



Between Friends

Thoughts on Caregiving

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Give Me a Break! Caring for Yourself When Caring for Others

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time when television stations air special reports or documentaries on caregiving. Do you usually watch them? Maybe not. Chances are, if you're living the life of a caregiver every day, the one thing you probably don't want to do is watch a program on the challenges of caregiving. Why watch when you're living it?

There was a great Cathy cartoon strip some time ago on caregiving. Cathy calls her mom, and says, "Hi, mom, I need..." and before Cathy can complete her sentence, her mom says "Need a shoulder? Need a hand? Need a hug? Need a friend? Need support? Need soup? Need spot remover? Need glassware? Need furniture? Need gift wrap? Need stamps? Need paprika?"

Cathy's response is "I need you to take good care of yourself." Mom's response is "Oh, for heaven's sake! Not this again!" To which Cathy thinks "How can one person be such a great care giver, and such a terrible care receiver?"

Sound familiar? Rosalynn Carter has said, "...There are only four kinds of people in the world – those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers."

Most of us have our moments being great caregivers, and other times when we're not so great. Of course, most of those who we care for can sometimes be very challenging care receivers.

It is easy to care for someone who is good-natured and doesn't demand much. It is not so easy to care

for someone who is cranky, confused, doesn't want your help, or doesn't know who you are anymore.

One thing we can't do is wave a magic wand and solve all of our or our family member's problems, or cure their – or our own – illnesses.

What we can do, however, is take better care of ourselves by giving ourselves time away from care demands. Time to replenish our energies and renew our spirits. Easier said than done, I know, when taking care of ourselves means that we first need to make arrangements for the care of our family members.

To do that, we usually have to do something that we don't like to do: ask for help (gasp! oh no! anything but that!). Of course, whoever we ask as the right to say no. Which means we need to get past our disappointment and anger and ask someone else, or check into other options like adult day care or respite services.

Sometimes, we just need to make the time to do whatever it is that can give us a boost – even if it's just for a few precious moments. Take a nap. Go for a walk. Listen to relaxing or inspirational music. Go to a movie. Take a leisurely bath. Get a massage. Read. Pray. Have lunch with friends. We all have our triggers – things that we find inspirational and energizing.

Whether it's for a week, a weekend, an evening, or just a few minutes, we owe it to ourselves, and to our families, to do whatever it takes. Just do it! You'll be glad you did.

A Friend's House Adult Day Services

A program of Catholic Services of Macomb

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