

Why Do I Have to Care for Them?

A GUIDE TO

THE SENSITIVE NEEDS OF
the

ELDERLY

and the
CAREGIVER



By Martha Jean Anderson

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Acknowledgments

To the many wonderful people who daily care for and make decisions for loved ones in their lives, this book is for you. Your sacrifices above and beyond what is expected, is worthy of such honor and recognition. Your resilience, grace, courage, and compassion have given a new meaning for what genuine beauty and unconditional love really is. It's your stories and testimonies that have touched the lives of many and I thank you and your families for granting me permission to share them (I have changed their names to protect their privacy). From the bottom of my heart, thank you for all you do.

Foreword

In the caregiving industry, “caring for the caregiver” has become a go to phrase. But as easy as it is to say, it is not so hard to do, particularly when you have competing emotions. Providing care for loved ones is not a new concept. But for those who are full time – or even part time caregivers, the need for respite and the feelings that coincide with this need can be new. Responsibility can easily turn to guilt and shame, frustration, fear and anger. Mrs. Anderson takes these feelings and not only justifies, but normalizes these feelings; letting the reader know that not only is it ok to feel this way, but a normal part of caregiving.

Why Do I Have to Care For Them examines the emotional, spiritual, social and familial aspects of caregiving. Mrs. Anderson provides first-hand experience of caring for others while providing simple solutions and expert feedback on being the best, most balanced caregiver you can be. Written in a way that is easy to understand, and more importantly easy to implement, the book is a great tool for the new and experienced caregiver alike to understand they are not alone in their frustrations and fears.

Dr. Kori D. Novak
Ph.D.

Introduction

More than two decades ago, I thought my life would have taken a completely different direction than what it has. If someone were to ask me then what I planned to do after getting my bachelor's degree in Business Administration, I may have answered something like this: "I may become a business executive, owner of a thriving corporation, a government official, or a great speaker." The truth is, life sometimes has a way of changing even our most thought out plans. Married right out of college and a mom of four before I knew it, I needed a new plan with a career that would be flexible enough to balance family and career. From soccer meets to gymnastics competitions, to dance recitals, there was very little time in between.

After searching a while, I found the perfect job or maybe I should say, it found me—a caregiver. I was one of the lucky ones. I found a wonderful agency to work for and it's there I stayed for many years. A special thank you to Special Care of Lancaster! Working for them not only gave me the opportunity to "serve", but it prepared me to become a caring and compassionate caregiver for one of the most important people in my life...my mom.

The elderly are our greatest treasures. They have lived life, seen many things, carry much wisdom inside of them, and are deserving of our respect and honor. Although they may find themselves in a place where help is needed to continue to live that full life, they deserve our compassion and attention.

I have taken care of some of the most wonderful, successful, and intelligent people anyone could ever imagine. Among them are top executives, opera singers, college professors, radio hosts, business owners, and those with physical and mental disabilities as well. My clients, soon great friends, have done and experienced amazing adventures and many also suffered tragic

loss. Many of them have overcome obstacles that no one ever thought they would endure. I stood in awe as they shared memories of vacations in the beautiful Jackson Hole, Paris, and Europe. Some have had affiliations with great historians like Dr. Martin Luther King. Others have children who now sing in well-known symphonies. A few have had and survived horrific near death experiences. Their lives are true testimonies of faith and perseverance. What a blessing they have been to my life! Many of them were mothers who have proudly raised doctors, lawyers, gold medal winners and their legacy yet continues through their grandchildren and great grandchildren.

In my humble opinion, and I am sure that many other caregivers would share my view, there should be a special holiday and ceremony for the elderly with recognition to award the highest medal of honor our nation can give them. Honors' bell should ring for the many that have single handedly raised children alone, worked two jobs to make ends meet, and sacrificed their own pleasures to make sure their family had a better life. These are the elderly, our moms and dads, our grandparents, our aunts and uncles, our friends. Many of these wonderful people now find themselves both physically and sometimes mentally unable to care for themselves any longer without help. It is not by choice that they have come to a place where their bodies no longer comply with their wishes and their memories are beginning to fade onto an almost invisible canvas. As family members and friends, we may be left with the decision to care for them ourselves, consider a nursing home, or hire a private caregiver. It can seem overwhelming, but there is help and hope.

