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In Touch

YOUR GUIDE TO LIFETIME PLANNING

BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU SERVING WISCONSIN
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2005

2nd Quarter 2006

THE QUESTION IS
"Will I have enough money to retire?"

News and Notes

Karen J. Ellenbecker, President
ELLENBECKER INVESTMENT GROUP, INC.

One question my clients frequently ask is, ***"Do I have enough money to retire?"*** If you consider the impact of unknown variables such as health and longevity, taxes, changing inflation rates, and unpredictable returns on your investments it now becomes the "million-dollar" question. I was recently discussing retirement with my Dad. He retired when he was 59 years old and this year he will turn 86 and my mother will turn 78. Simple math tells me that my dad has been retired for over 27 years. Both of my parents have experienced some health related issues but for the most part they are healthy and enjoying retirement. It is conceivable that one or both of them could be retired for another 10 to 15 years which could mean a total of over 40 retirement years. My dad never thought that he might be retired longer than he actually worked! The good news is that I have a long life expectancy based on my family history. The bad news, however, is that I will need to have a substantial amount of retirement savings or be willing to except a larger amount of risk than my parents did to make sure my money doesn't run out before I do!

I am certainly not alone in this dilemma. Let's take a look at my generation, the **baby boomers**. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 76 million baby boomers make up more than 25% of the total U.S. population. In addition, the social security administration indicates that the number of retirees will double in the next few years while the number of workers paying into Social Security will drop by more than a third. Personally, I could be in retirement at the same time as one or both my parents. It is evident that not only will the baby boomers need to plan for retirement but they will also have a huge impact on the U.S. Economy. In order for us to accomplish the financial goal of outliving our money, it will be impossible to simply depend on the concept of asset allocation and not putting all your eggs in one basket. This process of allocating your investments between stocks, bonds and non-correlated investments is only the beginning. Comprehensive retirement distribution planning will not only be necessary but it will be imperative to maintaining financial security.

Now I will begin to answer the million-dollar question, ***"Will I have enough to retire?"*** First you need to determine how much money you will need to maintain your current lifestyle in today's dollars and adjust that amount for taxes and inflation. The next step is to make a list of assets that are or will be available to fund your retirement income needs. This could include your home, retirement accounts, investments, social security, pensions and any other income producing assets such as rental properties or even a part time job. This is where it can get tricky. You must determine what, if any, tax consequences are associated with each investment you hold. For example, if you hold dividend paying equities, the dividends are ***currently*** taxed at 15%. Taxable bonds are taxed as ordinary income, tax-free bonds are generally federally tax-free but are not necessarily state tax-free. For your individual accounts you will need to determine your cost basis (what you paid for it), including all dividends and capital gains that were re-invested. This is important should you sell any portion of that investment. Knowing what you paid for the investment will prevent you from being double taxed. Another area that is often overlooked is the tax liability on qualified retirement accounts. Because you have never paid tax, any money that you withdraw from your qualified plan is taxed as ordinary income when it is withdrawn. If you are in the 32% State and Federal tax bracket and you want to spend $24,000 after-tax annually from your qualified retirement account (IRA) you will need to withdraw a total of $35,294 (an additional 47%). If you are in the 18% State

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THE QUESTION IS *"Will I have enough money to retire?"*

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and Federal tax bracket and you want to spend $24,000 annually from your qualified retirement account (IRA) you will need to withdraw a total of $29,268 (an additional 22%). You can see what a difference tax can make on what you get to keep! If you plan on working and earning an income it is important to understand if that income will affect the tax status of your Social Security. I frequently tell my clients that the two biggest risks they will face in retirement are **health and taxes**!

Speaking of risk…now it is time to determine how much risk you can afford to take both financially and emotionally. The problem is that very often these two concepts actually contradict each other. In order to meet your retirement income needs you might have to take more financial (market) risk than you are emotionally comfortable with. The dilemma is that if you don't take the added market risk, your retirement assets may not be able to support your chosen retirement date or you may find out that your goals are unrealistic.

