An Entertaining Life

It was 1944 in Biak, New Guinea. As Joannie Schendel crooned “Embraceable You” before 3,000 U.S. soldiers, the signal came: whoop, whoop, whoop. The alarm rang out as Japanese bombers were spotted above the war-torn South Pacific island. Joannie remembers: “They just grabbed my hand and we went running for a bunker. They pushed me to the ground, and a sergeant fell over me briefly sidelined this World War II USO entertainer, but before the war ended she still managed to travel to China, Burma, India, Africa, Italy, France, and the South Pacific on four USO tours with entertainers like Danny Kaye and Tony Romano.

Joannie’s voice first landed her work in 1934, when she was just 11 years old. She sang often in school and in Chicago-area churches. The producers of a national radio show, one way, and a captain over me the other way. We were packed in like sardines! I thought, ‘Will I ever get out of this crushing mess?’ I woke up a week later in the hospital.”

The bunker took a direct hit, as did Joannie’s head. The concussion “Barn Dance Theater,” asked her to join their troupe. “It was back in the days when western things were all the rage,” she recalls. “We sat on bales of hay every Saturday night and had a barn dance and radio show.”

Continued on page 2
An Entertaining Life

Continued from cover

Her plans to go to college were interrupted by World War II. “I wasn’t about to let my brothers go off to war and me not do anything,” Joannie says. “My father was adamant about me not joining the service, but the first thing he saw was me in uniform. And I said, ‘Dad, it’s not the Army or Navy, I’m a USO performer.’”

Her most rewarding USO tour was in the South Pacific. “There were so many young men who were so starved for anything from home,” remembers Joannie. “They would wipe their eyes and look again, thinking, ‘I’ve got to be dreaming—there can’t be a gorgeous blonde coming out of that truck!’ She adds, “I really felt like I was doing something.” She recalls visiting a hospital and receiving a wounded soldier’s request to sing “How Deep is the Ocean.” “I came to his bed and I just had to steel myself... he had lost one eye and his face was terribly burned. I had to look at him and let him know that he was loved.”

Following the war, Joannie returned to entertaining in the States. She was singing at the Stagedoor Canteen in Washington, D.C. one evening when two men—Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein—complimented her on her performance and said, “If you ever get to New York, for goodness’ sake, look us up and we’ll find a place for you.” She followed that promise to New York and appeared on Broadway in the casts of “Oklahoma,” “South Pacific,” and “Guys And Dolls.”

Joannie’s career led her west to Hollywood, where she did stunt work for film star Betty Hutton. A back injury brought her to Seattle for treatment in 1953; she ended up staying and married. She continued to do some television and musical work until her three children arrived; she then became “Happy, the Party Clown” for 25 years. “This outlet with children took care of that inner desire to be in the talent world,” Joannie explains. Even today, adults stop her, recognizing the clown who made one of their birthday parties special.

Joannie’s present life is busy, but she’s not entertaining as much. Having more free time meant she could join WHI. As a participant in the Hormone and Calcium/Vitamin D programs at the Seattle Clinical Center, Joannie loves “helping science find some better roads to women’s problems.”

Future plans include recording a CD with some musician friends, with Joannie singing hits from the 1940s to the present. It will be a fitting tribute to a life of bringing joy to others through song and showmanship. Joannie’s enthusiasm can’t be contained: “I’ve loved every minute of my life, and I’ll keep on loving it until the very last day!”

---

As a participant in the Hormone and Calcium/Vitamin D programs at the Seattle Clinical Center, Joannie loves “helping science find some better roads to women’s problems.”
Depression

Life is full of highs and lows, joys and sorrows. But if you’ve been feeling “down” for more than a few weeks or it’s difficult to keep going day-to-day, this may be more than just the “blues.” You may be suffering from a common yet serious medical illness called depression.

Depression can rob sufferers of their zest for life. It also can slow recovery from medical problems such as heart attack, stroke, hip fracture, and cancer. It raises the risk of suicide— a special concern for older adults, who have the highest suicide rate of any age group. In the United States, depression contributes to 70 percent of all suicides.

