

Caregiver's Corner Column (March 2011)

Leaving a Legacy of Care

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When I think of family care giving, I associate that with leaving a legacy of love, commitment, trust, and undying care with your loved one. Immediately, I think of many of the very special caregivers I have met throughout the years. Although family care giving is difficult, can be frustrating and exhausting, it can also be one of the most rewarding experiences a person can have while they are on earth. This, however, is often not realized until after the care giving journey has come to completion. It is because of the undying care and support showed not only toward the one being cared for, but also the promises made to previous caregivers. For example, one daughter actually discussed with her ill father that it was okay for him to pass away, because she would take care of her mother who had Alzheimer's disease. After this discussion decisions were made as to how this would happen, a plan was put into place, and then he actually succumbed to his illness and did pass away. He had to make sure his wife was cared for, and he completely trusted that his daughter would provide the care that she had committed to.

Recognizing and appreciating love is also an important part of our legacy. A family caregiver had been caring for her mother at home for nearly ten years. Her mother recently passed away at the age of 105 ½. This daughter said one of the most precious comments I have ever heard a loved one say about their cared-for one. "I grow to love her more every day." This caregiver discussed how her mother had always been with her. She had celebrated with her when she married, had children, and watched the grandchildren grow. Many of her cherished moments were of everyday experiences such as life on the farm, watching her mother and father work hard and complete a job well done. The mother had seen her daughter through some serious life tragedies such as the death of her own husband, a death of a grandchild, her own father, and her in-laws. When she spoke of her mother, she was able to speak with feeling about being more blessed than stressed with the care she had provided as her mother aged physically and declined cognitively. She had an outlook on life whereby she realized that the care she was providing would not last forever.

The Legacy of Caring is truly putting someone else first in life. The most important legacy we can leave our family, our children, our grandchildren, neighbors, community, and our country is compassion and caring. Those are the qualities I clearly see exhibited in many of the families I have worked with. These families are leaving a legacy that says, "I love you and I will take care of you." I am not suggesting that each caregiver has to complete their care giving journey in the same way. Each caregiver is unique, the cared-for one is unique, and the situations vary across many levels. The outcomes are different for each one of us. One thing is, however, the same, the journey is the goal. We all want to live our life to the fullest, especially when it comes to being a caregiver. We want no regrets, no unfinished business. It has been written that life is not a guided tour; rather we each have to make our own way through. There will be losses along the way; there will be sadness, frustrations, fear, hardships. But there will also be times of complete celebration, love, commitment, the ability to help each other out, to live peacefully "in the moment." What a true Blessing! How many of us are not living in the moment? We must

keep the end in sight. Doesn't that give us a sense of peace? A sense that we don't have to achieve more than God has desired for us, that we don't have to look for the worldly treasures of today to find satisfaction, contentment, and true joy in knowing that we are doing the best we can here on earth. We simply need to leave a legacy of love and caring for the next generation.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.