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**MID-MONTH
MUSINGS**

“Musing” (*noun*) – a calm, lengthy, intent consideration

Unlike our first-Tuesday e-newsletter, this monthly essay will not focus on practical legal cases and planning issues. The “Mid-Month Musings” will hopefully inform, inspire and provoke thought about many topics. We hope you enjoy it – and let us know what you think!

Many Happy Returns.

“Many Happy Returns.” A pleasant thought, but what does it mean? Its earliest recorded use was in 1789 by the British Lady Newdigate in a letter: “Many happy returns of ye day to us my Dr [dear] Love.” Since the mid-1800s it has been used predominately as a birthday greeting. But its original meaning was as a salutation to offer the hope that a happy day or event being marked would recur many more times.

I have recently been struck with how many “happy returns” occur in life. Some are infrequent major events, such as a 30-year class reunion or a cross-country family reunion at the old home place (well, those are happy if you like seeing those people again!). And some returns are seemingly insignificant but oh-so-important to you or those to whom you return. Each time I come home from work or travel or go to my parents’ home, I get a kiss from my wife or mother that shows their pleasure at seeing me again. I am truly happy to return to those people and places. Since our days are numbered, our opportunities for happy returns are likewise numbered. We should reflect on the blessing of every happy re-connection with special people and places in our lives. After all, such memories are investments we can draw on during later lonely or monotonous times to give us smiles and feelings that life has been good.

In our elder law practice, we often counsel with spouses and children of persons with dementia, whose disease has caused them to “return” to their childhood or earlier events in their lives. They may revert subconsciously to earlier relationships and memories with parents, siblings, children and jobs. They may believe those events and relationships are current reality. This is so, according to studies done on reminiscence and aging, often because those earlier events, people and places gave great pleasure or bolstered the person’s beliefs and personal values about life, others and themselves. So, even though disconcerting to family members, such a dementia-related reversion may be a “happy return” from a life of increasing confusion and decline to an earlier feeling of security and peacefulness.

This Musing went “AWL” (absent with leave) in May because, on the week I usually write it, my family and I returned from a trip to Florida. The trip was, itself, a

happy return to Disneyworld in Orlando – some business meetings for me and otherwise, vacation time with Ruthie, my daughter Melanie, and Melanie’s black Labrador retriever service dog, Madine. On the way, we reminisced about our last trip to Mouseville 23 years ago, when Melanie and her twin sister, Melissa, were 8 years old. It was a happy return to enjoy the parks and sights again.

It was another happy return to the campus of Canine Companions for Independence (CCI), where we all spent two weeks in November 2007 training with Madine before bringing her home as Melanie’s companion/assistant. The staff and trainers there have an on-going interest in each recipient and each dog placed, and this latest visit was like a family reunion. We also got to spend time with the McCalls from Atlantic Beach, Florida, the volunteer puppy-raisers who raised Madine as their first CCI pup from age 8 weeks to 14 months before giving her back to CCI for training. Dr. Moody McCall, a veterinarian, has now raised three CCI dogs, all of which have been placed with young women as skilled service dogs. This is an extraordinary success rate for placement of service dogs (many CCI dogs become skilled companion dogs for children or incapacitated adults), and it is an on-going extraordinary act of love. His family cried when they “gave up” Madine to Melanie in 2007, but it was short-lived sorrow. They are committed to “many happy returns” of such wonderful animals to CCI to benefit people with disabilities. So it was a joyful gathering of the McCalls with all three recipients of his puppies at a ceremony at Sea World. (See photo below of Melanie, Jess, Andrea and Moody with his current puppy, Sloane.)



Our return on Sunday evening from this great week was a very happy return for Gus, my therapy dog (see above and on the Staff page of our website, www.elderlawms.com), as we had left him at home for the entire week. (I think he is reading up at night on how to disable vehicles to prevent this from occurring again!)

As you reflect on the meaningful people, places and events in your life, we wish you “Many Happy Returns.”