

Top 40 reasons old age isn't for sissies

Lee Rozen/Moscow-Pullman Daily News Editorial Board

Most remember Casey Kasem's distinctive cadence as he counted down our youth's Top 40 hits. Both the fact and nature of his recent death speak to the nature of growing old in America today. He died in rural Gig Harbor, Wash., far from his friends in the entertainment business. He had dementia. His kids didn't think his wife was giving him proper care. They ended up in court.

Now, more of us are living longer than ever before. Many more as the Baby Boomers age.

At the same time, it's more unusual than before for us to live and die in the same town where we were born. As we age, we are finding it more of a struggle to stay close to our family and our friends.

To stay close to children and, more importantly, grandchildren, older adults find themselves moving away from their own network of friends. Either that or the grandkids find that getting through the woods to grandmother's house involves a trip on an Alaska 737.

Facebook and Skype may help, but neither provide hugs. Nor do they serve coffee for eight on Thursday mornings at the local café.

Sudden events like accidents and heart attacks kill fewer of us now. Instead, like Kasem, we die more often of the diseases of extended wear and tear on body, mind and soul. These debilitating diseases, often chronic and lingering, gradually erode our ability to do the things we love to do, erode even our sense of self.

Who does not fear that eventuality for themselves? Who does not fear that for their spouse or for their parent?

Anyone of normal means who has ever looked into long-term care insurance at whatever age has been discouraged by its cost. And by fears of Medicare and Social Security running out of money. And yet long-term care is what so many of us will either need or need to provide for another.

As older folks desperately try to hold onto their independence in their own homes, their equally desperate children who fear for Mom and Dad's safety and health must navigate the role reversal to become their parents' caregivers.

Some families fight over who is in charge. Some family members don't care, as long as it isn't them.

For the lucky ones, old age will sneak up on us. Then the real countdown begins.