Once you have determined how much money you will need and the amount of risk you are willing to assume you can then begin to develop a distribution plan for your retirement assets. Here is where it can get tough. It is important for you to understand yield (or income) versus looking at the total return on your investments. Planning for thirty years of retirement will require your money to be working for you. The old theory of living on your income meant that all of your investments were invested in fixed income securities or income producing investments. Moving forward towards retirement will require that you have investments that are structured for total return not just for income.

When I hear a commercial on the radio about "GPS" I think, wouldn't it be great if we could just push a button and we would receive a road map to retirement. Conceptually our asset allocation is like GPS, it is a unique investment strategy that is specific to each of our clients. It is true you can't push a button to get where you want to go but you can see all of your investments in one format that demonstrates if you are on the right track or if changes need to be made. This is the structure by which we manage money for our clients. It is a discipline that measures risk by the balance between all of the different asset classes. It is designed to withstand the fluctuations in the market. You can see at a glance how much income your portfolio will generate and at the same time how much of your portfolio is invested for future growth.

We prepare a unique asset allocation for each one of our clients. For many of them, receiving their asset allocation is the first time they see all of their investment assets in a single report. On this report we also break down the total assets according to tax status such as tax-free items which includes Roth IRAs, taxable accounts like a trust or individual account and tax-deferred accounts. This portion of our asset allocation is critical to our comprehensive retirement distribution planning because as I mentioned earlier, taxes can have a significant impact in retirement.

In closing, Wachovia's Retirement Fitness survey revealed that 43% of consumers surveyed admitted to being overwhelmed in their planning for retirement.[1] Those surveyed identified the dominate areas of frustration to be 1) the vast number of choices available, 2) the time commitment required to do the job right and 3) their inability to save money on a regular basis. It has taken us many years to develop our retirement strategy and to realize there is no magic formula to the question ***"Do I have enough to retire?"*** The best advice I can give you is to invest in yourself**. First, make retirement planning a priority in your life. Second, start thinking about the process at least 10 years before retirement. Lastly, Ellenbecker Investment Group, Inc. is willing to invest in you. We can help you design a solid retirement strategy that is focused on the long-term.** Even the definition of long-term has changed, just look at my Dad, 27 years into his retirement and still counting!

[1] Wachovia Press Release February 22, 2006

THE U.S. *Fixed Income Market*

Michael J. Steppe, CFA
BROOKFIELD INVESTMENT PARTNERS, LLC

Interest rates are moving higher. In the first seventy days of 2006, three month U.S. Treasury Bills are up over 50 bps (0.50%). The two-year and ten-year maturity U.S. Treasury notes are up 36 bps and 39 bps respectively. The primary reasons for this increase in interest rates are the following factors:

1. **Strengthening international economic growth** – The major trading partners of the U.S. (Canada, Mexico, etc…) as well as emerging international powers (China, India, etc.) are experiencing strong economic expansions.

2. **Expansionary U.S. fiscal policy** – The U.S. government is spending heavily in Iraq, the global war on terror and the rebuilding effort for the Gulf Coast after the hurricanes.

3. **The U.S. Federal Reserve is pushing up short-term rates** – Monetary policy is clearly less accommodative as the new Fed chairman worries about escalating inflationary pressures.

Short-term rates may increase from the 4.5% area to the 5.0% area. This will likely happen over the next ninety days. Intermediate and longer-term rates may increase 50 bps to 75 bps as economic growth and inflation come in stronger than anticipated at the beginning of the year.

This increase in interest rates represents a cyclical trend in rates. The combination of strong global growth and expansionary fiscal policy are driving up rates. These upward cyclical pressures on rates are limited by the following dynamics:

1. There is a large global pool of investment funds searching for high quality assets. These sophisticated worldwide investors have experienced low interest rates as governments reacted to concern over deflation by maintaining loose monetary policies. These investors are pushing down yield levels on the best quality investment assets.

2. The competition fostered by the global supply of labor continues to exert downward price pressure on all goods and services that can be made/delivered on an international basis. As America continues to outsource manufacturing to China/India and other emerging markets, this trend intensifies.

3. A softening U.S. housing market, will dampen consumer willingness to spend money borrowed against the value of their homes.

