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824 words

How to Overpower the Demands of Caregiving

Set your Feelings Free
Appreciate Nature
Stay Connected Socially

Lessons from

Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver

By: Elaine K. Sanchez

Madelyn Kubin was a Kansas farm woman who became the primary caregiver for her husband after he suffered a debilitating stroke. Although she was in poor health and had limited resources, she found the strength to take care of Quentin for six years. She chronicled her experience through writing letters to her daughter. There are many lessons for all caregivers in Madelyn's experiences. Here are a few, illustrated with excerpts from the book *Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver*:

Set Your Feelings Free

Writing about your anger, fear, frustrations, and sadness can get negative feelings out of your head. When you allow yourself to rage on paper you release intense emotional energy and pressure. It won't change your situation, but it can help you reposition your attitude toward it.

On April 6, 1996, Madelyn wrote:

I'd been too busy getting extra things done around here and just didn't get around to taking any time for myself. I had reached a stage where everything about Quentin irritated me.

I hated the way he huffed and puffed when he got in bed. It didn't start my morning off right to get up and find a very wet Depend and a pair of

wet shorts and pajamas on the floor and urine dripping off the rubber bed pad onto the floor.

I wanted to scream when he would sit and watch me put the orange juice, medication and vitamins, etc. on the table. When I would come with the toast, he acted surprised that it was time for breakfast, and then he had to go through a struggle to get his chair located right. I wanted to scream, "Why in the hell do you put so many pills in your hand when you drop some of them each morning?"

I don't have time to remember and itemize all the other irritants. I do realize that the stroke has affected him in so many ways that aren't obvious. I also know he is definitely not this way by choice and that he is not trying to irritate me. That is the reason I don't want to be cross with him. I also realize that some day I might be in even worse condition. I feel it is important "to do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It would be awful to be struggling with every little thing and have your caretaker and others cross with you.

Take Time to Appreciate Nature

Caregivers spend a lot of time cleaning up messes and performing distasteful tasks. Getting out in nature, even if it is only in your own backyard, can relieve stress and provide a pleasant diversion.

On September 3, 1995 Madelyn wrote:

This morning I looked out and saw a Blue Jay taking his bath, and before long there was a beautiful big red bird. He took a long time deciding if he wanted to get in the water or not, but he finally took a nice leisurely bath. When I looked out and saw him, I almost gasped. We will probably get a lot of interesting birds during the migration season. I'm putting out fresh water for them morning and night. It makes the kitchen work more interesting.

Stay Connected to Family, Friends, and Organizations

It is not uncommon for invitations to social functions to stop once a person is diagnosed with a chronic illness. As a caregiver you will need to be proactive and innovative to make sure you don't become isolated.

On July 16, 1997 Madelyn wrote:

Our Church Fellowship has a carry-in luncheon once a month. I decided I would have them come to the farm this time, and have had more fun getting ready for them. Except for being a little windy, it was a perfect morning. I sprayed the yard with Yard Guard and there wasn't a fly or mosquito in sight. There were 24 of us.

Quentin was there and he enjoyed himself so much. He was sitting with some especially interesting people. I regret I didn't get a picture of him with the happy expression he had on his face. It is something that triggers memories of the past, but it is very rare now. The experience is somewhat like the feeling one has playing golf – one good shot makes a person want to go back and try for it again. I will be trying to think of things for him to do so I can see that expression again.

Madelyn survived her caregiving experience by taking care of herself physically, mentally, and spiritually. Although there is nothing that can make the job of caregiving easy, there are resources and support groups that can help a person cope with it. For more information and to order a copy of the book *Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver* visit www.LaineyPublishing.com.

Resource box:

Elaine K. Sanchez is a successful author and speaker whose passion is helping people find hope and humor in aging, illness, and long-term caregiving. The Midwest Book Review praised her book saying, ". . . Details about surviving the day-to-day labors of physical caregiving as well as a big picture about what truly matters in life make *Letters from Madelyn* an invaluable read, cover to cover, especially for anyone coping with a loved one's slow deterioration."

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