

CHAT ROOM



Bev Cornell

Better late than never, she learns to drive at 50

I can now drive a car. In four months, I will be 53. I wanted to take driving lessons along with my friends at 16. To my dismay, due to orthopedic problems I've had since childhood, the doctors said NO.

When I turned 18, my family moved back to San Francisco from Phoenix, Ariz. In San Francisco, public transportation is wonderful. Not being able to drive was not a problem as I was able to go to work and school using public transit.

A few years later, I married and moved to Danville, Ky. I had a real culture shock and there was no public transportation. The good part of Danville was that it was a small town and I could walk to some places I needed to go. I started to really want to learn how to drive, but again my request to the doctors was denied. I had to depend on my husband and new friends.

Many times, I wouldn't go somewhere because I didn't want to impose on friends.

About five years later, we moved to Farmington Hills. I was hoping for public transportation again. At that time, it wasn't reliable. Luckily, we moved into a subdivision that was within walking distance to schools and to a swim club for our son. The public library and our veterinarian were close enough to walk. I sure got a lot of exercise.

Taking the plunge

As I got older, I was tired of always having to ask someone to take me places I couldn't walk to. I really wanted to learn to drive even though the thought scared me. So at 49, I decided I WAS going to DRIVE. The doctors finally relented.

My driving instructor was a saint. If he could teach two 80-year-old nuns to drive, he could teach me. He was so patient and understood my fears. Learning to drive as a teenager would have been so much easier. Teenagers have no fear. The older you get the more you realize that a car can be dangerous. Being a passenger for years, I have noticed some drivers do strange things.

As I was learning, different things about driving would scare me. I have driven on the freeway only once. Since that one short experience, I won't be driving the freeway anytime soon. Sometimes, I would let a fear get the better of me.

What really helped was my dear neighbor. She would call and say, "Time to practice." She would have somewhere to go and have me drive her there. She gave me tips. We did this several times a week until my driving test. I thought she was awfully brave to drive with a novice.

Frozen with fear

On test day, I was frozen with fear. As luck would have it the gal who was testing me was very nice. She relaxed me by talking about dogs. She would tell I had a dog because of the dog bed and toys in the back of the van.

I passed the test and received my driver's license on April 4, 1997!

My husband surprised me with a new van the night I received my license! I had a new car and my freedom. What a feeling.

A girlfriend and I have been doing meals on wheels for several years and she always drove. Now I can do my share of the driving when I go places with my friends.

I take my dog, Marbles, with me to most places. He loves the van with his bed, toys and a tip water dish.

I still have some fears like driving in snow and ice. I am getting better about driving to places I haven't driven to before when by myself.

I really enjoy the feel of driving. I am sure that is because of my newfound freedom. If it's a nice day, I can take Marbles to the park or for a walk in downtown Farmington.

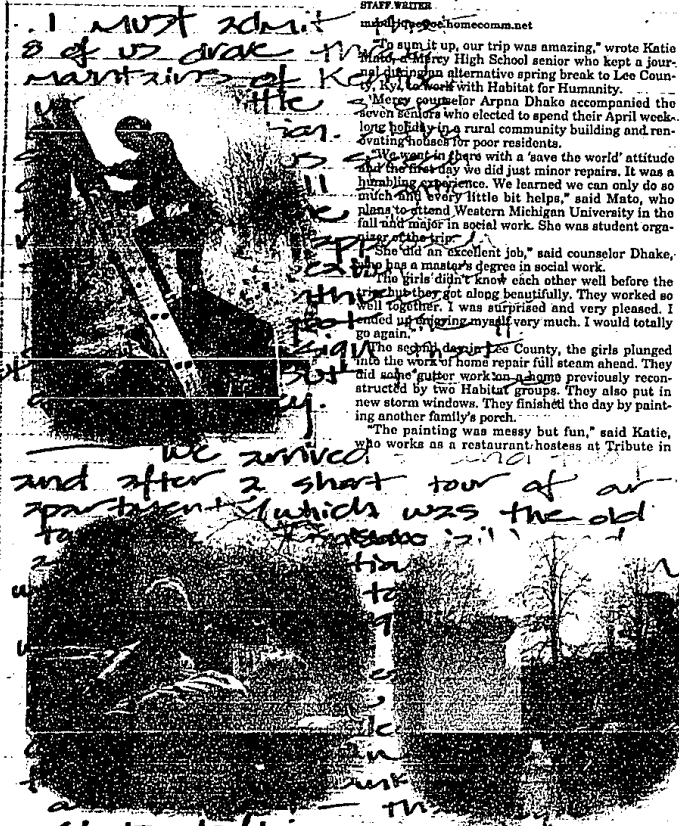
I am proud of myself for learning to drive and gaining independence.

Bev Cornell is a Farmington Hills resident and pet columnist for the Farmington Observer.

If I had a hammer

Mercy students pound nails for Habitat projects

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER
mrodrique@oe.com



Farmington Hills and will be a summer camp counselor for the city of Farmington.

Renee Bak, Maureen McDonald, Natalia Yuhaz, Mary Li Secrest, Lesley Adams and Christine Price rounded out the volunteer group. The girls traveled in two vehicles donated by the families of Renee Bak and Mary Li Secrest for the 400 mile trek south. They bunked in a renovated building that once housed the town jail.

"We did a lot of cement and tar work. We leveled out the entire floor of the site and we built the main beam for the sub floor. We also did a lot of clean-up work," Katie wrote on day two.