4. Technological improvements remain a source of productivity and lower costs for many businesses.

Normally a cyclical increase in interest rates would push intermediate and longer-term rates to significantly higher yields. This cycle is different however due to the factors listed above. Longer-term U.S. Treasury rates are not anticipated to rise by much more than short-term rates. In this type of an environment, the yield differential between short-term rates and intermediate/long-term rates becomes very narrow and the yield curve (described as flat) can stay flat for many months.

Fixed income investors often make mistakes in this type of an environment. Stretching for additional yield in this type of a period is tempting, but usually winds up with negative total returns for investors. The key for investors is to stay defensive as interest rates begin to push up. Extending maturities too early results in very weak performance. This is the reason intermediate/longer-term bonds are inappropriate. A much better alternative is short-term (January 15, 2008 maturity) U.S. TIPS. These securities earn a base return (currently approximately 1.80%) plus an inflation adjustment equal to the Consumer Price Index. Brookfield Investment Partners forecasts CPI for 2006 to be in the 3.75% to 4.00% range. These short-term securities earn a reasonable yield and are an effective holding place for funds until more of the upward adjustment in interest rates is completed.

When five-year to ten-year maturity U.S. Treasury yields exceed 5.0%, it will likely make sense for investors to begin extending maturities. While U.S. interest rates are volatile and may move even slightly higher, over a longer-term perspective, these rates are attractive and adding quality assets at this point in the interest rate cycle makes sense. Investors in higher tax brackets should consider an emphasis on ten-year to twelve-year maturity municipal bonds. These bonds can be supplemented by some traditional U.S. Treasury Notes to create a diversified portfolio that meets the specific needs of the fixed income investor.

Share this newsletter and your experience with friends and family. Don't keep us a secret. We always appreciate referrals.

THE EXERCISE *Prescription*

Linda Wasmer Andrews
WISCONSIN ATHLETIC CLUB

Wisconsin Athletic Club, Inc.
"Fitness For The Good Life"

The Wisconsin Athletic Club is committed to educating the community on the benefits of regular exercise. One of the biggest effects regular exercise can have on your health is disease prevention and quality of life preservation. This article, by Linda Wasmer Andrews, discusses five common degenerative diseases that regular exercise can help prevent. This is one of many resource articles available to the community on the Wisconsin Athletic Club's website, **www.thewac.com**.

What would you do if we told you there was a new pill that **could help prevent or manage everything from arthritis and osteoporosis to high blood pressure, diabetes, and colon cancer?** Chances are you – and everyone else who heard the news – would soon be asking for a prescription. Of course, no such wonder drug exists, but these same disease-fighting effects can be had with regular exercise. Below, leading experts on exercise tell you how to get the health benefits you can't find in a pill bottle.

One word of caution: If you already have one of these conditions, be sure to check with your doctor first before starting a new exercise program.

Osteoarthritis

Often referred to as the wear-and-tear disease, osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis and it afflicts more than half of all adults by age 65. The disease is brought on by the breakdown of cartilage in the joints as a result of aging, excessive weight and past joint injuries.

Weak muscles also play a role in the disease. *"If your muscles, especially your quadriceps and hamstrings are weak, you're at an elevated risk,"* says Miriam Nelson, Ph.D., a Tufts University researcher and lead author of <u>Strong Women and Men Beat Arthritis</u>. Thus, leg-strengthening exercises may be used to help prevent osteoarthritis of the hips, knees and ankles.

Once you have arthritis, some people think that exercise is out. Nelson disagrees. *"Rest certainly is not best,"* she says. According to Nelson, strengthening exercises can be used to build strong muscles, which support and protect the joints; flexibility exercises can be used to relieve joint stiffness and maintain range of motion, and aerobic exercises can help control weight and improve overall function. She suggests that a beginner start with easy weight training and stretching and then progress by adding a low-impact aerobic activity such as walking.

High blood pressure

While it can occur at any age, high blood pressure is most common among middle-aged and older adults, thus increasing their risk of heart disease and stroke. Studies have shown, however, that high blood pressure is not a foregone conclusion and can be alleviated by exercise. An increase in aerobic exercise can see an immediate and dramatic decrease in blood pressure in as little time as three to four weeks.