There are many reasons why assisted or full skilled care is needed for our elderly in the later years. For me personally, dementia has infiltrated and taken away the lives of aunts, uncles, and now my mother has been touched by this as well.

“Alzheimer’s disease usually begins gradually, affecting 20 percent of people over 80...The number increases to 50% by the time people reach 90 years old. The Alzheimer’s symptoms, primarily caused by the progressive destruction of nerve cells in the brain, begin to increase rapidly as well. First, short term memory fades, then planning and judgment become impaired, followed by personality changes and finally, difficulties speaking and walking.” (A Place for Mom, Living With Alzheimer’s Ethels & Mattys Story) Those with Dementia also have problems with short-term memory and it is progressive, meaning it starts out slowly as well. It causes damage to the brain and the cells can no longer communicate with each other. (alz.org)

This disease is one of the hardest for family members to deal with because it takes away the very core of the person we’ve always known and loved. Nevertheless, because we remember, we find the strength to give them the love and care they need.

Dementia...Remember Who They Were

“Research has shown that endorphins released during a pleasant experience have a salutary effect on a person with dementia even after the experience is forgotten.”

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/05/20/130520fa_fact_mead?currentPage=all

Caring for a family member at home or finding a suitable place to have them cared for is a big responsibility. Think long and hard about all of your options. Do research, talk to professionals; call a family meeting if you have to. The decision you are about to make will affect all of you. Your elderly loved ones are people with feelings and emotions. Remember, as much as it may make you feel a bit overwhelmed at times, they are the ones who are experiencing the humbling reality of having to rely on you or someone else to care for them in ways that may sometimes be embarrassing and degrading. They may show their feelings through sadness, withdrawal, anger, or rebellious behavior. Sometimes they are unable to communicate the way they once could, but they don't deserve anyone's cynicism or lack of respect.

When dealing with a family member or patient with dementia, it is so important to try to remember not only who they were, but who they are now. Today is the day that has been made, we should rejoice and be glad “in it.” Remembering this, will help you to interact with them in a positive and reaffirming way. Allow yourself to look at them in a new light. It's fine to try to reach them through something from their past or a fond memory, but don't become discouraged if that path is no longer the option you had hoped for. You may find that your day to day interactions with them, may take trial and error if their memories are fading, but they love to talk

about the good ole days, the funny things they once did, the honors they received, and their wedding day. Make them feel special “right where they are.” Sometimes in our efforts to help them, we tend to push them to be who we feel they should be or the person they once were. Although it saddens our heart to see them changing, learning to accept them in this place is crucial to their happiness from this point on. When they can’t remember your name and begin calling you someone else or they can’t remember the things you taught them the week before...know that it’s ok. With each new day there are opportunities to bring joy again. Try a different approach. If most of your visit is spent talking about someone in their memory that leaves them laughing, happy, and smiling, you would have honored them more than if you had taken the full hour trying to help them retrieve their past. If you persistently try to make them remember, it will turn an otherwise wonderful visit into a very frustrating one for them and for you. Let’s move beyond our own defenses and anxieties so that we can build healthy relationships with our elderly and loved ones and leave them with a bit of dignity and pride.

Having a mother who is facing her own advanced stage of Dementia, I understand the sadness that is felt from not being remembered or no longer being able to talk about the things that you’ve shared. I’ve been called “that lady” many times, but when she talks about “her” I have made it new, happy memories. That makes my visits with her very special to me. She can’t remember anymore how to go to the bathroom when she needs to, or how to wash herself properly in the bathtub. Scolding her, yelling, and belittling her, is the worst thing I could ever do. I don’t want her to become afraid of me; I want her to become my friend. Even in her stage of inner isolation, she is still aware that my helping to clean her may be a burden in her eyes. I find her always apologizing for my having to help her. She offers to assist me and says “I’m sorry.” I immediately calm her fears by telling her “It’s no problem at all mom.” Subconsciously,

she knows this is not the proper order of things and she feels a bit uncomfortable and sad. Showing empathy during these difficult times is the most humane thing we could ever do. Putting ourselves in their shoes and trying to understand how we would feel having to have one of our children care for us in the most private of ways, shows them more compassion than we will ever know. Starting a totally new relationship with new rules is what it will take to now nurture and show unconditional love to my “new” mom.

