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8:04 am PT, Tuesday, Sep 16, 2003

SENIOR MOMENTS: Incidentally...notes worth noting

By Lois Requist

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When I write about cancer or aging, or most anything, I get notes, and sometimes I meet people who respond to the column.

One person I met is Irene Estrella. She lives in Martinez, California, and has a business called H.O.P.E. -- Helping Other People Everyday. It seems to be a motto she lives by. She provides, "ethical care, companionship and personalized assistance for people with specific needs," according to her brochure. Some of those specific needs are: as a traveling companion for those who want to go but need someone to go with them for either assistance or companionship; helping with special gift purchases; as a pickup and delivery service; as transportation to special events and social gatherings; and simply for companionship.

Irene is a quiet, soft-spoken woman, comfortable to be around. If you want to talk with her, the number for her business is 925-228-5885.

When I wrote about aging, in an article, "When Repairs Don't Keep Up," Leonid Gavrilov, author of the book, "The Biology of Life Span," wrote me, suggesting that I might be interested in an article, "The Quest for a General Theory of Aging and Longevity," which was published in July by the Science Magazine's department on aging research. It is available at: <http://www.src.uchicago.edu/~gavr1/SAGE-KE-03.pdf>.

Accessibility is another issue -- the 21 pages of a scientific paper aren't readily understandable by me and perhaps many others. That's when I start scanning for the parts I can get my head around.

Just to note a couple of interesting observations: atoms don't age and "an impressive range of cell

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functions in most organs remain unimpaired throughout the life span." Some of the elements from which we come do not age, so why do we, as a whole unit, age?

A mutation accumulation theory holds that "aging is an inevitable result of the declining force of natural selection with age. For example, a mutant gene that kills young children will be strongly selected against (will not be passed to the next generation), whereas a lethal mutation that affects only people over the age of 80 will experience no selection pressure, because people with this mutation will have already passed it on to their offspring by that age. Over successive generations, late-acting deleterious mutations will accumulate."

The Gavrilovs (Leonid and his wife Natalia, who came from Russia and study aging at the University of Chicago) also mention a "high initial damage load," that is essentially, that we are born damaged, that being illustrated by noting that "the human female fetus at age 4-5 months possesses 6 to 7 million eggs. By birth, this number drops to 1-2 million and declines to 0.3 to 0.5 million eggs by the start of puberty -- 4 to 8% of the initial amount.," Although enough, we might say, to supply more than the number of children we want, this damage does effect our life span.

In addition, the authors point out the high stress level involved in the birth process itself, because of deprivation "of oxygen by compression of the umbilical cord...then, just after birth, a newborn child is exposed to oxidative stress because of acute reoxygenation while starting to breathe."

Have I lost you yet? Let me know if you do read the article. Fascinating stuff, though challenging as well.

Finally, I wrote about cancer and heard from Marjorie Hendricks, in the Public Information Office at the Area Agency on Aging that serves Napa and Solano Counties.

The agency "exists to help seniors and their families and all of our services are free. The phone number for their professional social services representatives is 1-800-510-2020 or in Vallejo, 707-643-1798.

Lois Larrance Requist is a Benicia, California, resident. You may reach her at lrequist@getlocalnews.com.



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