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Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Sue Chen • June 24, 2015

EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Sue Chen

Gary Barg: Sue, what do you mean when you say Nova Joy?

Sue Chen: It really is the ultimate result of human connection and experience. It is joy. As people get along in life, what we really want is to find and experience joy. Over the 22 years of having **Nova**, I am just overwhelmed at the stories of joy. It is people being together. I do not look at our products as walkers and transport chairs. I look at them as products that bring people together, that give them experiences, and do bring tremendous joy into their lives. Nova Joy happened as a result of thousands and thousands of people's stories – their own joy. There was not any marketing. It just happened. That is why we have Nova Joy one story at a time. It is just thousands of stories. I want to share that because I think so much can be attached to getting older that seems not so joyful.

Gary Barg: What is the most touching or unique story that you have heard?

Sue Chen: I would say the most touching story I have heard is about a family planning a vacation in Hawaii. It was going to be three generations. It would be the grandparents, their kids, and their grandchildren. The one thing that everybody was thinking about was how to get Grandma around. And all Grandma could think about was, "How am I going to get around? I do not want to be a burden." I pretty much forced them to try a transport chair because you can travel with it on the airline. If she is tired, you can push her around. It just

makes things so much easier. She was just waiting in the car as people did things because she did not want to be a burden. This one product changed the entire vacation.

Gary Barg: I like the classy part and I think this is so important. I remember we spoke about the rubber balls which people put on the bottom of these metal stands in front of them. They are dressed to the nines, they have earrings, they are made up, and then they have this thing in front of them.

Sue Chen: Imagine if we saw somebody with a baby stroller and the baby stroller was not rolling very well. We decide that if it is not working, why not just put some tennis balls on the bottom of the baby stroller and push the baby around? Everybody would be glaring at the mom going, “How could she possibly push her child around on that baby stroller with tennis balls? That is awful.” We would not do that with anything else.

A similar example is how much emphasis and time people put on just buying a baby stroller for their kids. Some of these baby strollers can cost up to \$300, \$400, or \$500. It has to be the right color and design. I think that is great, but the reality is that their baby is not going to remember. That baby is not going to say to Mom at 18, “Hey, Mom, thank you so much for that baby stroller you got me. That looked really great.” Inversely, if we value that so much, why do we not value walkers for an adult? Should you not have the best?

Gary Barg: And, if I remember correctly, you are a walker stalker.

Sue Chen: Yeah, I am. I scare people sometimes because I always carry walker skis with me wherever I go. I can spot a walker with tennis balls or some weird contraption a mile away. I can just sense it. Then I will stop that person and I will remove those tennis balls. Recently I was in AARP in Miami Beach. There was a homeless guy there who had some weird contraption. I think it was like a plastic Coke bottle he had taped onto the bottom of his walker to move around. I found him and I brought him walker skis. I was telling him that I was going to put the walker skis on to help the walker walk so much better. I was not sure if he looked at me thinking I was an alien or an angel.

Gary Barg: They have a spring in their step afterwards.

Sue Chen: Oh, they are shocked at how one small thing can make a difference in their mobility.

Gary Barg: Their whole attitude—how they stand and how they approach

life—it makes a big difference.

Sue Chen: That is why I am proud to be a walker stalker. Building **Nova** for 22 years has been a mission. It is a life mission for me. It is because I am just completely fueled constantly by the joy that products bring other people. I just cannot help myself.

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

Sue Chen: Life only becomes more joyful as you get older. Let it happen. Embrace the joy.

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