Spiritual Support for CAREGIVERS and Those Who LOVE Them

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Our ministry is supported primarily by the freewill offerings of friends like you. Your generosity helps make it possible for us to offer this inspirational booklet. Our desire is to make Unity literature available to everyone who wants it, especially those most in need of spiritual encouragement.

Dear Friend,

One of the most difficult yet unheralded experiences of this human journey is to care for a loved one whose health is failing. For months or years, caregivers tend to the needs of others, often at the expense of their own.

Yet some conclude caregiving is the greatest blessing of their lives.

What are the spiritual aspects of caregiving that can make it meaningful? How can caregivers be supported even through their exhaustion and grief?

This booklet has been compiled to support you spiritually as a caregiver and to guide others in the best ways to help you. It is filled with insights, personal stories, and resources from those who have journeyed through all the complicated aspects of caregiving. These writers know how grueling the days can be, but they discovered positive aspects too.

May these lessons of compassion and healing inspire and inform you if you are a caregiver or care about someone who is. Please share this booklet with anyone you know who might feel understood and supported by these stories, poems, and words of wisdom.

Blessings on your caring journey,

Your Friends in Unity

unity®
World Headquarters
at Unity Village

The Inner Work of Caregiving

By Rev. Margaret Flick

One of the most transformational and difficult experiences of my life was caring for my parents who both had dementia. A wild ride barely begins to describe it.

My once-angry father was now sweet but had no comprehension of relationships. He didn't know me or Mom—he just knew whether he liked someone or not. My mother, once sweet, was now angry and somewhat abusive, especially to me and my husband. She knew who I was but not the reality of me.

Caregiving put me in uncharted territory. Being an only child, I was in the role of parent and solely responsible for them with help from my patient husband. I had to take stock of available resources and how we were going to manage all of it.

Even more important was my spiritual management. Here's what worked for me:

First, I had to surrender to a power greater than myself, which I call God. My spiritual life provided the guidance and support needed for my sanity and perspective. I set the intention that this experience would transform me rather than break me. I set the intention that I would love them unconditionally, which was setting the bar really high. Sometimes I succeeded, but often I failed and had to recommit to my intention.

Second, I had to acknowledge they were no longer the people I grew up with. In many ways, they had already left. I had to let go of any expectations that my love or care would be returned. This was important because not only would I face daily disappointment but I was sometimes in denial about their abilities. I focused on the good they had given me and considered this my repayment.

Third, I had to acknowledge the pain of open-ended grief. Each day or week, a function or ability would change or diminish in my parents. I felt deep grief that this was the end of my family. Whenever I was at work or away from them, I dreaded answering the phone since it might be "the call." I felt as if I were living in some suspended, altered reality.

Talking with other caregivers was important in handling this ongoing grief, so I started a caregiver's group at my church for mutual support. Senior centers and hospice also helped as many of them offer groups and resources for grief and caregiving support. Attending workshops and speaking with social workers versed in geriatrics and other specialists gave me useful information about dementia and Parkinson's disease.

> **"Jesus made it very clear that God knows what you need, even before you pray. More than that, God doesn't have what you need. God is what you need."**
>
> –Eric Butterworth, *The Universe Is Calling*

Fourth, and most difficult, I had to face my own limitations and set boundaries for myself and with my parents. Caregiving, although outer-directed, requires intense inner focus. Caregiving, especially for loved ones, brings up resentments, anger, frustration, and guilt. I felt guilty for taking a day off from them. I had codependency issues about being the "good girl." I was angry they hadn't planned for their old age or set up a power of attorney or any medical directives.

But being angry didn't help me or them. Again, I had to accept the reality and move on. I gave myself permission to take good care of myself, such as going on a vacation, or to leave the room if Mom was being verbally abusive.

In the end, setting my intention to love them unconditionally resulted in an internal shift and transformation that has stayed with me. It wasn't about them—it was about me.

I had to let go of expectations and resentments.

I had to go deep within, accept my own trigger points, and forgive myself.

I had to forgive them. Forgiveness is a powerful force that benefits and blesses all.

I also realized that I had to love myself unconditionally.

Caregiving can be heaven or hell. We choose how we perceive it. I know for sure it's not about whether they know who I am. It is more important to remember the totality of who they are, beyond this stage of their lives.

No matter the condition, mentally or physically, everyone remembers and feels what it is like to be loved. Sending them on the next part of their journey, forgiven and loved unconditionally, is the greatest gift we can give to them and ourselves.

And we will be changed at depth. ■

How to Live With the Guilt

By Barbara Bowen

From the petty to the heartrending, guilt plagues caregivers. I've been no exception during six years of caring for my 95-year-old mother. Almost every situation has stirred guilt within me. However, I've learned to let intent guide me.

Guilt was probably most threatening when I had to take over the money. Mom, who had always handled her own finances and taught me to handle mine, said, "It's my money!" Still, she was confused as to whether she had paid bills, sometimes paid them twice, was often late, donated to everyone who asked, and fell prey to minor scams.

I faced a hard decision. I knew Mom had worked all her life to provide for herself and me. Should I let her continue to struggle with independence and be vulnerable to scams while I pretended not to see? Easier for me, but not very loving. So, intending to provide positive support, I put hesitation and guilt aside, embraced necessity, and took control of the computer and checkbooks for her protection. Once the change was accomplished, surprisingly, she seemed relieved.