"There also is some evidence that weight training may lower blood pressure, although the effect seems to be less profound than with aerobic training," says Christian Roberts, Ph.D., a physiologist studying the effects of exercise on disease at the University of California, Los Angeles. Brisk walking, stair climbing, aerobic dancing and swimming are among the activities that provide positive aerobic benefits. While weight training may help lower blood pressure, those with high blood pressure should avoid exercises where they have to hold a muscle contraction for several seconds or put their heads lower than their torsos.

Type 2 diabetes

This is the adult-onset form of the disease, which usually starts in middle age or later. It occurs when the body fails to properly make or use insulin, leading to dangerously high levels of glucose in the blood. More than 20 percent of people over age 65 have the disease, which can damage the heart, blood vessels, eyes, kidneys, and nerves. Before the full-fledged disease starts, though, people almost always go through a period of pre-diabetes, in which blood glucose levels are only slightly higher than normal.

A recent study found that people with pre-diabetes can prevent diabetes and possibly return their blood glucose levels to normal by exercising regularly and eating a healthy diet. Just 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise a day, coupled with a five to 10 percent weight loss, reduced their risk of diabetes by 58 percent.

"Exercise increases the cells' sensitivity to insulin and helps with blood glucose control," says Cathy Jarema, M.S., an exercise physiologist at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston. As a result, exercise plays a key role in treatment for people who already have the disease as well. Those in this group should ask a knowledgeable health professional to help design an individualized exercise program. Complications – including heart, eye, kidney, and nerve disease – can affect the safety of some activities for certain people.

Colon cancer

Cancer of the colon and rectum is the third most common cancer in both men and women. More than 90 percent of cases occur in people over age 50. Luckily, there's now strong evidence that suggests that regular exercise decreases the risk of colon cancer. To get this benefit, the American Cancer Society recommends at least 45 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on five or more days a week. *"We're still not sure of the exact mechanisms at work,"* says Marty Slattery, Ph.D., a professor of epidemiology at the University of Utah School of Medicine. *"The effect may come from maintaining body weight, altering insulin levels, influencing the immune system, or regulating prostaglandins (key hormone like substances)."*

Whatever the cause, studies have found that fairly intense exercise – about three to four hours weekly – reduces colon cancer risk by about 40 percent. For the most gain, the American Cancer Society says you should also eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods, and limit your consumption of high-fat foods, especially red meat.

About the Author: Linda Wasmer Andrews is a freelance writer specializing in health, psychology and the mind-spirit connection. She has authored five books and more than 1,700 articles for websites, magazines, newsletters, and reference books.

PUTTING YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER:
Don't call the electrician to do your plumbing!

Mark Krause
President
KRAUSE FUNERAL HOMES & CREMATION SERVICES

From time to time, every house needs some maintenance work. My own house is now about twelve years old and is starting to need some attention. The appliances, the walls needing fresh paint, and even some of the landscaping need some effort to keep them functioning how we need them to work and looking presentable. With a house, it is often easier to understand what needs the attention because we can see what has to be done. In my house it is very easy because of the "Honey Do" list my wife creates for me. Even though I will lament about the list and the work that is commissioned for me on my time off, I actually appreciate the fact that my wife watches over the needs of the house and is diligent to stay on top of the tasks that need attention. I can take care of many of the easy jobs that do not require a lot of expertise and knowledge. On occasion, I will even marvel at some of the projects I can handle. Then there are the other projects.

We recently needed a new dishwasher. My wife, Joan, noticed that our dishwasher was developing a leak and brought it to my attention. I actually thought (for about a minute) that I would tackle this job myself until she brought me to my senses. I was not qualified to handle this job. I had no experience replacing a dishwasher and did not understand all the potential issues that could arise that I would not be able to fix. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and we made the call to the plumber. How did I know to call the plumber? Well, experience tells me that when it comes to water issues I need to get a hold of the person that is the expert in that field…the plumber. When I need roofing work, I call the roofer; or when we have electrical needs, I call the electrician. I know that experts in their respective field have the experience and knowledge to do the job correctly and understand what must be done for the unique circumstances that present themselves. Just as I would not call my electrician to fix a plumbing issue, I think it is important to consider whom you get advice from when making plans for the one event that everyone must experience…the funeral. The electrician may have a little knowledge about replacing a dishwasher, but the truth is he probably does not have all the answers that are needed to do the job right.

