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EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

Caregiver To Caregiver Interview: Susannah Kelly

Family Caregiver for her Mother

Gary Barg: Anyone who reads my column, knows what a dog lover I am. But, you have seemed to be able to connect all of the various aspects of your life, as a family caregiver, an artist and a dog lover to make a career. Tell me about yourself.

Susannah Kelly: I'm a film-maker and a visual artist. But in order for me to continue my career and also be here to look after my mom, I had to bring in my own income and that is what led me to [Dogvacay.com](#). I was thinking "As a caregiver, I need to find what I can do to earn money where I don't have to be away from home for too long and it is pleasant." Well, I have always loved dogs. So, I have been able to bring together all of these worlds where everybody's needs are met on many different levels. And because there are dogs in the house all the time, it brings a certain kind of happiness back into the house for my mother and for my brother who also looks after my mom.

Gary Barg: How did this all come together?

Susannah Kelly: It's a great story for anybody who is making a career and a life change. You just sort of do things – you sort of throw anything at the wall and see what sticks. So that was my experience with [DogVacay.com](#). I didn't

know who these people were, but I decided I am going to give it a shot and look it up. So I went to their website and of course my first thought was, "Well, what is this going to cost me?" and I saw it wasn't going to cost me anything. That all I needed to do was put together a profile promoting my services as an alternative to a kennel. And it's wonderful. I love it. I think they're wonderful people. I really do. I have such respect and appreciation for them and this comes from the time that I've spent in relationship with them, starting from when I needed any questions answered or was having an issue with a dog's health or an emergency, such as if I had to take a dog to the vet or I wasn't able to deal with some behavioral issues of a new dog. They were so reassuring and caring, just like a caregiver is supposed to be. They really care about what they do and you feel that. The phone conversations I have had I have always gotten prompt responses to any questions. I just have the highest regard for them as individuals and as an organization.

Gary Barg: You know I could see this being valuable to professional caregivers as well. Have you heard from any professional caregivers who wrap this into their schedule?

Susannah Kelly: I live in a building where the population here is aging and what that means is on our floor alone, there are quite a few elderly people that have their care providers come in and visit and they see what I do and will comment on it. They say that is so wonderful. And because they all know each other, I am sure they talk about me and my mother and all these different dogs.

Gary Barg: I think this is doing well by doing good.

Susannah Kelly: Yes. And that is important thing to me. My whole life is about that. I mentioned to you earlier about a career change. I was, in fact, working with people with disabilities and was a care provider to two different individuals. I actively chose that direction to go in because that has meaning for me and it is how I feel I can really contribute to society.

Gary Barg: Your mom benefits from this too we know that for seniors having pets around is a terrific thing and there is plenty of proof about that. How does she deal with the pets in the house?

Susannah Kelly: Oh, my gosh. She will ask about the dogs "when is this one coming back, when is that one coming back." We had one recently where the owner could no longer keep the dog. We fell in love with him instantly and every time he would have to go home my mother would say, "I want him back. I miss that little guy. I miss everything about him." So this past week when we found out that he needed to go someplace else, it was heartbreaking for my

mother. We were all feeling kind of miserable. I could see how much he impacted her life. I found a home for him in three days and it turns out it was going to one of the other people that works in our building. So we can have visitation rights to this little guy which just brightened up my mother's day.

Gary Barg: What would be the most important piece of information you would like to share with your fellow family caregivers?

Susannah Kelly: It sounds so cliché, but as a caregiver, you make a world of difference in that other person's life in so many ways and you are doing noble worthwhile work. Don't ever think that what you do doesn't benefit the lives of others. Not just the immediate person you take care of but how that trickles down to everybody else that is related to that person. I don't think caregivers get enough recognition and support and they deserve so much more.

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