Depression can be caused by stresses in your life, such as losing someone you love, feeling isolated or misunderstood, chronic pain, or money problems. It often comes and goes with life events or concerns, often over many years. Some medications can trigger depression, or it can also be a symptom of a medical problem. Depression often runs in families.

The good news: depression is highly treatable. But in order for it to be treated, it must first be recognized. Many people with depression do not seek the professional help they need — often because they don’t know the symptoms, think depression will go away on its own, or are embarrassed to talk about how they’re feeling. Read the checklist in the next column to see if you or someone you care about might be depressed.

If you have any of the first three symptoms or have checked a total of four or more symptoms, you should talk to your doctor. Depression is not a normal part of aging, but many older adults become depressed following life changes, such as the loss of a spouse, caregiving responsibilities, or illness. If you have recently had some type of loss, these feelings can be part of “normal” grieving. But if these feelings continue for more than three months, you may need help.

If you feel depressed, get some help. Counseling, medications, and lifestyle changes lead many depressed people out of hopelessness and back to happier, more fulfilling lives.

Are You Depressed?

Check any symptoms experienced for more than two weeks:

- Unexplained sad, anxious, or “empty” feelings
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Thoughts of death or suicide; a suicide attempt
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling “slowed down”
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Irritability
- Excessive crying
- Recurring aches and pains that don’t respond to medical treatment

Depression Testing

Free, anonymous, and confidential depression screening tests are available on-line at www nmha org. The National Mental Health Association site provides information about symptoms and treatment, along with counselor referrals. They can also be reach by phone on their toll-free line (1-800-969-NMHA).

Continued on page 4 ➤
Avoiding Isolation
Feeling isolated or lonely can lead to depression. Volunteering is a sure-fire way to meet people and feel positive about yourself. Older adults, with their tremendous life experience and skills, make ideal volunteers. The following are possible places to volunteer:

- Hospitals
- Libraries
- Schools
- Foundations or guilds
- Grassroots organizations
- Churches, synagogues, or mosques
- Animal shelters
- Senior or community centers
- Child care centers
- Nature centers, aquariums, or zoos
- Women's organizations
- Family service agencies
- Political campaigns
- Senior advocacy groups
- Nursing homes
- Red Cross
- Museums
- Theaters

Dr. Hsia's group found that women under 65 years (who are too young for Medicare) were more likely to have had a mammogram in the past two years if they had prepaid insurance, such as membership in an HMO (health maintenance organization). Women under 65 were less likely to have had a mammogram if they were not insured or had fee-for-service (other private) insurance. Among women 65 years or older, those with Medicare and prepaid health insurance were more likely to have had mammograms than women with Medicare only.

In the case of cervical and colorectal cancer screening, women younger than 65 years were also more likely to have been screened if they had a prepaid type of insurance, and least likely if they had no insurance. Just as with mammograms, women 65 and older with Medicare and prepaid insurance were more likely to have been screened than women with Medicare alone.

These scientists also discovered some other great news about WHI participants! Overall, more than 80 percent of WHI Observational Study participants reported having a mammogram within the last two years and a Pap smear within the last three years. However, only about 60 percent reported having screening for colorectal cancer within the last five years. Screening tests for colorectal cancer include having regular testing for blood in the stool and a flexible sigmoidoscopy. Please talk with your doctor if you want to know more about these important tests.

WHI Word Search

This puzzle was created for WHI Matters by Edna Pakele, a WHI participant in Hawaii. She works as a registered nurse for the Tripler Army Medical Center and began making puzzles as therapeutic tools for her patients. Edna also writes poetry and enjoys her seven grandchildren. Find and circle the words listed below within the puzzle; they are hidden horizontally, vertically, diagonally, and backwards. The puzzle's solution is on page 2.
Letters to the Editor

Q: In the years to come, I may move to another state. How will that affect my participation in WHI?
— A Glen Head, New York participant

A: Depending on where you move, you can possibly continue to participate in the Hormone, Dietary, or Calcium/Vitamin D programs. If you move near one of the other 40 WHI Clinical Centers, your study records can be transferred to that Clinical Center. Your original and new Clinical Centers will work together to ensure a smooth transition for you.