In today's world, knowing the intricacies and details of funeral arrangements is key to having a meaningful service. The fact is, funerals are much more difficult and complicated than what they were even just a few years ago. Children living in different parts of the country, Title 19, second marriages, out of town deaths, are just a few of the issues that complicate contemporary funeral plans. How will the details be gathered and who will do it? Can I guarantee and prepay the expenses over time? What if health issues require my spouse or me to go on Title 19? What options are available to me, and how will my children pay for it? What if I want it to be a party, or a traditional service? What special things can we do to remember and say good-bye? These are all questions that our preplanning department advises families about every day.

On occasion we are asked legal, medical, or financial questions and just like the electrician that knows a little bit about the dishwasher, we will direct our families to the experts in the specific field of their interest. Even if my intentions were well meaning, I would be remiss if I thought I could expertly answer questions for which I did not have complete information. Planning a funeral is often like cleaning out that one closet you have been avoiding to organize for quite some time. You know you should do it, but it is easier to tackle the project that is more readily visible. The fact is, having all the details in place really does make that difficult day easier for those left behind. I have never had anyone say they were sorry that they planned their funeral ahead of time, but I have had families say they were sorry they did not plan before they needed the funeral. The details can be overwhelming on that difficult day.

When we put our house in order, we plan for things that may happen. It's called insurance. When we plan for something we know will happen, it's called wise. When it comes time to plan for any situation, call the expert and remember: it will never be any easier to clean that closet you have been avoiding than if you just get started. You will probably be surprised that it was easier than you thought it would be.

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Don't keep us a secret. We always appreciate referrals.

OFFICE *News*

Dawn Lotz
Director of Lifetime Planning
ELLENBECKER INVESTMENT GROUP, INC.

It has been a long winter so I'm sure everyone is looking forward to watching the tulips and daffodils pop up. The change in season reminds us how busy we have been as we look back and see the many changes happening in our office. I want to share the office news.

If there is a word that clearly describes our office this past and present year it is **CHANGE**.

"To improve is to change;
to be perfect is to change often."
Winston Churchill 1874-1965
British Statesman, Prime Minister

According to Winston Churchill's quote, we must be close to perfection because change is a normal, acceptable activity and we certainly change often at our office.

One of the most exciting changes is that Julie Ellenbecker Lipsky is now a Certified Financial Planner™. This is a very difficult course of study and after passing five individual modules and many years of study and experience, she passed the two-day comprehensive exam. Her energy, education and experience in this fast-paced, quickly expanding industry is a tangible benefit both to all of us and our clients.
Congratulations Julie!

Another welcome change is watching our staff grow. Julie Pankonen joined us in January. Julie was in the investment field for 14 years when she took time off to have a family. Originally Julie and Karen met while working together at Dain Bosworth. She has now rejoined the workforce and we are thrilled to have her on staff. She has already become a vital part of our asset allocation process.

As you may have read in our 4th quarter newsletter, last fall we were awarded the Better Business Bureau's Award for "Business Ethics and Integrity," in Wisconsin. This qualified us to move on to compete in the "International BBB Award." Although there are over 1000 submissions, we are very excited for the opportunity to compete.

Our **Hats and Mittens** project continues throughout the year. We are in the process of forming Ellenbecker Investment Group's **Charitable Giving Foundation**. Anyone donating to our charitable projects can now do it through the foundation to receive a tax deduction. Since now is a great time of year to find hats and mittens on sale, feel free to do your shopping early. Otherwise, if you want us to do the shopping you can send a check donation to our charitable fund.

As a company, we are aware of our environment and whenever possible we will implement procedures to reduce waste. Toward that end we are working on a system to e-mail the Newsletter rather than mailing a hard copy for those whose are interested. Please call our office if you would rather receive our newsletter at your email address.