A Story of Strength (Lady Elegance)

My Lady of Elegance...her name means “famous warrior, renowned fighter.” Indeed this describes her most graciously. Her strength in character, resilience, compassion, and perseverance, is matchless. A retired professor from prominent College is known by everyone as the kindest and most refined lady of stature there is. Her gifts in the literary arts and English precede her. From working in radio and television to directing dramas and large screen plays, she is a portrait of grace.

She was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease many years ago. “Parkinson’s disease is a chronic and progressive movement disorder, meaning that symptoms continue and worsen over time. Nearly one million people in the US are living with Parkinson’s disease.(What Is Parkinson’s disease?—Parkinson’s Disease Foundation) The cause is unknown, and although there is presently no cure, there are treatment options such as medication and surgery to manage the symptoms.” The news came to her as she cared for her husband who eventually passed away from the same disease. She never let it stop her from doing the things she loved. She enjoyed visiting with her children and the family vacations. Although there were days of not feeling well, she took pride in her appearance as she was beautiful both inside and out. How it made her smile to speak of the accomplishments of her children. With two English professors, a well-known author, noted opera singer and television host, to champion horse rider and much more, her legacy of style and class will live on forever.

As I watched her disease progress and saw how weak she had become, I remember the person she was and who she will always be to me. She didn’t talk to me as much as she used to,

but her smile always said “thank you”. In November of 2014 she went to heaven. To me she will always be the most beautiful person I have ever known.

Blessed Focus...Don't forget Why you are Doing this

. “Taking care of an aging parent is physically and emotionally draining. It is lonely, overwhelming and frustrating. You may think you can't do it any longer. Parents or sibling often don't acknowledge or appreciate all that you do. You give up your life for another and no one seems to notice.” Marlo Sollitto

While care giving is a welcomed option for some, it is often a necessity for others.

Taking care of a family member, friend, or client, is often met with juggling family and the needs of self as well. The hours are long, gratitude is not always acknowledged, and can become an overwhelming task.” Sometimes being a caregiver

means being companion, entertainer,

nurse, doctor, advocate, pharmacist,

chauffeur, parent, and maid, among

other roles.” <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/pdfs/fcs464.pdf> : Burdens and Blessings of Caregiving, a pdf

Sometimes we think of all of the negative effects that caregiving brings to our family instead of focusing on the hidden blessing that it can be. “...It can be one of the richest and most profoundly rewarding experiences you may ever encounter. It is a matter of perspective. Is your caregiving cup half empty or half full? May we be mindful of the precious gift we have been given; the privilege of sharing some

of the most challenging yet rewarding moments of life with another human
being...” [www. Care-givers.com](http://www.Care-givers.com)

Nursing Homes...Stay On Top of Things

According to the National Center of Elderly Abuse, Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were more than 5 million elderly abuse cases in 2010. The largest percentage of those cases was of neglect.

No one wants to think of their loved ones being mistreated or abused in a nursing home or in their own home, yet sadly, it does happen more than we can imagine. “In the only national study that attempted to define the scope of elder abuse, the vast majority of abusers were family members (approximately 90%) most often adult children, spouses, partners, and others.” Many family members may feel burdened with the care they must give. As a result, their abuse rates are higher. The number of elderly abuse continues to rise and the “accidents” that occur are almost always preventable.

Many nursing home facilities are understaffed and overworked. Let’s face it. Not every employee is there because they have compassion for elder care; to some it is just a job to put food on their table. I don’t fault them for that, but care for the elderly takes very special people to be successful. There are those who truly have a heart of concern and who are sensitive to the needs of the patients. How do you know which one is caring for your family member? The answer is, sometimes you don’t. Statistics say that 85% of nursing home residents never receive a visitor. This makes questions about their proper care even more isolated and unknown. The best way to keep abreast of the kind of care your loved one is receiving is to stay on top of things. Sporadic visits and calls to check on their progress is a good way to start. Make your concerns known and try to correct any immediate problems you happen to see. I have found the nursing home administrators, social workers, and head nurses were very helpful and attentive to

my concerns when addressed. It's important to develop relationships with key persons within the nursing homes and with private caregivers at home.

