



Caring for Caregivers

2021
January

Lisa Valentine wrote this poem after a visit with her Mom, who has dementia. She says this about the poem:

My Mom's dementia is advancing and this recent visit wasn't the first time she didn't know me. Telling her my name when I arrive and calling her "Mom" as we talk doesn't stick anymore. Her innocent question was endearing. It almost made me smile. And it almost made me cry. That's when this came out.

Maybe You Know

Maybe you know
Some of my kids

My Mom asked
Innocently
From her
Muddled Mind.

I know a few
I answered
From my
Muddled Heart.

L. V. 01/02/2021

New Year's Non-Resolutions

Caregivers have too much to do and too little time to do it. We don't need yet another "to do" to add to our list. Caregivers are often reminded to take care of ourselves, but sometimes that can feel like one more thing we have to do. Instead of making a resolution, we could consider a non-resolution. What can we stop doing? Are there things we can give up or turn over to others to do?

Unfortunately we may need to resolve to do one more thing. Make a list of tasks or duties you don't want to do anymore. Make a list of family, friends, services or programs that can take over something you no longer want to do or can do. And when people ask "What can I do?" show them the list and ask them to make a commitment to do one of the items on the list. Ask for help. Use your list of resources. Get over the attitude that only you can do what needs to be done. Let unrealistic expectations go. Let go of unwarranted guilt. Let go of things that you cannot control. Letting go of caregiver baggage makes caregiving easier.

Caregiving on Steroids

AARP's family and caregiving expert, Amy Goyer, says of caring for a loved one with dementia: "It's like caregiving on steroids." Women are 2/3 of the primary unpaid caregivers of those with dementia, so it is women who are especially at risk from the extra stress of caregiving for dementia patients. In fact, caregivers for relatives with dementia have a higher risk of developing dementia themselves. As dementia progresses caregivers are asked to increase their level of caregiving while knowing that things will only get worse, no matter how well they provide care. Dementia patients can have many problem behaviors which multiply the intensity of caregiving. The CDC reports 57% of dementia caregivers provide care for 4 or more years. Dementia caregivers experience ongoing grief as they slowly lose their loved one to dementia. This ongoing grief, called disenfranchised grief, is often not validated as a loved one is still alive. Pauline Boss describes this as a dementia patient being "there but not there." The Alzheimer's Association describes the pain of dementia caregivers as "...an emotional wallop of confusion, anger, and sadness." Unfortunately there are no steroids for caregiving.

Zoom Support Groups

Elderhaus offers two virtual caregiver support groups weekly. All community members are welcome. Every Monday 1-3 p.m. or Wednesday 9-11 a.m. Please send your email address to caregivers@elderhaus.org and you will be sent an invitation with a link to join the meetings. Even though we can't meet in person we can still offer support to each other.

The Reluctant Caregiver

The Caregiving in the U.S. 2020 study found that more than half, 53% of caregivers, felt they had no choice in taking on the caregiver role. With women being the majority of caregivers, it is women who most often find themselves in caregiving situations they did not choose. An article on belief.net, "The Reluctant Caregiver" suggests that caregiving when relationships are strained can be especially draining. The role of caregiver can be especially tough if your elderly parent was not a good parent to you, was abusive or conflict was on-going. In highly conflicted marital relationships, spouses may not want to care for a spouse who becomes dependent and needs caregiving, but societal expectations are difficult to withstand. A blog post on The New Old Age called "The Reluctant Caregiver" stresses that reluctance is not selfishness, it is realism and emotion in crisis. What if your "loved one" is your "non-loved one"? Caregiver shaming is harmful to all caregivers and devalues them. No one has a right to tell caregivers how they "should" feel.

Navigating caregiving for the reluctant caregiver requires creative solutions. If there are siblings it is important for all to understand how caregiving will be shared. There are questions to ask:

- * Would it be better for the loved one to stay with another relative or be placed in a care facility?
- * Can in-home care be utilized to take on personal care like bathing, toileting and grooming?
- * Is there respite care available to a reluctant caregiver or support groups available to help with negative emotions as they arise?

If a caregiver notices that their anger is spiraling out of control, the most responsible step to take is to admit they are unable to provide care and place their relative in a different caregiving situation. Feeling like a martyr in a caregiving role fosters deep resentments and compromises the health and well-being of the caregiver and the person receiving care.

Ha, Ha!

**I have an inferiority complex, but not a very good one.
The person who invented autocorrect should burn in hell.
Did Noah include termites on the ark?
I doubt, therefore I might be.**

Happy New Year Happy New Year Happy New Year Happy New Year

Elderhaus is planning a limited reopening Feb. 2, if circumstances permit. Details are posted on our website and Facebook page. Support services for caregivers are available virtually. Contacts: Tim or Danita @970-221-0406 or caregivers@elderhaus.org.