

*Review:*

## **Personal Safety Nets**

*by Lisa Farino*

### **Personal Safety Nets: Getting Ready for Life's Inevitable Changes and Challenges**

BY DR. JOHN W. GIBSON AND JUDY PIGOTT

*Safety Nets Unlimited, 2007; 224 pages, \$17.95*

REVIEWED BY LISA FARINO

I must admit that when I first started reading this book, I was more than a little dubious. *Personal safety nets?* Weren't they a relic of the past?

In recent decades, economic globalization and the growing wealth disparity have disrupted the community networks people once relied on. We are not just a country of immigrants, we're now also a country of migrants, scurrying around our vast nation looking for good jobs, affordable housing, and educational opportunities.

The result: extended families are dispersed and communities are constantly in flux, making it difficult to build a network of friends and neighbors for mutual support during times of personal crisis. Our longer work hours and commutes make it even harder for people to offer support.

Admittedly, I'm a bit of a cynic. Two years ago, I was hit by a car and discovered that my own personal safety net was more the consistency of swiss cheese—minus the cheese. When I reflect on the months during which I struggled with an array of injuries, what I remember even more than the physical pain was the psychological pain of feeling alone, lacking support from anyone other than my husband.

But as I read *Personal Safety Nets*, it became clear how I might have acted differently. Good thing, because soon after I read the book, life threw me another challenge. I suddenly lost a good part of the hearing in one ear and found myself highly medicated and under doctor's orders to be sedentary.

This time, the experience couldn't have been more different. I had lots of friends visiting and phoning, helping to keep my spirits up. When I needed rides to

appointments, I got them, along with offers for more. Friends helped with projects around the house, and one sent my husband home from a party with food for me.

Why were the two experiences so different? I credit almost all of it to reading *Personal Safety Nets* and applying the wisdom of Gibson and Pigott. Here are the five lessons that most positively impacted my experience the second time around:

- *Tell people what's wrong:* It's easy to feel embarrassed or ashamed when our bodies fail us, but if you don't tell people what's wrong, how can you expect them to help?
- *Ask for help:* It's humbling to admit we can't handle everything on our own. But if we don't ask for help, we're less likely to get it.
- *Be specific in requests:* It's a lot easier for someone to respond if your request is clearly defined.
- *Don't take "no" personally:* Sometimes people don't have the time to help, or they may shy away, finding illness and injury a scary reminder of their own fragility and mortality. Either way, it's important not to take it personally when someone says no.
- *Remain a giver:* While it's important to accept help graciously, it's also important, even through injury or illness, to continue to be givers. We can offer kind words, smiles, and a continued interest in our friends' lives. In fact, shifting some of our focus to others helps lift our spirits, an important part of recovering from illness and injury.

Reading this book is a great way to prepare for the future and also a poignant reminder of the care and support we can offer others today.

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