Don't become predictable. You are not being mean or deceitful by keeping the employees alert to the fact that at any given point in time during the week, you may show up. If you are unable to do that, pick up the phone and call. Ask for a daily or weekly report of your loved one and speak to the caregiver in charge if possible. Some patients rarely receive a visit or a call and for them life can seem so dismal and isolated. These are the ones who can be easy targets for abuse, theft, and neglect. No one deserves such treatment, no one. Checking on them whenever you can, may make the biggest difference.

Make the best of your ability and time. Take notes of any abnormalities. Keep an eye out for discrepancies with their medications and their hygiene. Watch their countenance when you see them. Be wise. Learn to detect mistreatment and address it immediately! While it is becoming mandatory for many nursing homes, the requirement for strong, outcome-based training curriculum for staff working with Dementia and Alzheimer's patients is a key component. With more than 50 percent of the residents in nursing homes and assisted living facilities having some form of dementia or cognitive impairment, leaders from the Alzheimer's Association came together to address the needed recommendations for their targeted care. It has made a tremendous impact on the quality of care they receive.

Sometimes we can take for granted the great care our loved ones receive on a daily basis. Showing kindness by remembering to give praise to the caregivers when it is due, is wise and very encouraging. Many caregivers do care about your loved one. Your attention to that detail is just as important

Holding On...Patience Is a Virtue

“It’s a painful process when they must accept the inability to stand alone, loss of their independence or worse, the need to depend on someone else to do what they value as important.” Cindy K. Sproles

We’ve all heard the old adage that patience is a virtue. It’s an enduring and sometimes humbling quality; a good and honorable quality. Caring for our elderly and loved ones is like a treasured recipe. It takes a pinch of generosity mixed with a teaspoon of compassion and of course, a good heaping full of patience. It’s not always pleasant to sacrifice our own comforts for the comforts of others. Yet, in the cycle of life, the parents nurture and care for the children who will one day nurture and care for them. If we embrace the moments we have in the present, learn to accept what is, our impatience will become less and less every day.

Many years ago, my sister was diagnosed with stage four cancer. By the time she found out, there wasn’t much more the doctors could do. During the last two months of her life, I watched her mental and physical faculties begin to fade. For a while she could talk but her body was frail and weak. The nurses had to change her, wash her, and feed her. She was aware of my presence and she knew who I was, but the sadness in her eyes pierced my heart. I could feel her discomfort and her pain became mine. A few weeks later she had a stroke. This left her speech almost unrecognizable.

I remember visiting with her one morning and her television was on. I asked her if there was something special she would like to see. She tried and tried to tell me what it was she wanted to see, but her words were muffled and I didn’t understand her. Trying to help, I guessed over and over again to no avail. Not only did I feel so very helpless for her, but she finally yelled

and pointed to the television and began to cry uncontrollably. Inside of her body was a person who knew exactly what she wanted to tell me, but on the outside, her body and mental capabilities were not cooperating. I felt horrible and also began to cry. I hurt for her.

“...health care should not always be medical care. “It’s not medical treatment, its helping meet personal goals,”.... “It’s about ‘Who is this person, and what do they want in their life?’ My client and good friend, whose story we will later tell, struggled with disabilities and learning impairments that were a result of unforeseen circumstances, but his zeal and desire to push forward in spite of them, would be a deliberate result of the personal care he received. When you know what they have been through, what their experiences were, and what they have overcome, you develop a close bond and that gives life to the opportunity to give the best personal care you can provide.

Our elderly may have many challenges as well. Many of them are trapped inside of a body that doesn’t work too well anymore. They know what they want to say, but can’t find the right words. Their actions don’t resemble what they really want them to. As a result, many times they lash out in anger and discontent. Sometimes they cry and sometimes they withdraw. Wouldn’t you become angry too? They live with the realization of the loss of their personal self-worth. Our patience is key in helping to bring that back to them as much as we can.

If you are finding it very difficult in this area, look for help. Impatience can sometimes turn into bitterness and frustration and you may find yourself taking that frustration out on them. Find someone to talk to like a good friend or counselor. Look for options like adult day care, having a nurse come in once a week if possible, or another family member to help fill in. More importantly, if you ever find yourself coming to the brink of violence as a result of the

overwhelming responsibilities, time for a drastic change and action. It's ok to say "It's too much for me."

If a nursing home becomes your only option, feeling guilty about doing it must be weighed with the decision to do what's best for them and for you and your family. If you're reading this book that says that you care. Don't be too hard on yourself. When you have done your best and you know it, let that be your peace of mind and move forward with confidence.

