



**LIZA HORVATH
SENIOR ADVOCATE**



Keep Current on Photos and IDs

“At some point in their lives, six in ten seniors with Alzheimer’s disease...will wander from their homes or long-term care facilities, often without knowing their own name or address...”

- Gary C. Ovitt, Board of Supervisors, County of San Bernardino 2/24/10

In 2009 a senior suffering from dementia walked out of a care facility in San Bernardino and disappeared. The facility notified police immediately upon discovering that the resident was missing and staff provided a physical description to officers.

Days turned into weeks and then months and still no word came on the missing resident. Finally, months later, a law enforcement clerk from a neighboring county called the care facility and said that they may have the missing resident. As it turns out the man was picked up by police just days after leaving the care facility but, because he was unable to provide his name or any identifying information, was placed in their county facility. Months later a clerk reviewing stale missing person reports found the San Bernardino bulletin and called the facility.

The family had suffered greatly during the months that their father was missing and they feared the worst.

In response to this incident, the San Bernardino Board of Supervisors sponsored a bill requiring that conservators – those who are appointed by the court to insure the safety of incompetent persons - take a clear photograph of the individual once a year and preserve the photograph for identification purposes should the person become lost. In 2010, this bill became law.

Aging parents or friends may shy away from having their photograph taken because they would prefer we remember them as they were, not as they are now. However, the annual photograph law is a good one and the practice should be adopted by those who are caring for mentally impaired seniors. Take an annual “mug-shot” and keep it on hand should the worst happen and your elder becomes lost.

Also, consider subscribing to Project Lifesaver which is offered through the Monterey County Sheriffs Office Search and Rescue unit. This non-profit organization partners with local law enforcement and public safety officers to search for and locate missing persons. The senior is provided with a personalized wristband that emits a tracking signal and, if local law enforcement is notified that the person is missing, a trained search team responds to the wanderer’s area with a mobile tracking system. Search times have been reduced to hours instead of days - or more. Project Lifesaver can be found at www.projectlifesaver.org or 647-7702.

Seniors who are caring for themselves should remember to maintain current identification in the form of a driver's license or senior identification card. Up-to-date identification is important because, according to estate attorney Jean Rasch of Monterey, "If a client needs to sign a document and have their signature notarized, the Notary will not affix their stamp unless the signer presents current government identification." Also, it is just good practice to have identification and contact information on your person should something happen and you are unable to speak for yourself.

Caregivers or seniors may not need to take all these precautions yet, but keep them in mind. Also remember that not all that wander are lost. My brother has been wandering the world for forty years and I haven't had to call police but twice.

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