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Lamorinda Village sponsors managing End-of-Life discussions

By John T. Miller

Lamorinda Village's planned simulcast of Dr. Atul Gawande's presentation on "The Value of Community Choice as We Grow Older" last month at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church was postponed due to blizzards in the Northeast preventing the surgeon and author from reaching Boston. The event has been rescheduled for sometime this summer.

Dr. Gawande's simulcast was scheduled to originate from the Beacon Hill Village. He is the author of several books, including, most recently, "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End" (2014). The book discusses end-of-life choices and challenges many traditionally held notions about the role of medicine and the effect of medical procedures on terminally ill people.

Lamorinda Village Executive Director Anne Ornelas announced that the simulcast will be rescheduled for sometime this summer, but a date has not been settled yet.

Meanwhile, Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, treated local residents instead to a free seminar on preparing for end-of-life decisions. Fodrini-Johnson is a Licensed Marriage, Family and Child Counselor, a Certified Care Manager and the founder of Eldercare Services in Walnut Creek. She has contributed columns to the Lamorinda Weekly in the past.

Her presentation, "Are Your Ducks in a Row?" led the audience of nearly 100 participants through a series of topics to consider when preparing for changes that can occur later in life, such as memory or sensory loss and lack of stamina and strength.

"Quite often we are on a journey that can include some interdependence before we leave this life," she said. "These conversations

about end-of-life decisions should happen before it is too late, so you can fully live until you die."

Fodrini-Johnson offered several checklists for preparing, including legal and medical advice, how to stay socially active, tools for a long life, and how and where to find support. She also provided helpful tips for those who are caregivers to the elderly.

On March 23, the Diablo Valley Villages — comprised of the Clayton Valley, Lamorinda and Walnut Creek Villages — will hold their bimonthly Lunch'N'Learn program at Atria Walnut Creek. The topic will be "Tech Talk for Seniors" presented by Sharon Beck, founder of Mac-Senior.

Beck is dedicated to helping seniors get the most out of their iPads, iPhones and Macs, and will show how they can stay in touch with their families through technology. The program will run from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm. Registration and luncheon are free, with limited seating for 30 participants.

The Lamorinda Village is a nonprofit organization for members 55 and older that works to actively build a community embracing connections, caring, and choices in how members live and thrive.

The Village movement began in 2001 at Beacon Hill in Boston with a group of residents who wanted to receive services and support in their homes. It has now evolved into a national movement with over 50 operating Village organizations. Hundreds of organizations worldwide are at various stages of creating a Village, including ones in Clayton Valley and Walnut Creek.

Those interested in learning more about Lamorinda Village and their events can email them at info@lamorindavillage.org, or call 925 253-2300.

Vintage Madame Alexander dolls are on display at Lafayette Library

By Cathy Dausman



Lauren Tombari and friend.

Photo Cathy Dausman

At the onset of World War I she began making cloth dolls styled as Red Cross nurses. "Madame" (a self-appointed title) established her company in 1923 and remained at its helm for 65 years (www.madamealexander.com). In the 1930s the company began modeling dolls after famous people — the Dione quintuplets, characters from literature, then-Princess Elizabeth and child actress Jane Withers.

Tombari is a great teacher — in fact that's her day job, but she is also young enough to have wanted American Girl dolls rather than dolls made by a company founded in 1923. Nevertheless a collector she is.

Tombari began her love affair with the Madam Alexander dolls when she noticed them at Lafayette's Handlebar Toys. She also recalls being in awe over a 20-inch tall Madame Alexander fashion doll (complete with rhinestones) she saw at FAO Schwarz Toy Company in San Francisco. It retailed for \$700. Expensive? Yes, especially in 1990s dollars.

"It was quite something to see," Tombari said. She did not get that doll; instead her grandfather found her mother's Madame Alexander doll in his attic and gave it to Tombari as a gift.

Madame Alexander herself was a female entrepreneur ahead of her time. She was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1895 and lived over her father's doll repair shop.

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The doll market boomed during post-World War II consumerism. An 8-inch tall Alexander-kin doll was introduced in the 1950s; it had jointed knees, a plastic face and "real saran (plastic) hair." The face was hand painted — savvy collectors can identify different artists by the brush strokes — and the eyes, "sleep eyes," usually blue, opened and closed as the doll was made to stand or recline. The dolls' attention-to-detail clothing and myriad accessories earned Madame Alexander four consecutive Fashion Academy Gold Medal Awards beginning in 1951.

Tombari's collection has grown since childhood, and by her own admission "it is not exactly a cheap hobby." She prefers to view her dolls as something of a 3-D art

collection. When asked how many she has, Tombari responds with a guess: "Oh gosh, maybe 50? I've never counted!" It's easy for her to name her "pride and joy", though — a rare 20 inch Cinderella doll, vintage 1955 dressed in a satin gown with ostrich feathers and carrying an opera fan.