A Story of Perseverance

Each day a little part of the mother I knew is slipping away. Reality is gradually becoming intertwined with imagination. Emma Gertrude DeWise, an 89 year old who grew up in hard times and faced more challenges than anyone should ever have to. She was physically abused for many years leaving emotional and physical scars that never healed. How she survived has been nothing short of a miracle. A widow of 26 years, mom has been diagnosed with advanced stage dementia. There are many days when she doesn't know who I am. I am just that "nice lady." I struggle watching her forget the fun things she used to say to me. She can no longer remember how to care for herself or make the wonderful meals she made especially for me. She has become fearful of people she doesn't recognize. Most of those people are the family members who love and care for her every day. Each day she faces a new challenge. I wish I could make it all better; turn back the hands of time and bring her back to me. But I know she's still in there. My mother will always be my mom. I love her and all I can do from this day forward is to be the kind face that makes her smile over and over again and to help her to make new memories every day.

Support caregivers...Be Nice!

“Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you! Wear them like a necklace. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people and you will gain a good reputation.” Proverbs 3:3-4

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

What wise words to live by. When we make special people feel appreciated, they don't forget our kindness. Many caregivers are single mothers balancing family and career while trying to be great at both. Others are full of compassion and have hearts of gold. It is important to show kindness to those caring for our loved ones. Developing a good relationship with them is essential to the continued support and nurturing of our family member. A simple thank you, a card at Christmas time, remembering a birthday, or a gift when appropriate, says volumes. You better believe these caregivers will be attentive in giving their best care at all times.

It is always nicer to be celebrated and not just tolerated in the workplace. To be valued by the employer or client is an unspoken, yet greatly desired goal. It warms the heart and motivates the caregiver to push through the challenging days, stand through the tough days, and reach further for the good days. If you are concerned about an issue with your loved one, don't hesitate to talk directly to the caregiver. It is crucial to keep a good rapport between caregiver, client, and family. Having open lines of communication is key. The decision-making process to address workplace dilemmas, should be handled with care and discretion. If there was a standardized code of ethics with guidelines for every possible misconduct or concern that may arise, solutions would be a lot easier. Unfortunately, there is none. Each case must be individually encompassed with the goal to restore and smooth out any underlying tension whenever possible. With such an

awesome responsibility on the shoulders of caregivers, something has to give, and it should be us. “A cheerful heart is good medicine...” for everyone. (Proverbs 17:22)

A Story of Courage (Diesel)

“Diesel” has earned my respect, honor, and gratitude for being an exemplary model of Christ like faith. He has faced tragedy yet survived, opposition, yet persevered. His story portrays both bravery and strength. He has a heart of compassion that not only replicates the love of God, but sets a standard for all of us to attain. “Diesel” was a thriving 17 yr. old high school senior with his whole life in front of him. His hopes of joining the Navy and playing his last varsity year of football were all taken away in one tragic moment. Known for his courage to help those being bullied even by a very angry gang, he didn’t draw back.

On March 28th, after stopping an earlier altercation with a gang member bullying a defenseless student during lunchtime, “Diesel” was trapped and severely beaten by the entire gang after school. While this alone was enough to alter his life forever, a well-known community thug who just happened to be passing by, saw the fight, jumped in, and then stabbed him in the heart. For fifteen minutes...he died. Although revived, the lack of oxygen to the brain later caused it to swell. He has been disabled since that day. I’d like to read a quote by his Sunday school teacher and friend who says, “Three years ago “Diesel” was wheeled into the class my wife and I led. When I was introduced to him, I thought this cannot be. Could this be the young gentleman that I had saw the EMT’s and their equipment in front of the High School as they attempted to revive him after his beating from a bunch of thugs who had left him for dead? I followed the news on this event. So I followed “Diesel” every time his story was made public in a news venue. Yes, it was the same handsome man. However, the beating left him with immobility, speech and vision problems. But it did not affect his large generous heart. Here he was in our class, I was so honored.”

I have known “Diesel” for many years. I have been his caregiver and friend and watched him triumph through many challenges and setbacks. I have learned so much from him and will always be grateful that I became a part of his life and he mine. Because of his strength of will both inside and out, my husband always called him “Diesel.” I call him ‘Iron Will.’”