"At first we thought their small town was slightly odd and we found humor in their customs," she wrote in her journal. "By the time we left, we knew that Beattyville was more than a quiet little town. Its customs and culture were centered around heritage, family and friends. We wondered how they lived without a mall. They found company in each other and used creativity to express themselves. I must say that all of us were sad to leave."

"We learned so much and we left with wonderful memories, a better sense of ourselves and many new friends."

This was the second year in a row Mercy seniors participated in an alternative spring break with Habitat for Humanity. Pat Atchinson, volunteer coordinator for the Farmington Hills school, says it has become an annual practice that will continue. Though each Mercy student is expected to complete 25 hours of community service during her high school career, all the girls in the Habitat program have exceeded that requirement.

Katie said she plans to spend some time with the Detroit branch of Habitat for Humanity this summer.

Some 200 new homes will be built in June and July in the state. The Jack Kemp Michigan Build will be constructing these homes statewide.

The Detroit portion of the project will get under way June 14 and run several weeks.

The Creekside program in the Jefferson Corridor area of Detroit will include up to 15 new homes," said Bob Arcand, executive director for Habitat-Detroit.

Since the founding of Habitat for Humanity International more than 20 years ago, the humanitarian organization has built more than 70,000 homes for more than 350,000 people. Home building efforts have been carried out by 1,350 affiliates in the U.S. and 80 other countries.

For more information, call Habitat's Detroit office at 313-521-6691.

On the road: Mercy seniors tackle construction projects in Lee County, Ky. during spring break. They worked with Habitat for Humanity.

Working tirelessly for nursing home reform

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER
mrodrique@oe.com

Tears well in Lydia Rizzo's eyes as she recalls the horrific treatment her beloved mother endured in a Wayne nursing home years ago. Her mother is gone now, but Rizzo has become a local crusader for nursing home industry reform in Michigan.

Last December with a core group of friends and associates she helped establish an Oakland County chapter of Michigan Campaign for Quality Care, a consumer advocacy group that meets monthly. Its legislative platform looks to basic improvements like increasing minimum nursing home staffing, providing adequate staff training and residential care, and improving the state's monitoring of nursing homes, specifically to investigate complaints in more timely manner.

Rizzo's Multitown apartment in Farmington Hills is filled with state and federal reports, newspaper clippings and copies of letters to state legislators in a never-ending quest to improve what she sees as a vastly underreported daily occurrence — neglect of the elderly in many long-term care facilities across the state.

"We hear about Kosovo every day on

the news. But do you ever wonder while driving down Grand River or Middlebelt past a nursing home, what kind of care are the residents getting?" she asked.

Two local facilities are named in a federal government report critical of nursing home inspection practices in Michigan. The General Accounting Office presented its report to the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging in late March.

The Greenery Extended Care Center on Grand River, now called IHS of Michigan, is one of them. It has one of the state's worst compliance records, according to the GAO. On Oct. 29, 1998, seven complaints alleging dozens of violations — including resident abuse, unexplained fractures, insufficient staffing, dirty conditions and poor infection control practices — were investigated. The Michigan survey agency received most of the complaints five to six months earlier, but didn't conduct timely investigations. A dozen allegations were verified during the belated investigation.

The GAO report further states Charter House of Farmington Hills had four complaints investigated during the facility's annual survey on Jan. 27, 1998.

Please See NURSING HOMES, B3



STAFF PHOTO BY DILL REEDER

Tasks: Lydia Rizzo, Barbara Nedwedess of Livonia and Maggie Pollock of Farmington Hills, members of Michigan Campaign for Quality Care, check out reports on nursing homes.

Local fire safety video will get a national airing

"Fire Smart — The Ultimate Lesson," a dramatic fire safety program produced by SafetyTech, will be shown at 1 p.m. Saturday, May 22, on WTVS, Channel 58 in Detroit.

Produced primarily in Farmington Hills, this one-hour show was a combined effort involving a variety of agencies, including the Farmington Hills Fire Department, the University of Michigan Trauma Burn Unit, U-M's Survival Flight and Communicore Visual Communications of Plymouth.

The video version of Fire Smart is produced by former Farmington Hills firefighter and Plymouth resident John Zyka, has been available for six months.

"I've had orders from as far away as Russia and the Philippines," said Zyka, president of SafetyTech.

"Fire Smart" has also been awarded the Classic Telly award for excellence in video production.

The awards are nice, but they don't mean a thing if the video isn't doing its job," Zyka said. "The goal of this tape is to capture the attention of entire families with the special effects, dramatic fire footage and a story that we

all can relate to. We then educate them with fire safety facts and they don't even realize it."

"The program is full of the latest home fire safety information that most people simply do not know or understand. It's not your typical fire safety video. People watch this tape and they can't believe we really burned this house down. They're amazed when they see the intensity of this non-Hollywood style fire and realize how close we all are to actually experiencing this within our own home."

"The real reward for me is when I

receive letters, phone calls and e-mail from people I've never met and they tell of how they watched the tape and immediately made changes around their house," he added. "These are folks that thought they already knew all there was to know about fire safety. If this video saves one life or prevents one fire from devastating a family, then it's done its job."

"Fire Smart — The Ultimate Lesson" is available for \$17.95. It is part of SafetyTech's Family Safety Video series. For more information, call 1-800-723-3637 or www.safetech.com