. Hegland, Esq. who was also a Professor Emeritus, he, at the University Arizona College of Law have provided a guide to the considerations one needs to take into account as one ages. It is witty, down-home (Larry is originally from Nebraska, after all) and covers, sometimes, existentially, topics near and dear to our hearts.

At this juncture, I'd like to have you hear from Professor Frolik as to what caused him to write the book:

"Over the years Ken and I learned that most folks don't know very much about what it means to age.

Our response was to present information about the many aspects of growing older but do so in a way that is easy to read, helpful, and even entertaining.

So, we wrote 40 chapters, about 3 to 5 pages each, that introduce a great variety of topics. We don't tell the reader what to do. Instead, we tell them things that they might want to think about or perhaps consult a lawyer about.

We included practical advice, a few poems, and some humor. We wanted the book to be something you would actually read that would help you live a bit better life."

Well stated and a good addition to everyone's library who is faced with these issues, either for themselves or for a loved one.