Empathy...If We Walked A Mile in their Shoes

“Strength doesn’t come from what you can do, it comes from overcoming the things you thought you couldn’t.” (BeClose)(www.google.com/search=quotes about empathy in caregiving)

If the video of their lives suddenly became ours, we would know how they feel and stop for a moment to pause. Their pain would be ours...we’d understand. The words they are thinking but cannot express, the feelings of helplessness and fear, the sadness would become much more real to us. If we walked a mile in their shoes, it would indeed make us a much better, much stronger person inside and out. We would encompass their world as it is that very moment and see....all of our misconceptions brought to light. All of our questions answered. The things they once did so simply, now totally depend upon you and your help. With loving care, you take the time to dress or feed them and notice a tear in their eye. I think they are saying two things.” I’m so sorry you have to do this for me, and “thank you, I love you.”

Taking care of loved ones and the elderly is sometimes harder than we ever allow anyone to truly know.

Sometimes the tears are in our eyes too. When our hearts somehow connect with theirs, it becomes just a bit easier. We genuinely try to go the extra mile with them every day. We’re tired, but so are they. We are willing to share the strength we have, to help them to get through another day and they are grateful. Some days that appreciation is more evident than others, but we have become prepared to accept that. We wake up one day and everything has changed. We

become the caregiver to one who is now completely dependent upon us for their every need. What do we do and just how much can we do...alone? These questions bombard us like a continuous storm. Yet, we find that there is help out there to support and calm that storm. Alas, there is a way to be a blessing and find contentment as well. Still, the possibility that one day we may very well walk in their shoes brings that beautiful scripture to light. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Luke 6:31)

Memories...Until Forgotten Us Do Part

“They may forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou

Mom has been crying all day. She is afraid to sleep in her room. She said she wants to sleep in the bath tub instead. She believes that there's a lady who killed her husband and who promises to kill her too. She says the preparation for her death has begun with “something” placed inside of her window. She will not go near it. She doesn't think she will live through the night. I talk with her on the phone hoping to calm her and to make her feel safe. Mother has been a Christian for many years and still remembers many of her scriptures. So I prompt her to remember the words of Gods protection for her. I begin the scripture..”God will give his angels charge over thee to.... and she just as quickly, finishes the quote “to keep thee in all thy ways”. How grateful I am that these memories are still very much a secure part of her. Although mother continues to struggle with the separation of imagination and reality, there are parts of her that I am able to reach. It is those “golden nuggets” of hope that will help me to keep her “with me” for as long as I can. I try to remember to treat her with dignity even when her behavior may seem childlike at times. I understand that there will be good days and bad days. I try to make her smile with the things I know she loves, like her music! Mom loves to dance and sing. Her favorite song is “Let It Be’ by the Beatles. Now a resident in a nursing home, she has everyone singing the lyrics to her song. In her younger years, she was always the life of the party. It makes her

happy. Now mom is making others happy too. In the Senior Living Blog on 4 ways to Connect with loved ones With Dementia, it says...” We have long known that music and rhythmic speech like canonical prayers are stored in portions of the brain that often remain vibrant late into various dementias. Music which has been important to an elder, will likely spark connections...”(A Place for Mom Senior Living Blog July 31, 2015)

A Story of Grace (Ms. July)

“Ms. July” always makes me smile. I call her a lady of elegance. She is a picture of beauty both inside and out. With a heart of gold, this 99 year old retired High school commercial teacher from the beautiful state of Wisconsin is one of the gems in the treasure chest of my heart. Her age never stopped her from balancing her own checkbook, preparing her famous dill dip, creating memory albums, and telling me delightful stories of childhood and family. Admiring the special gifts that portray some of her talents are the dried flowers meticulously set and framed for family holidays and the beautiful knitted sweaters she made.

She calls me her “best friend”, but truly she is mine. Caring for her in her home was such a joy for me. If I missed a day and could not be there, she called to check on me. She made me feel special and always found ways to let me know that. “July” makes everyone around her feel cherished and loved. Her greatest loves are her three children. All of whom were very successful. She has her own “personal doctor,” a very creative daughter with a thriving business, and another son who she lost from cancer that she treasured greatly. “July” is now in a skilled care facility where I continue to visit her as often as I can. We enjoy a warm bowl of tomato soup in

the café and many hours of laughter and memories that warm our hearts. Helping to care for her has been truly one of my greatest honors. “July” is a portrait of grace.