If you move to an area where there is no WHI Clinical Center, it is still very important that you stay in the study, even if you cannot come for visits. Your Clinical Center will want to stay in contact and follow-up with you by telephone and/or mail until the end of the study.

If you are a participant in the Observational Study, there is an important clinic visit at around the third year after joining the study. If you attend this visit before you move, your present Clinical Center can continue to follow you each year by mail until the end of the study.

Please remember to let your Clinical Center know in advance about your move so they can help you make your plans. Your continued participation is very important to us!

Q: I questioned the item in your newsletter regarding receiving an electrical shock from a wet telephone (“For Your Health,” WHI Matters, Vol. 5B) as untrue. I wrote an e-mail to my local phone company asking for the facts. They said, “No, you can't get a shock from a wet phone, and there is no way the person on the other end of the line could get a shock.”
— A Waverly, Ohio participant

A: Even though it's widely published as true, we did further sleuthing and now agree that the person you're speaking to would not receive a shock. However, we consulted a national phone service provider about phones and water safety; here's what they said: “A telephone that is plugged into the wall has a small amount of voltage going into it, which increases when the phone rings. Consequently, you are safer not to use a wired phone anywhere near water, and certainly not when you're in the tub. On the other hand, a cordless or cellular phone could be used in these situations as they are powered by a relatively weak battery—but if you drop one of these into the water, the phone will be ruined.”

Continued on page 7 ->
The next time you have sore muscles or an aching back, try this home remedy: Take a long sock and fill it 3/4 full with uncooked rice. Then knot the top and microwave it on HIGH for three minutes. The result? A heating pad that holds its temperature for about an hour, and easily molds around joints or body parts.

Want to remove an adhesive bandage without pain? Soak a cotton ball in baby oil and wipe it around the sides of the bandage. Wait about 10 minutes. The adhesive will be softened, making removal easy and painless.

If you have pet allergies, keep the pet outside, off the furniture, and out of your bedroom. In most cases, saliva and dander (dead skin that flakes off) cause the allergies. Consider washing your dog or cat daily with water only, but avoid shampooing your pet too often, as shampooing causes dander to be released more quickly.

Second opinions on medical matters really are important. Twenty percent of second opinions disagree with diagnosis. Up to 80 percent of second opinions on treatments don't agree with the first, according to The People's Medical Society, a patient advocate organization. If you have trouble locating a specialist who can give a second opinion, call the national headquarters of that specialty's association for a few names.

When it comes to blocking sunlight to prevent sunburn, a fabric's weave is more important than its color, thickness, or any special coating. Test the piece of clothing by holding it up to a light. If you can see through it, it won't provide enough protection.

What's the best way to clean your teeth following a snack or meal if you don't have a toothbrush handy? Chew sugarless gum. Gum causes your mouth to produce more saliva, and saliva's chemicals neutralize tooth- decaying acid. Munching crunchy fruits and vegetables is helpful, too. Toothpicks, however, can irritate your gums.

When medical emergencies happen, you may not be able to communicate vital information about your health at the critical time. Create a handy reference that you always carry with you—a wallet-sized laminated card works well. Include your medical problems, any medications you take, and any allergies. Also include your name, address, phone number, insurance information, and an emergency contact.

Letters (continued)

WHI Matters:
I want you to know how much I appreciate receiving your newsletter. I always read it from front to back and usually find very useful tips—or reminders of things that I should have remembered, but didn't.

We were having extremely hot weather in Southern California last summer and I found myself with a constant, dull headache, feeling tired and "not myself." I had a sudden dizzy spell while shopping and it was cause for worry. Then I read the item in the newsletter ("For Your Health," WHI Matters, Vol. 5B) about dehydration and thirst alerts. Voila! A solution to my problems! Now I am being careful to drink those eight glasses of water every day and it seems to be helping. Thanks for the reminder.

— A San Diego, California participant

Dear Editor:
In Vol. 5A of WHI Matters ("For Your Health"), you suggested a recipe for a flexible ice gel pack. A few years ago when I made several for knee surgery, I put a few drops of food coloring in the mix. That way, I could never mistake the bag for something other than ice gel—especially if the color was bright blue.

— A Steger, Illinois participant