"I've told my Dad which dolls to take if I ever have to leave my house," she said. Who knows how many other Madame Alexander dolls are tucked away in storage across Lamorinda.

Moraga resident Peggy Hoffman has kept her own collection from childhood. Although not an active trader, she estimates she has 30 dolls, mostly Alexander-kin models. "I passed them on to my daughter who also enjoyed looking at them, but (for now) they reside in my attic waiting for the next generation," Hoffman said.

A portion of Tombari's collection is available for viewing at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center and the Lafayette Historical Society. It is at the historical society where Tombari sought information about a former Madame Alexander seamstress who operated out of a shop along Lafayette's Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Jane Miller Company clothes were sold in upscale department stores including Neiman Marcus, Bullocks Wilshire and Marshall Field's. The woman had the misfortune to have such a common name that neither staff at the Lafayette Historical Society nor Martinez Historical Society staff could find any record of her. Although Miller's doll clothes live on, the woman herself is a mystery "lost to history," Tombari said.

Family Focus

Reluctant Discipline: A helpful approach to a tough subject

By Margie Ryerson

Many parents face the difficult issue of how to coordinate their efforts to discipline their children. One parent may tend to be a strict disciplinarian, while the other may be more lenient.

Recently I met with a couple who were locked in a pattern of good cop/bad cop. "Mandy" was the strict one who set rules and applied them. "Jeff," on the other hand, preferred to be low-key and nonconfrontational with their two children. Because they weren't in agreement, their relationship with each other suffered. Mandy resented being the one who always provided the discipline, while Jeff resented the pressure to change when he was perfectly happy with the way he was.

When it comes to disciplining our children, we are often products of our own childhood family environment. Mandy grew up in a healthy family atmosphere where discipline was neither too strict nor too indulgent, what we call an authoritative approach. Her parents were in control, but the children had a voice and it was a participatory system. Family relationships were strong and respectful.

Jeff's family upbringing was more on the permissive side. His parents were hesitant to take control, and allowed their children a great deal of freedom. Jeff and his two brothers didn't have many family meals together, limits on screens or a curfew when they were older. Jeff felt close to his parents and appreciated their leniency. (The only downside for Jeff was that his relationship with his brothers was strained. Without their parents' help resolving conflicts, not much got settled. Too often, they were left with anger and hostility towards each other.)

In order for Mandy to be able to step down from her role of en-

forcer, Jeff needed to agree to get involved. He knew he didn't want his two children to be as unregulated as he and his brothers were, but he also didn't want to come across as heavy-handed.

I introduced the idea of reluctant discipline to them: A parent demonstrates with words, tone of voice and body language that he really doesn't want to have to be in the position of having to discipline, but unfortunately the child's behavior has necessitated a consequence.

Too often, power struggles, resistance, resentment, and anger arise when a parent disciplines in a strong manner. A parent's loud, angry voice and irate facial expression coupled with criticisms or threats doesn't tend to produce a desirable outcome. True, a child will be corrected and disciplined, but what is the collateral damage?

We want to discipline in a manner that shows our children there are rules and ways of behaving that we expect them to follow. We need to be very clear about what we expect, and to give them a warning whenever possible before we implement a consequence. The purpose is to train them to behave in certain ways, but also for them to want to go along with our program. We want cooperation and respect.

By disciplining reluctantly, a parent shows a child that he is not taking any satisfaction in having to take charge. He is not angry, just matter-of-fact or sad because rules weren't followed. It's important to match your tone of voice (compassionate) and your facial expression (halfhearted) with your words. You want your child to perceive that you are always on his side, even though sometimes you need to insist on certain rules and behaviors.

Of course, a parent must first be able to suppress his own anger at his child's misdeeds so that he

can come across sincerely and effectively. It can help to take some time to evaluate the situation and figure out how to have a measured response. You may want to talk to your partner or another trusted person. You may want to do lots of deep breathing! Avoid reacting or responding too quickly unless the situation calls for a fast correction. A toddler who continually defies parental authority or who is in possible danger needs immediate intervention. A teen who has continually ignored an agreement, such as failing to do dishes or other chores, can wait for a parental response.

As with acquiring any new skill, the more you practice reluctant discipline, the more instinctively you will be able to apply it. Since anger begets anger, removing anger from disciplining enables a child to be better able to look at his own actions instead of reacting to negative parental verbal and/or nonverbal messages.

Jeff and Mandy were relieved to find a system of discipline that felt satisfactory for each of them and also united them in a common approach. Their children benefited and felt more secure when their parents were able to work together as a team in this way.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist and author in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com.

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