Another new and exciting project is hosting estate planning parties in the homes of our clients and friends to discuss estate and end-of-life planning in a format for people to learn in a safe environment. For those of you who know me, it has been one year since my Dad's passing and although I had the estate planning in place; it was a very stressful, traumatic time with all the decisions that had to be made. Through my experiences I have become a strong advocate of completing the planning in advance of a stressful situation such as death or terminal illness. These events provide a forum to discuss these issues while offering a discount on estate planning to anyone who hosts a party.

We are excited about our upcoming move to our new office on Capitol Drive. We hope to be there by August. I expect a more detailed timeline for the move to be announced in our next newsletter. Check out our billboard heading west on Capital towards Pewaukee.

Lastly, save the date for our upcoming **CLIENT APPRECIATION EVENT**. We will be hosting a breakfast at Westmor Country Club on May 4th and a dinner at the Wisconsin Club on May 2nd. We will have an exciting event integrating gardening and investment planning. Watch your mail for an invitation. You will be encouraged to bring a friend.
We hope to see you there!

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ASSET *Protection Planning*

Philip J. Remmers
Attorney
CRAMER, MULTHAUF & HAMMES, LLP

Asset protection planning has received increased focus recently as a result of today's increasingly litigious environment and the desire to protect family members from creditors or foolish actions. Asset protection planning is the use of planning techniques to place assets beyond the reach of future potential creditors. Yet, asset protection planning has always been a part of estate planning. People create trusts for family members to preserve and protect property for the future use and benefit of family members.

Creditor and liability problems can arise from a variety of sources such as:
(1) contractual obligations
(2) tort creditors, *e.g.* personal injuries
(3) regulatory liabilities, *e.g.* environmental and tax issues
(4) divorce, and
(5) disabled and incapacitated beneficiaries.

THERE ARE SEVERAL SIMPLE ASSET PROTECTION METHODS.

OUTRIGHT GIFTS OF PROPERTY
Outright gifts are a simple way to protect assets from the claims of creditors. Assets that are given away are no longer subject to attachment by the donor's creditors.

TRANSFERS IN TRUST
Trusts are the most regularly used asset protection method. Transferring gifts or inheritances to a trust may provide protection against a beneficiary's unwise use of property. A trust may also provide protection in case of subsequent divorce. Finally, in most states, a beneficiary's creditors cannot reach trust assets if the trustee's power to distribute trust assets is subject to the trustee's discretion and the assets of trust were contributed by someone other than the beneficiary.

Trusts are especially effective for the benefit of a disabled beneficiary. If a disabled beneficiary is the recipient of governmental assistance any assets transferred directly to the beneficiary may make them ineligible for certain governmental programs and benefits. In addition, public agencies have become more aggressive in seeking reimbursement from disabled beneficiaries for present and past benefits and direct transfers will provide easy assets for the government to attach.

Until recently asset protection trusts established by a person for his or her own benefit did not insulate the assets of the trust from creditors. Protection of this type usually required offshore protection trusts. However, in 1997 both Alaska and Delaware enacted laws permitting self-funded asset protection trusts. Since that time Missouri, Nevada, Rhode Island and Utah have enacted similar legislation. The laws permitting these trusts normally require that the transfer is not fraudulent, that the trust is irrevocable and that the trust assets and trust administrator is located within that state.

EXEMPT ASSETS
Certain assets are partially or entirely exempt from the reach of creditors. A few important exemptions are the homestead, life insurance, annuities, pensions, and IRAs.

The homestead exemption amounts vary from state to state. The Wisconsin exemption is currently $40,000. The federal bankruptcy exemption is $125,000 if the homestead was acquired at least 40 months prior to a bankruptcy filing. The homestead exemption allows an individual to retain a certain amount of equity in the individual's residence.

Many states exempt the proceeds as well as the cash value of life insurance and annuity contracts from the reach of creditors. However, in some states the exemption is available only if the insurance is payable to a member of the immediate family or other dependent.

Federal and most state laws also protect qualified retirement plans from creditors. In 2005, the United States Supreme Court confirmed that IRAs are also covered by the federal exemption. The Wisconsin exemption is broad, but does not cover amounts in owner dominated plans. Qualified retirement plans are also excluded from bankruptcy and not subject to attachment. The 2005 Bankruptcy Act also provided an express exemption for IRS, but the exemption is limited to $1 million in some cases.

