

## Silver Threads

*A column created especially for people spending their golden years in Falmouth, written by these same senior citizens.*

“ O, Come with me, Lucille...”

By Vicky Cullen

One of the more sensitive areas to negotiate as we grow older is the decision about when we probably should no longer be driving. Who among us hasn't resented the news article that begins with "An elder driver was involved in a car accident ...", when we know that young drivers are even more likely to get into an accident? But we all know at least one person we feel should no longer be behind the wheel--- could it be me? In this Thread we have put together a series of questions and answers to help guide the uncertain senior citizen to a decision.

**Q: *What affects our ability to drive as we age?***

**A:** Well, for starters, at age 60 we need twice as much light to see what a 20-year-old sees at night. Then, for some folks, there are decreased mental acuity and slower response time, as well as more limited range of motion.

**Q: *Are there ways to respond to the need for more light?***

**A:** For the light issue, we can try to stick to well-lighted street and roadways. Keeping headlights (and supplied with brighter bulbs and perhaps polished covers) and also keeping windshield clean inside and out can help. Avoidance of foul weather driving, when there is increased glare from wet surfaces, can also make a difference. Also, regular vision checkups will spot such problems as cataracts.

**Q: *What can help keep us mentally sharp?***

**A:** Indulge in activities that challenge the brain: games and puzzles provide an enjoyable way to stay sharp. Local libraries have available for loan a software training program called *DriveSharp* that is designed to help older drivers think faster, focus better, and react more quickly on the road. Be mindful of both prescription and over-the-counter medications, such as tranquilizers, sleeping aids, antidepressants, and antihistamines that may cause drowsiness. If you're sleepy, don't drive! Some 250,000 people fall asleep every day while driving, endangering not only themselves but others on the road as well.

**Q: *And physically sharp?***

**A:** Just as we're constantly reminded, keeping fit and flexible with exercise!

**Q: *Any other advice for older drivers?***

**A:** *Motorcycle World* offers this advice for drivers of all ages: 1) Scan the roadway, looking ahead rather than down at the road or only at the car in front of you. 2) Identify hazards. 3) Try to predict what might happen with traffic you're in and be prepared to react to it (but avoid paranoia about it!). If you're in heavy, multi-lane traffic, consider making three right turns to avoid a dangerous left turn.

**Q: *What might indicate that I should think about giving up driving?***

**A:** A few indicators include repeated fender benders, lots of honking that appears to be directed at you, frequent trouble finding your way or getting lost on familiar routes, and "counseling

sessions” convened by police, family, or friends. The American Automobile Association (AAA) offers Roadwise Review Online (or on a CD), a tool that allows users to measure—in the privacy of their own homes—eight functional abilities known to be the strongest predictors of crash risk among older drivers. If it looks like it’s time to hang up the car keys, you might find some comfort in balancing the cost of keeping your car on road vs. the cost of taxi rides; if your driving is limited anyway, it may cost less to use those taxis.

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*Neighborhood Falmouth is a nonprofit, membership organization, operating since 2009 to help Falmouth seniors live safely and comfortably in their own homes. For more information on joining, volunteering, and donating, call 508-564-7543; or visit [www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org](http://www.neighborhoodfalmouth.org).*