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## Just being there is the key for Visiting Angels

By April Corbin

It was an issue of nudity.

Lew Black's dementia was worsening, and he'd begun resisting showers. His family attempted to intervene, but the modest Lew wouldn't have it. No one, except maybe his loving wife Palma, was going to see him naked and vulnerable—least of all his children, in-laws and grandchildren.

That's when a friend recommended Visiting Angels to daughter-in-law Charlene, and Rhetta Day began stopping by the Black's home.

Two years have passed since the Black children began using the in-home care provider for Lew and Palma, who are 89 and 86, respectively. "I don't know where we would have been without Rhetta," says Charlene. "She was an answer to some great concerns."

Most of those concerns have remained just that—concerns. In two years there have been no incidents of someone wandering from the old town Henderson home unattended, or leaving a pot of water on the stove. Nobody's slipped in the shower.

Largely, Rhetta simply keeps the elderly couple company three days a week while the rest of their family is at work, school or temple. One morning, Rhetta and Palma watch a detective thriller in the living room as Lew sleeps. Afterward, they talk—Palma tells stories about growing up and past jobs, including doing make-up for the deceased people at the morgue. Lew joins them when he can, laughing at the verbal jabs his sharp wife throws at him, retaliating only by tickling her side.

"We promote social interaction with our services," explains Michael



Visiting Angel caretaker Rhetta Day (center) laughs with clients Lew and Palma Black.

DiAsio, who owns Visiting Angels with his wife, Jackie. "Sometimes, we're people's only means of getting out of their house. We take people out to eat, to a casino."

It might not seem like much, but these commonplace activities are what keep many of their clients going. It's a more social, independent alternative to live-in facilities—and it's cheaper (half of Visiting Angel's business is tied to Medicaid)—and it's a reality more and more families are turning to.

This summer, the DiAsio's opened a satellite office in Summerlin, and the DiAsio's say they'd love to expand services to Anthem eventually. With baby boomers aging, the need for assisted living is growing.

Still, the work of home care is often overlooked. Jackie, who has been in home care for more than two decades,

knows this, but says the proof of its importance is easy to find. She tells the story of one Visiting Angel who spent only two days with a customer before he died. When the son called to tell the company, he gushed about the caretaker and offered to write a letter of recommendation for her.

"In just two visits she'd bonded with his father that much," explains Jackie. "She made his last few days comfortable, and that thought comforted the son and his wife."

For the DiAsios and their 115 (mostly part-time) employees, this is what it's all about. It's becoming an unofficial member of a family—like Rhetta. Or, it's just about the act of helping someone in whatever small way you can—even if only for a day or two. Adds Jackie, "It's very, very rewarding."