Counting the Cost...It Is Worth It!

“Caring for our seniors is perhaps the greatest responsibility we have. Those who walked before us have given so much and made possible the life we all enjoy.” John Hoevan

You’re tired and your emotions have been tried more than gold in a hot fire. You may be faced with your own physical problems that you just don’t have the time to properly attend to. Does it matter to anyone? You bet it does! You are the unsung hero to the person you have sacrificed your time and life for. You are the only healing they may ever have. You are not waiting for a reward in heaven. You are paying it forward right now. I know you don’t get paid what you deserve. The role you have taken can be difficult and support is sometimes minimal to none. This doesn’t take into account the many social invites you have missed as well, but you have one of the most important jobs in the world. You give genuine meaning to the words endurance, love, and hope.

“A potent way in which hope manifests itself is when you as a caregiver let people know by your words and actions that you are willing to help them struggle through their problems. Your consistent caring presence with them through thick and thin instills hope.” Every time you make one elderly person smile, you’ve scored a goal. Each time you calm them down from a

stressful episode, you have hit a home run. When you make their favorite meal and they eat 100 percent of it, you have made a hole in one. If you need help, have questions that need answered, and long for any support at all, there are people who are trained and available to you. Start with your local agencies that offer elderly care and support. Check to see if your state offers free elder care through organizations such as the Senior Corps or the Elder Helpers organization.

There is an overwhelming amount of information and guidance on many internet sites such as the eldercare locator, agingcare.com, and the elder care directory. They offer many stories from others facing the same challenges that you are. There is counsel and advice on how to cope with difficult situations and where to go to find the support you need. There will come a time when your loving care will no longer be needed. When you think back on those years of sacrifice, you will treasure the good memories not the bad. “Nothing is meaningless during this time of intensive caring. Even under the most challenging circumstances, taking care of someone you love, can transform your life forever.” (www.agingcare.com/articles/rewards-of-family-caregiving) You will say with a smile, that during the times that you felt like giving up the most, it was worth it all!

Saying Goodbye...When the One You Care For Dies

“Being able to say goodbye, can be an incredible rewarding and fulfilling experience.” ([www.the-seniorlist.com/saying goodbye to a parent or loved one](http://www.the-seniorlist.com/saying-goodbye-to-a-parent-or-loved-one))

There was a meeting called today with all of her caregivers, her daughter, the hospice nurse, and her social worker. There were tears and open conversation of some of our concerns as well. The hospice nurse told us it could be just hours to maybe a few days. She told us that her body was preparing itself for end of life. I told everyone how hard it was for me to see her at this place. What we wanted was to make her last moments as peaceful as all of us could. The social worker mentioned the possibility of having a group of singers come to sing hymns to her. She loved music. Her daughter, who was present at the meeting was one of her joys. She is a well-known opera singer whose voice could always make her mother smile. Oh, how proud of her she was. We often listened to her cd's or watched her videos from her television debut. We were asked if before we left our shift for the day, we wanted to say goodbye or wait until later in the week. I told them I wanted to say goodbye that day. I walked in and closely by her bedside I whispered in her ear that I loved her and that I wanted to thank her for allowing me to come into her life to care for her. Again, I said I love you and kissed her goodbye. After leaving, not more than an hour after my departure, “My Lady of Elegance” went to heaven. May heaven welcome you with open arms and may songs resound in your honor while God smiles, prepared for your arrival.

There are no words to describe the privilege of being able to say goodbye to those we have cared for. Life doesn't always give us the option to say all of the things we'd like to say to our elderly loved ones before they leave us. When we are blessed with the time to prepare for the end of life with them, it brings such peace for them and for the families. The elderly want to know that they will not face the fear of death alone. Knowing that you are there by their side, holding their hand, and being the greatest pillar of strength and support, is your supreme act of love.

Advice from Celebrities In The Know will

Grey's Anatomy Patrick Dempsey, whose mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. "Whatever your strength is, that's ok. Be patient at the beginning to figure out what your role will be. Don't be afraid. Empower yourself with information, and that information will give you the strength that you need."

