

SPOTLIGHT SUCCESS

ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY AS CAREGIVER



Approximately 75% of those providing care are female. (1) One of those is Liz de Nesnera. She is featured in this article because she is representative of all women who have taken on a caregiver role. The consequence of Liz's parents' health decline and its impact on Liz's life is the story of millions of American women.

Liz's parents moved in with her and her husband eleven years ago, shortly after Liz turned thirty. Her mother is partially paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair as a result of a stroke. Her father, who passed away almost three years ago, suffered from Alzheimer's. Liz says, "The decision to eventually place dad in an Alzheimer's Assisted Living facility for his own safety was (and still is) the most difficult decision I have ever had to make."

“Spontaneity left my life eleven years ago. It's similar to being a parent only my mother's dependence on me increases.”

For Liz, life as a caregiver means every minute of every day has to be planned ahead. "Spontaneity left my life eleven years ago. It's similar to being a parent, only my mother's dependence on me doesn't lessen, it increases. Now I need to make sure someone is always with her. That will never change."

Today, nearly one out of four households in the U.S. is involved in caregiving to persons aged 50 or over.

There are hundreds of issues that arise when taking care of an elderly parent. One that is universal Liz calls "The Guilt Sandwich": Guilt flanked by Frustration on one side and Fatigue on the other.

Frustration for Liz ranges from "Why did this happen to my mother—it's not fair" to "Why can't mom just remember what I told her five minutes ago!" "Sometimes," she says, "I just wish mom were like she 'used' to be. Then I feel I should be able to deal gracefully with whatever situation comes up, but it's not easy."

Guilt is a major issue for caregivers, and Liz is no exception. "Intellectually I know that she's getting older, that she can't do what she used to do, I know the stroke was not her fault, but I still get upset when I can't just get up and go see a movie with my husband or out to dinner with friends without having to find a 'mom-sitter'. But sometimes I just don't want to 'deal' with being a caregiver. Then I feel guilty for being upset...and then I get upset for feeling guilty...and round and round we go."

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HELPFUL RESOURCES

Web sites:
www.thefamilycaregiver.org
www.caregiver.com
www.caregiver.org

Here is how Liz says she copes with her situation. She...

1. Lets out her frustration by either a good old-fashioned scream alone in her car or by exercising.
2. Joined The National Family Caregiver's Association and credits them with helping her realize there is

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from the editors

Caregiving is a huge topic for women, particularly those of us in the "sandwich generation". The number of women caring for an elderly family member is climbing every year, and is already in the millions. Whether or not the person being cared for lives with the caregiver, the emotional toll can be staggering. This issue provides insight and helpful information for women in such a situation. Our heartfelt thanks to all who contributed their time.

On a lighter note (no pun intended), we are pleased to welcome Dr. Ronna Sherman to our pages. Dr. Sherman's column, **Food for Thought**, gives us realistic tips and ideas to make healthy eating choices. As both a medical doctor and registered dietitian, Dr. Sherman understands that nutritional advice must be sensible and easy to implement.

Another new addition to **Silk Purse Women** is **Talk Back**, your opportunity to share your thoughts with us about any of the articles you read. Perhaps you have something new to add, or have a different point of view, or have a great idea for a topic you would like to see discussed. We want to hear from you.

Our Silk Purse community of women continues to grow! The events we host are becoming increasingly popular, and our subscription base is climbing. Thanks to all of you for your enthusiastic support and encouragement.

Chris Spear &
Lorraine LaShell

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- a name for what she is doing and that she is not alone.
3. Got professional help to learn concrete techniques to help her handle her situation.
 4. Acknowledges her guilt and tries not to beat herself up too much. Humor helps a lot.
 5. Tries to get as much rest as she can.
 6. Relies on outside support from a home health aide.

Being a caregiver for a family member or close friend may not be the career of choice. In fact, it is usually a job in addition to a paid position. Just over half of all caregivers for persons aged 50+ are employed full time and almost two-thirds are employed either full or part time. (2)

Liz's journey with her mother may be similar to yours or that of someone you know. It is not an easy journey. To those of us on the outside looking in, it is clear that the dedication and selfless love of those who caregive can only come from angels. You have our utmost respect and admiration. Footnote: 1, 2 Family Caregiver Alliance

Talk Back Letters to the Editors

Musings on Musings...

When I started reading Lorraine LaShell's "Musings of a Silk Purse Woman" in the spring issue, I was immediately struck...that the article was demeaning to women. She so depends on her hair stylist, herbalist, housekeeper. She can't dress herself, she can't maintain her environment, and can't decide on her own where she would like to vacation. Whatever happened to "I am Woman, hear me roar!"

But when I read the closing line, I discovered Lorraine wasn't musing about her own needs at all: "On the other hand, my husband of 40 years needs only one person...me." Is she saying the husband is self-reliant except for maybe a little help from the wife? I think it's more likely she is saying the husband, too, needs lots of help, and the wife can fulfill all of his needs. Doesn't sound good for the husband. But it's confusing for the wife: if she can be all things for her husband, why can't she be all of those things for herself?

Of course, there's the counterpoint: I just asked my wife what happened to the lunch I just made. She told me I left it in the microwave. —*Art Lieberman*

Tell Us What You Think! E-mail: editor@silkpursewomen.com or fax: 908-301-0191. Write to us: Talk Back, PO Box 3458, Wayne, NJ 07470. Letters are edited for clarity and length.

The challenges of being a caregiver can lead women to new career paths. Here are four women we know whose lives have been changed by their caregiving experience.

- Liz de Nesnera is starting a business to help other caregivers that will include speaking at hospitals to people newly facing a caregiving situation, producing an audio CD primer, writing a column and a book.
- Rene Cantwell, author of the article "Facts on Family Councils" in this issue, is the founder and publisher of FOLO (*Families of Loved Ones*).
- Barbara Rimorin, formerly a general contractor, recently became licensed and certified as an Assisted Living Administrator in New Jersey and is now working at a Sunrise Senior Living facility.
- Patty M. Kearns, full time caregiver for her mother, is the author of a book titled *Lessons in The Divine for Caregivers*. The book is described as a "spiritual buffet for The Totally Exhausted, served with unlimited sides of humor".

BOOKS:

The Fearless Caregiver: How to Get the Best Care for your Loved One and Still Have a Life of Your Own (Capital Cares) by Gary Barg

Share the Care: How to Organize a Group to Care for Someone Who is Seriously Ill, Second Revised and Expanded Edition by Cappy Capossela, Sheila Warnock, Sukie Miller

Elder Rage, or take My Father...Please!: How to Survive Caring for Aging Parents by Jacqueline Marcell