

# VOICES OF AGING

VOICES OF AGING is a blog and newsletter created by Marian L. Knapp supporting those who are aging and those who love someone who is aging. Please visit us at [voicesofaging.com](http://voicesofaging.com).

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## A NOTE FROM MARIAN – JUNE 2017

I continue to be rattled by what is going on at both the federal and state-wide levels. Attitudes of hate and insidious dishonesty seem to pervade the news. But I also see ongoing attempts to gain back some normalcy and reason, and that is reassuring. In this context, I continue to work locally to advocate for older people who can't find affordable places to live and to support Newton as a "welcoming" community. In addition, I have been asked to review proposals for projects that help legal permanent residents to become naturalized United States citizens through a Massachusetts statewide Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP).

That's a snapshot of my community activity. On a personal level, I have two new books out. The first one, "A Steadfast Spirit: The Essence of Caregiving," I talked about in my May website posting. I have been getting some nice feedback and you may want to take a look at it. Interestingly, it is our children's generation that seems to be interested since they are the ones who will have to take care of us. Check it out and get it for your kids (you can find it on Amazon.com).

The second book is different. My friend Vivien Goldman and I have teamed up to create a book called: "The Outermost Cape: Encountering Time." The book is a "conversation in word and image" and is comprised of Vivien's evocative Cape Cod photos and my reflections on what these photographs represent for me. Crafting this book has been a creative and meaningful collaboration for the two of us. We are delighted with the result. "The Outermost Cape: Encountering Time" is available on Blurb. Vivien and I will be exhibiting photographs and excerpts from the essays at the Wellfleet Public Library from June 17, 2017 through June 30, 2017. We will be doing an artist-author talk at the Wellfleet

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Public Library on Sunday, June 25, 2017 at 3:00.

My article for this month's blog is "Connected More than We Know."

Have a good June – talk to you all in July.

Marian

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## THIS MONTH'S FEATURED ARTICLE

### **Connected More Than We Know**

By Marian L. Knapp

Maybe we are connected with each other in ways that we don't know and don't see. Maybe our presence in our neighborhoods is noticed even though we don't feel it. Maybe our regular actions are observed and registered in the minds of strangers, but their awareness is hidden from us. I wouldn't be thinking about the phenomenon of unknown and unacknowledged connectedness unless I had heard about Audrey's dog.

Audrey, a well-known and beloved member of our community, walks her dog every day. She has been doing this for as long as anyone can remember. Audrey is a dog lover and those who are close to her truly believe she is "part dog." What they mean is that her understanding of dogs is deep and intimate. Her awareness of what they want, need, and feel is palpable. She is spiritually and profoundly connected to dogs.

Over the years Audrey has had many dogs. She has taken care of them, loved them and brought them outside - usually twice a day and in all kinds of weather. As she walked her dog, the people in the neighborhood and other dog walkers along her route greeted her and they would talk for a few minutes to catch up on things. Some of these people had known Audrey quite well, and others were not as close, but there was always something to discuss about their dogs.

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As she walked the sidewalks, anonymous drivers in unfamiliar cars passed by. She would notice but not think too much about them unless someone took a moment to wave hello. Mostly the cars and their drivers were just part of the background activity and noise.

Then, this past year, Audrey's ten-year-old dog got sick and began to decline. She took care of him, comforted him, and held him until he died. It was an exhausting and devastating time. A few people knew that this had happened – especially compatriot dog owners. They were able to acknowledge her loss because they knew and understood the powerful significance of Audrey's relationship with her dog.

What Audrey didn't know was that strangers noticed that she was missing from her usual streets, but they didn't know why. When she got new dog, a slightly smaller one that would not pull so strongly on a leash, and as she resumed her walking those anonymous drivers stopped to talk whether or not they had waved in friendship in the past. They interrupted their travel to make a connection. "What happened?" "Where were you?" "I was worried when I didn't see you?" "Are you OK?" "Is this your new dog?" It didn't seem to matter if the person would be late for work, an appointment, or dinner. They halted their trips to say hello and to check in with someone they had only observed through their schedule-driven daily routines which, in practice, prevented one-on-one interaction.

Audrey cannot believe the outpouring of concern from people she didn't know. She talks about it with an aura of astonishment as she excitedly recognizes how these strangers noticed and reached out to her at such a crucial time. "I can understand it with people I know, but with complete strangers? It's amazing!"

Audrey is so much a part of Newton life and enjoys countless connections with those who have known her for decades. She has an involved and caring family, numberless friends and colleagues, and important relationships with other dog lovers.

But she has learned that there are many who know her only as an unnamed older woman who walks her dog on a regular basis, alone. They don't know that Audrey is not solitary. Her experience of reappearing after a loss has provided Audrey with a new and powerful insight – that there are strangers out there

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who have the capacity to care about someone even if they don't know them, and who are prepared to take a step and let someone know they care.

This is not a surprise. We know that a big majority of people in this City are willing to help someone in whatever circumstance, but that fewer people are comfortable asking for help. This raises a dilemma for those who are ready to help, but don't want to enter into someone's life without being invited. Those on the other side may also have a dilemma - how to indicate that help would be welcome without sacrificing independence and control. Making those connections is hard on both sides – how to give and how to ask.

Audrey's dog provided caring strangers a means for getting involved and making a link that wasn't there before. Many people don't have a way to be visible to the world and can end up being alone and also isolated. Not everyone has a dog to be an intermediary. I don't have answers about how to make those critical connections. The best thing I can do is to watch the world around me like the unknown drivers did and look for opportunities to just say hello.

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Marian has also been featured on [Huffington Post](http://Huffington Post).