FRAUDULENT CONVEYANCE
An individual must remember that when implementing any of the asset protection methods it is fraudulent for a debtor to transfer his or her assets to a third party with intent to obstruct creditors from reaching the assets to satisfy their claims. Some indicators of fraudulent intent are secrecy, lawsuit pending, transfer by persons about to incur debts and large gifts to family members or other related parties. This means you must plan ahead before there is a financial problem.

Most individuals can gain some asset protection by carefully structuring and allocating assets for both themselves and their family members. It is worthwhile to keep the various options in mind when you are doing financial and estate planning.

Ellenbecker Investment Group, Inc., SII Investments, Inc. and Cramer, Multhauf & Hammes, LLP. are separate companies. SII Investments, Inc and Ellenbecker Investment Group, Inc. do not provide tax and legal advice.

BRINGING MOTHER'S DAY & FATHER'S DAY TO LIFE *in New Ways*

Nance Guilmartin
Author
HEALING CONVERSATIONS: WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

For more information about having meaningful conversations—in your family or the workplace—please visit www.nanceguilmartin.com.

May and June both have holidays which can be poignant, awkward or even painful for many of us who stop to think about our relationship with our parents. When Mother's Day and Father's Day come this year, what might you do to support someone whose parent has died or who is feeling estranged or distant from them?

Perhaps you want to share a loving sentiment with your parent that you haven't found words for — yet. Or, you may want to clear up a misunderstanding. If you are feeling a bit awkward about how to have a *"meaningful"* and loving conversation with a parent, why not just start with the truth of how you are feeling? One daughter talks about how she faced this uncomfortable moment in the story, *The Long Goodbye* excerpted below from *Healing Conversations, What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say*.

There are the many children around the world facing their first Mother's or Father's Day without a parent—not only children whose parents have died but also those who are separated from parents who may be serving in the armed forces or who have recently divorced. Others are at a loss for how to get through this so-called holiday, perhaps wondering whether it will be the last one for someone they love. Recently I faced that situation and decided to send photos to the family for them to cherish as they struggle with whether additional medical treatment will work.

There are those of us whose parents died years ago, yet we still wonder what life might have been like had they lived a little longer—had we had that special talk, healed a hurt, or somehow connected in a way that we didn't. We wonder what they would be doing or saying to contribute to our life, to our community or to the lives of our children. My parents have been gone for nearly 20 years and with my oldest niece about to head to college I am wondering what wisdom Dad would have been planning to give her for graduation? How would Mom be helping my sister in the transition of 'losing a daughter to college life' having gone through it with me decades ago? Just letting my sister know that I'm thinking of her in this way could generate a discussion between us about our parents that brings them to life once again—for all of us.

This is also a time of year when we pause to appreciate what our parents have taught us—even a lesson that was hard to learn. Regardless of whether they are still living, you might consider finding a way to honor your parent by sharing what you learned with your own child or with someone close to you—at work or in your circle of friends.

While this story is about how a daughter dealt with the last months of her father's life, the discovery that she made about how to 'be' with her father is one that can help you have memorable conversations **regardless** of whether someone is ill or in the prime of life!

THE LONG GOODBYE

I kept thinking as I sat next to my Dad's bed, "He doesn't have much time left—I should be having meaningful conversations with him." The more I tried to think of something important to say or do, the farther away I felt from my father. It took a while for me to let go of myself and just be with him without an agenda.

Martina's father had been diagnosed with inoperable but treatable lymphoma. She was living in another state and was commuting back and forth to visit him. The commuting was taking a toll so she moved home.

After I relocated, I was faced with how to spend time with Dad. He'd been a pretty private person and at first I felt awkward with him. I was the only daughter in the family of sons and we hadn't hung out much together. In time I learned that all he wanted was my company. To have me sit with him during his X-rays, to take him for a drive, to go out for breakfast—to let go of my agenda of having meaningful conversations about important topics. I learned to stop thinking about the past or the future and to focus on what was going on for him at that moment. For example, if he was in a lot of pain, he felt awful and I felt awful and there would often be nothing I could do. But instead of fussing or feeling guilty, I was able to be silent with him and to feel him feeling his pain without me trying to push it away.