



Special Issue

What I Learned as a Caregiver: Part 2

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What I learned as a Caregiver: Caregiver, care for thyself

“When you’re a caregiver, you need to realize that you’ve got to take care of yourself, because, not only are you going to have to rise to the occasion and help someone else, but you have to model for the next generation.” - Naomi Judd

The first thing a caregiver should do is “care for thyself”. I know this seems counterproductive to caring for your loved one, but if you are not healthy, you cannot care for someone else.

As I mentioned in my last blog, in November 2003, I became a caregiver for my mother who was diagnosed with Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis. Not only did I not know “how” to care for someone with a terminal illness, let alone IPF, but I also had no idea the toll it would take on me.

Within a year, I was exhausted, having my host of medical problems, and taking 12 different medications daily. I had also gained a substantial amount of weight. I was emotionally and physically spent.

This singularity in focus, while seemingly noble, is not sustainable for any of us with the job description of caregiver. After reaching this point of exhaustion, you would think I would realize that taking care of myself was just as important as taking care of Mom. If I was not at my best, I was not capable of bettering her everyday life. I did not see it then. Now, looking back, that realization should have led me to rethink the way I approached each day. I encourage you to do this.

You must take time daily to tend to your needs, even if it’s just 15 or 30 minutes here and there. Do something for “you”.

- Go for a walk and enjoy nature.



- Meditate – and truly focus on your breathing.
- Exercise.
- Be with others; meet a friend for coffee, go out to lunch with a friend, etc.
- Nurture a hobby; maybe you knit or sew or you like to read.

Your mental health, as well as your physical health, should still be your priority. If you are having medical problems, see your doctor. Do NOT put off your health instead of caring for your loved one. The worst thing imaginable would be to pre-decease your loved one. I have seen it happen.

You may be saying to yourself “I don’t have time” or “I need help”. In the next post in this series, I will share some ideas to get you started.

... Warmly, Taleena Koch

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