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The Council for Older Adults is a non-profit organization serving the older population throughout Delaware County. The Council was created to plan, coordinate and develop services designed to enable older persons living in the county to remain independent in their own homes and community.

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Lessons Learned from Nixon

I've been writing this column now for more than 12 years. It is not because I am the best writer in the world, or because I necessarily always have something interesting to say. Rather, I write this because I am the boss, and there are certain expectations that come with the title. Besides, no one else wants to do it.

I will, from time to time, receive letters or emails or phone calls about something I have written here, and I do appreciate the feedback — both good and bad — as it confirms and reminds me that at least someone is reading what goes in this space.

The single column that generated the biggest response was not about our services or a specific aging issue, or for that matter about anything we do here at the Council. It was about my dog. Back in the 1990s I wrote a column about Nixon, our too big, too goofy and sometimes way too energetic Dalmatian. I wrote, jokingly, that as a puppy he was so energetic that his veterinarian had prescribed a tranquilizer, but that we later found that things worked out much better if, instead of giving the pills to Nixon, we took them instead. I was just kidding!

One of the other things that I wrote that I most loved about Nixon was watching him every morning when I let him out into our back yard. No matter if it was a beautiful sunny morning, pouring down rain or the coldest, snowiest day of the year, he always would approach his morning prance around our fence line in the same way — with his head high and long tail almost straight up. It always

FROM THE DIRECTOR

BOB HORROCKS



made me feel that he knew something that I didn't and that I should strive to be more aware and appreciative of my surroundings. It reminded me that I should stop and enjoy the small stuff that I take for granted. Even on my worst day, watching his reaction to the new day never failed to make me feel better.

In the years since I wrote that column, Nixon's daily morning routine continued. Over the years he had gained a few pounds, but he never lost his energy or enthusiasm for life. Then about a year and a half ago we began to notice that he was slowing down a bit. He had noticeably gained weight and developed a slight limp. His veterinarian told us that he was getting older and that this was not unusual. Much to Nixon's dismay, we put him on a diet and, much to our dismay, he gained more weight. His gradual decline continued over the next nine months or so, to the point where his limp worsened and he struggled getting around the house. When I let him outside in the morning he no longer pranced along the fence line and his head and tail were no longer held high. It was clear that he was feeling pretty miserable. I was feeling worse.

You probably are guessing

what happened next. I was certainly trying to prepare myself for the worst as we took Nixon to the vet for another visit. We would be pleasantly surprised. Nixon had gained even more weight. So much in fact that it could not be chalked up to simply the inevitable result of getting old. Blood tests ensued, and as it turned out, Nixon had (has) a thyroid problem, which is treatable. He now takes a couple pills a day for this and a couple more for arthritis, and suddenly he is back to his old self. He has lost 13 pounds in the last two months, and any day now Jan and I are going to dig out the old tranquilizers.

I think that there is something to be learned here. Please don't assume that feeling bad is a natural part of growing older. See your doctor regularly, and if he or she tells you that whatever ails you is due to old age, find another doctor and find out the real cause of your problem.

Wouldn't it have been a shame if we had not discovered what was wrong with Nixon? He would have been robbed of all those extra mornings prancing along our fence line, and I would have been robbed of the good feeling of watching him. None of us is going to live forever, but we may as well feel as good as we can for as long as we can. Don't rob yourself or your loved ones of this.

Now, if only we can get Medicare Part D to cover Nixon's drugs. On second thought, maybe we should be happy that we don't have to try and figure that stuff out for him.