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'Senior Moments' articles inspire columnist to pen book

By **DAVID EMANUEL** Staff Writer

Bowie Blade-News and Crofton News-Crier columnist Jacqueline D. Byrd, considered "one of America's best elder law attorneys," just had her first book published, and it is "informing, moving and compassionate," according to noted author and New Jersey elder law attorney Tom Begley.

It is also deeply personal, as Byrd draws upon her own real-life experiences with her mother, in addition to lessons learned in her relationship-based elder law practice.

Byrd's book, *Senior Moments: A Book for Seniors and Those who Love Them*, takes several years' worth of columns she has written for the Blade-News and divides them into several topics: The Role of Care-giving in Modern Day America, Estate Planning, Health Care, Housing for Seniors, Other Challenges Facing Seniors, and Personally Speaking.

It is also a book of resources, Web sites, additional books, and telephone numbers for further help.

The book is being called "a unique combination of practicality and warmth," and offers "specific and useful advice for the post-50 crowd and those who may be called upon to care for them."

Senior Moments is dedicated to her husband Toby, "with love and gratitude for all of it ... The only dream that mattered has come true."

Byrd, who worked for 25 years on Capitol Hill for the House of Representatives, went to law school when she was 50.

That's often unheard of, but, she said, "I had a great time."

"I didn't think I would have any friends, because I was old," she said. "But I did have friends, and I loved it and learned a lot."

"A lot of times, we so strongly in our culture think of aging as

a time of decline, and that is such a wrong way of thinking," she said. "We need to learn to value what age provides."

Byrd said there are also "so many scams against older people today" as well.

"I try to help seniors recognize these scams with my columns, alerting them to what happens, and to let them know the attorney general's office has help for them."

Byrd said she has two, maybe even three, more books in mind.

"Senior Moments is the first 100-plus columns," she said. "I really want to write a book cover to cover on one topic; specifically, about how to be a nice person when you are a caregiver, and how do you remain a nice person, knowing everything you know about yourself."

With Senior Moments, Byrd says she wants people to know that "it's a very bad idea to just let life happen, and that you have to make important decisions outside the hospital emergency room."

"You have to do some life planning," she said. "There are things you have to do to get your ducks in a row."

Byrd got her ducks in a row when Blade-News editor John Rouse read five writing samples she submitted.

"He called me and said OK, we'll run some of these. I told him I would do it every week. He said, there's no way you'll be doing it every week."

But for five years, she has submitted a column in time for every Thursday's publication date of this newspaper.

"She's one of the only columnists I've ever known to do that," said Rouse. "Her column is one of the most popular features in our newspaper."

"People ask me how can I think of topics," said Byrd. "But the topics keep covering up my desk. There are so many things to talk about, that I can't shut up."

"I just look at all of this and think, 'how can people know what I am lucky enough to know?' How is a regular person supposed to know these things? I just feel so bad. And frankly, that's what keeps me writing a column every week. It keeps me really motivated."