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1183 words

## **How to Overpower the Demands of Caregiving**

Practice Creative Indifference  
Learn Something New  
Savor Happy Memories

*Lessons Learned in*

### ***Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver***

By: Elaine K. Sanchez

Madelyn Kubin was a Kansas farm woman who overpowered her own failing health to care for her husband after he suffered a debilitating stroke. She chronicled her experience through writing letters to her daughter. There are many lessons to be learned from Madelyn's experience. Here are a few more in this continuing series.

### **Detach Yourself Mentally by Practicing "Creative Indifference"**

The routine of caregiving can be confining, tedious, and exhausting. Practicing "creative indifference" can help shift your thoughts away from the drudgery of your daily activities and focus your mental energy in more positive ways.

On February 8, 1995 Madelyn wrote:

*I can't see anything so wonderfully exciting or invigorating about getting up in the morning, fixing breakfast, doing dishes, making the bed, picking up the papers, doing laundry, fixing lunch, doing more dishes, more laundry and housework. An exciting day for me might include a good telephone conversation, or possible meeting an interesting person in the grocery store or on the street. And for this I should spend money on vitamins, try to eat right and exercise so I can prolong this wonderful life experience? HA!*

*My greatest joy in life comes from learning and growing mentally and spiritually. The best thing about having your “space and happiness from within” is that a person can stay more or less detached and still do what has to be done to give other people a reasonable amount of happiness.*

On April 25, 1999, (four years later) she wrote about a conversation she had with an Episcopal priest who was suffering with terminal cancer.

*We talked about how we had changed because of the illnesses. He said he and his wife have developed a greater sense of humor. They see things funny that I guess most people wouldn't. I told him I had developed a detached attitude. He says he calls it “creative indifference” and he has developed it too. I like that better, as “detached” seems cold. Whatever you call it, it means not being emotionally ravaged by the progression of events.*

## **Learn Something New**

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Embrace the process of learning. Reading to expand your mind, developing a new skill, or even performing a routine task in a different way can be invigorating. Even though you may feel physically confined in your caregiving role, there are no restrictions on how far your mind can go.

On May 13, 1996, Madelyn wrote:

*I read that we have little root-like things called dendrites in our brain. The article stated that people can grow new dendrites to replace some that are lost from a stroke – or even old age. The secret is to develop some new habits. It seems that one good way is to exercise, develop a new hobby or to get very interested in something different – something a person enjoys. My flowers are my new hobby. As I was working with the hoses this morning, and as I was trying to screw them together again, I couldn't help but wonder if learning how to screw in hoses would help grow dendrites.*

The following spring, in a high-school graduation letter to her granddaughter, Madelyn wrote:

*It is very exciting to realize that if a person has a good mind there is no age limit to continue learning and growing. The days aren't long*

*enough for me to master all the things I'm interested in, and there are probably not enough years left to do everything I want to do.*

## **Savor Happy Memories**

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People who are chronically ill or suffer constant pain can get demanding, cranky, and depressed. Sometimes it's hard to recall happier times and remember who your loved one was before he or she got sick.

On January 6, 1996, Madelyn wrote:

*I think when a person has a sick wife or husband it can feel as if you've been alone for the same number of years that person was sick. I have said that my husband died on October 30, 1993. We just haven't gotten around to burying him yet. Hopefully Quentin will die first. It will probably take some time for me to remember what it was like before his stroke. Then the grief will start.*

Three years later, on January 1, 1999, Madelyn wrote:

*I was really down yesterday. The situation hasn't changed any, but I'm looking at it differently today. It is easy to get disgusted – one could even say real, real disgusted. This morning I had the thought that this is not the Quentin I loved for so many years. It is hard to remember now how careful he used to be. He never came into the house with dirty boots. He always took his work clothes off in the little bathroom.*

*He had good table manners and read the Time magazine from cover to cover, as well as the Farm Journal, Successful Farming, the High Plains Journal and the Hutchinson News. He kept up on the news and current events. I was always proud to be his wife. When he was with people, he laughed and joked and was a good guy. He was exactly the same at home.*

*I think it is understandable that I go through some days when I feel very burdened. Thank goodness for faith! I try to always remember and to be thankful that he still has a good disposition and a sense of humor. He appreciates me and tells me so almost every day. As long as I have my mind and the ability to read and think, I will get along fine. Sometimes it takes an attitude adjustment.*

On March 25, 1999, Madelyn wrote about a happier time. Savoring that memory helped her look at her husband a little differently

*I'll never forget Valentine's Day, 1993 when we were in Port Richey, Florida. We had gone to an inspirational early church service. We were on our way to meet Jean and Frank and another couple at a very elegant country club.*

*On the way, we stopped at a grocery store to see if we could find an inexpensive floral gift for Jean and her friend. We were about to give up when the clerk showed us an orchid mounted in a small white wicker basket. We selected two. I must have been looking wistful, because Quentin asked if I would like to have one. I said I sure would!*

*It was so pretty that I didn't want to mess up the corsage by wearing it, so I kept it in the basket. Our meal was delicious. There was free champagne and a flower for each lady. As we drove around that day I had the most joyous awareness of how much I loved my husband of fifty-one years. The flower lasted three weeks.*

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](http://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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