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This is my season! Here in the Midwest the world has burst into full bloom. Everywhere I look I see signs of abundant new life. Spring goes straight to my head every year, inducing a high I could never achieve with any chemical.

There is one place, though, that spring's magic never seems to touch: the nursing home. Whatever the season, the sky there seems forever gray. The old folks shuffle through the halls or sit in their wheelchairs around the nurses' station. Faces stare blankly at me, and someone is sure to tug at my sleeve and ask to be taken home.

You bring a little spring just by visiting. A bright smile and a warm hug bring a bit of warmth to the grayest day. But consider what more you might try.

A splash of color is cheering. A small gathering of flowers from your garden (or from the grocer's flower department, if your thumb is as brown as mine) is a nice touch. A bright balloon or a colorful card to leave behind as a pledge of your thoughts and prayers also brings a cheery touch.

When my children were very small, I used to visit a nursing home regularly. My little stair-steps went with me; I had no one to leave them with. The first time I went, I worried that the residents would find my lively, noisy toddlers a disturbing presence. To my great surprise, the tots had the opposite effect. Folks who spent their days slumped in a wheelchair sat up straight and smiled. Some wanted to see whatever toy a child had brought along, and everyone, it seemed, wanted to hold whoever was the baby at the time. My children brought more sunshine into that dreary place than I ever could.

Nursing home staffs plan a lot of activities to tempt their residents out of their shells, but few include little tots. There are exceptions, of course. I know of a couple homes that have nursery schools on their "Main Street." But most of the little ones who enter are someone's grandchildren and never get farther than Grandma or Grandpa's room. If you're fresh out of little tots, try inviting someone who's not to come with you. Or raid the scrapbook and compare notes about children and grandchildren with the people you visit.

Making the decision to find assisted living was especially painful for a friend of mine. She not only had to give up her home; she had to leave the dog who had long been her beloved companion in her daughter's care. Some homes have regular animal visitors — but some care needs to be exercised. Someone thoughtfully put a cat in

my mother's lap for petting. Mother, who feared and hated cats, let out a scream. So that was not exactly a great idea. Finding out what feelings people have for animals before you even try such a thing ranks high on the compassion scale!

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The best dog we ever had never saw a stranger. We used to joke that she'd protect us from burglars by beating them to death with her wagging tail. I'm sure that, if dogs go to heaven, she runs to the pearly gates faster than St. Peter can! If you have a well-behaved and outgoing pet who seems to fit someone's preference in animals, try bringing it along.

The best brightener, of course, is to bring someone who is dear to the person you visit. I know a woman whose dearest friend calls regularly but is unable to make the trip to the nursing home because of her own infirmities. Just think what a burst of spring glory would result from bringing such a person along!

**Editor's Note:** *This reflection was originally published in the May 2005 issue of [Celebration](#).*

This story appears in the **Daily Easter Reflections** feature series. [View the full series](#).