Maria Shriver, an advocate for the Alzheimer's movement. "You ask for God's grace and for His help. You go through your life trying to do the best you can, doing it elegantly, and with grace and dignity. That's my motto."

Holly Robinson Peete lost her father to Parkinson's and her son Ryan has autism. "Knowing my family can help others and maybe ease their caregiving journey is the best gift of all. At some point, you take your guilt and you move on—and I did that by paying it forward."

Henry Winkler whose mother suffered a stroke. "Somehow you keep the fire burning to take those tiny steps forward because it is so easy to just give up."

Meredith Vieira from The View, whose husband was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis says.. "Humor's essential. We always found something to laugh about. And we still do. It's what gets you through."

Dwayne Johnson from the Fast and the Furious, whose mother was diagnosed with stage 3 lung cancer says...” always take a moment to count our blessings (because) there’s always something to be grateful for.”

Leeza Gibbons whose mother and grandmother fell victim to Alzheimer’s says...” I’ve always found my mothers courage to be amazing. She truly was a steel magnolia. She faced her disease with all the grace and dignity she could muster day by day. She showed me what living was all about: showing up and doing the best we can.”

([www.guideposts.org/friends-and-family/caregiving/caregiving burnout/11](http://www.guideposts.org/friends-and-family/caregiving/caregiving%20burnout/11) celebrities share inspiring lessons)

.” (A Place for Mom, Living With Alzheimer’s Ethels &Mattys Story) Those with Dementi

Medal Of Honor...A Deserved Thank You

The answer to the question, “Why Do I Have to Care For them” is one that each individual and each family will have to answer for themselves. It’s really a matter of the heart. Voluntarily and courageously standing on the front line as a caregiving soldier is a noble and honorable task but many times a very difficult one. Although the battle scars of fatigue, discouragement, and frustration arise, caregivers find strength hold on. During the moments when they feel surrender is the only way to survive another day, they find the grace to endure.

The Medal of Honor is the United States of Americas highest military honor, awarded for personal acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty...”(Wikepedia) Caregivers have earned such an honor with exemplary applause. Their sacrifice has been recognized by the millions of elders who depend on their kindness and compassion to survive and live the rest of their lives with dignity and respect.

Thank you for being among the 15 million family caregivers who care for loved ones with Alzheimer’s. Thank you for providing 17.5 billion hours of unpaid care totaling an estimated 375 billion a year in actual care. Thank you for being among the 80 percent of caregivers to provide dementia care. Thank you for being among the 65 million to provide care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend during a given year. (National Alliance in collaboration with AARP; November 2009) Caregivers are the worlds Unsung Heroes! (Womenslifestyle.com)

Remember these inspiring words by Kenneth C. Haugk, author of “Christian Caregiving. A Way of Life”
“Ultimately, the right to care flows from our responsibility as family members...In a certain way, we have a “license to care”...We have the responsibility to care based on the needs of people...especially those who are hurting, want to talk about their needs. Although they may flinch when you first ask

about what deeply concerns them most, they will later express relief and be grateful that you cared enough to ask, listen, and help them deal with their concerns. “

Helpful Resources

If you are looking for a good nursing home but don't know where to begin, look at the statistics reports from US News and World reports at [health.usnews.com/best-nursing homes](http://health.usnews.com/best-nursing-homes)

If you are looking, there is a list the nursing homes with the five star rankings down to one star, complete information on each, the insurances taken and an overall review of each. This will prove to be very helpful in your search.

Look for office of aging in your area. They will have advice that may prove valuable to your situation.

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Cindy K. Sproles

“...health care should not always be medical care. “It’s not medical treatment, its helping meet personal goals,”... “It’s about ‘Who is this person, and what do they want in their life?’

“Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you! Wear them like a necklace. Write them deep within your heart. Then you will find favor with both God and people and you will gain a good reputation.” Proverbs 3:3-4

)(www.google.com/search=quotes about empathy in caregiving)

“They may forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou

“Caring for our seniors is perhaps the greatest responsibility we have. Those who walked before us have given so much and made possible the life we all enjoy.” John Hoevan

.” (www.agingcare.com/articles/rewards-of-family-caregiving)

([www.the-seniorlist.com/saying goodbye to a parent or loved one](http://www.the-seniorlist.com/saying-goodbye-to-a-parent-or-loved-one))

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