A sense of priorities must be part of intent. Sometimes Mom wants to go "home." She has made it obvious that she means her girlhood home where her "daddy" lives. The first time she asked, I tried telling her the truth: Her parents had both made their transition. She cried for a week and a half and demanded to know why no one told her anything (although she had planned both funerals). Eventually, she forgot her parents had died and asked again to go "home."

What is more loving? To relate the facts and let her mourn all over again—who knows how many times or for how long—or to tell a "therapeutic fib," a lie that makes her happy in the moment? Nowadays, I cross my fingers and tell her anything but that her parents are dead. I say the car is in for repair, or a storm is predicted, or I need to phone her dad to find a good time to visit. If she asks for follow-up, I figure I can tell her I forgot to make the call, but the request always slips her mind before 10 minutes have passed. I could feel guilty about fibbing, but I don’t. I have given my mother a gift of peace.

Realizing I am helping Mom goes a long way toward dealing with guilt, but it is also important that I live my own life.

If I feel guilty about the feelings I have—wishing this situation would end, that Mom would make her transition, that my life would return to normal—I surround myself with love. I’m reassured that I’m helping and guided in moments of doubt. I’m sure I am doing or have done my best at any given moment, whatever human feelings may be involved, and I forgive myself for being human.

According to fellow caregivers, after the loved one passes, relief is frequently great—suffering is over, and life is once again the caregiver’s own. But feelings of relief bring further guilt. Although I have not yet had to face these emotions, when the time comes, I will apply the same principles. They have worked for me thus far.

Realizing I am helping Mom goes a long way toward dealing with guilt, but it is also important that I live my own life. Guilt sometimes causes problems if friends, family, or employment are neglected. I have to remember that no one can live my life but me, and that means taking care of me. I've found that unless I do, I'm testy. Then I snap at Mom, and that creates guilt too.

So to have the best chance at patience and kindness, I do yoga and write, even if I have to get up early, stay up late, or take a day off from caregiving. And I ask for help. Support groups, friends, community and church organizations, and family are all willing to lend a hand, but they must be asked for specific tasks at specific time periods.

When Mom gave me her power of attorney, she was in her right mind, and she did not doubt my intent. She knew I would do what was best for her. That has not changed. When guilt looms, I remember this.

It is not pleasant to watch Mom lose her faculties and slowly slip away, but remembering and practicing loving intent brings self-forgiveness and peace. Sometimes there is no perfect solution for the problems the two of us face. I intend, however, to make things better for her. And I know I have, even if she can't always recognize it.

I continue to be guided by love, and let guilt wither, untended. ■

It's OKAY to Be Angry

By Rev. Kelly Isola

Caregiving is a complex journey that brings a flood of emotions including gratitude, frustration, compassion, sadness, guilt, and yes, anger and resentment.

Many of us have self-critical chatter that says, *I'm inadequate* or *I'm not enough* because we think we shouldn't get angry. Then when we condemn ourselves for getting angry, we wind up feeling guilty, and anger surfaces again for feeling angry in the first place. We become overwhelmed and oftentimes unable to forgive ourselves for how we are feeling.

We get angry at the illness and the raw emotions and powerlessness that emerge with illness. Anger surfaces when our role is not acknowledged and we don't have support from other family members. Caregiving invariably will require us to rearrange our lives, and we sometimes feel resentful because our lives have been hijacked. As caregivers, we find ourselves working with all of this, while simultaneously coping with our own grief as we lose the person we are caring for.

I've been a caregiver several times in my life and have noticed that the closer I was to the person, the more likely I was to get angry and become more resentful because this person I loved so deeply was leaving me. The two most important men in my life, my dad and my beloved, died within two years of each other, and I was their caregiver for many months prior to their deaths. One relationship was riddled with conflict, the other was not, yet in both cases anger and resentment were a part of the journey.

Throughout the years I have learned many practices to make peace with the anger that can emerge as a caregiver. I want to offer a few here in the hope that the caregiving relationship can bring you an added sense of closeness, perhaps a healing, or an experience of sacredness you might never have known otherwise.

First, it is imperative to admit when you are feeling angry. It's normal and natural to feel it. We are human, and no one can balance all dimensions of life seamlessly. Regardless of the anger and circumstances in the moment, you are enough and your presence here matters. How you feel does not define you, nor can it change the fact that you were created inherently good.

Engage in self-compassion, which has three components: mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness.

Mindfulness is about focus. When anger arises, pay attention to the task at hand, even if it's unpleasant. For instance, if you find your

mental chatter saying, *I hate doing this! Why can't I get some help?* or *This is awful! I don't want to do this every morning!* shift your attention to the moment-to-moment action of the task itself. *So now I'll put this here … then I put that there. Next, I'll do this …* If you focus your attention on the little pieces of the task, it relaxes the brain, like unclenching your fist. You will breathe more freely and deeply, releasing the anger.

Common humanity is remembering you are not alone. Suffering is a part of everyone's life; it just looks different for each of us. We all struggle. Make little index cards that say things like, "Other people feel this way," or "I know I am not alone," and put them in cupboards and drawers or on a mirror so you won't forget. When you feel angry, close your eyes and put your hands on your heart. Feel your gentle, warm hands touching each other as a physical reminder of our common humanity. You are not alone.

Finally, practice *kindness.* Ask yourself, *What are the words of kindness I need to hear?* What would you say to your best friend? Something like, "I know this is really hard, and it makes sense you are feeling angry. I'm here for you." Now say it to yourself. Create a few phrases of kindness that resonate with you, words you can speak to your body, your mind, and your soul.

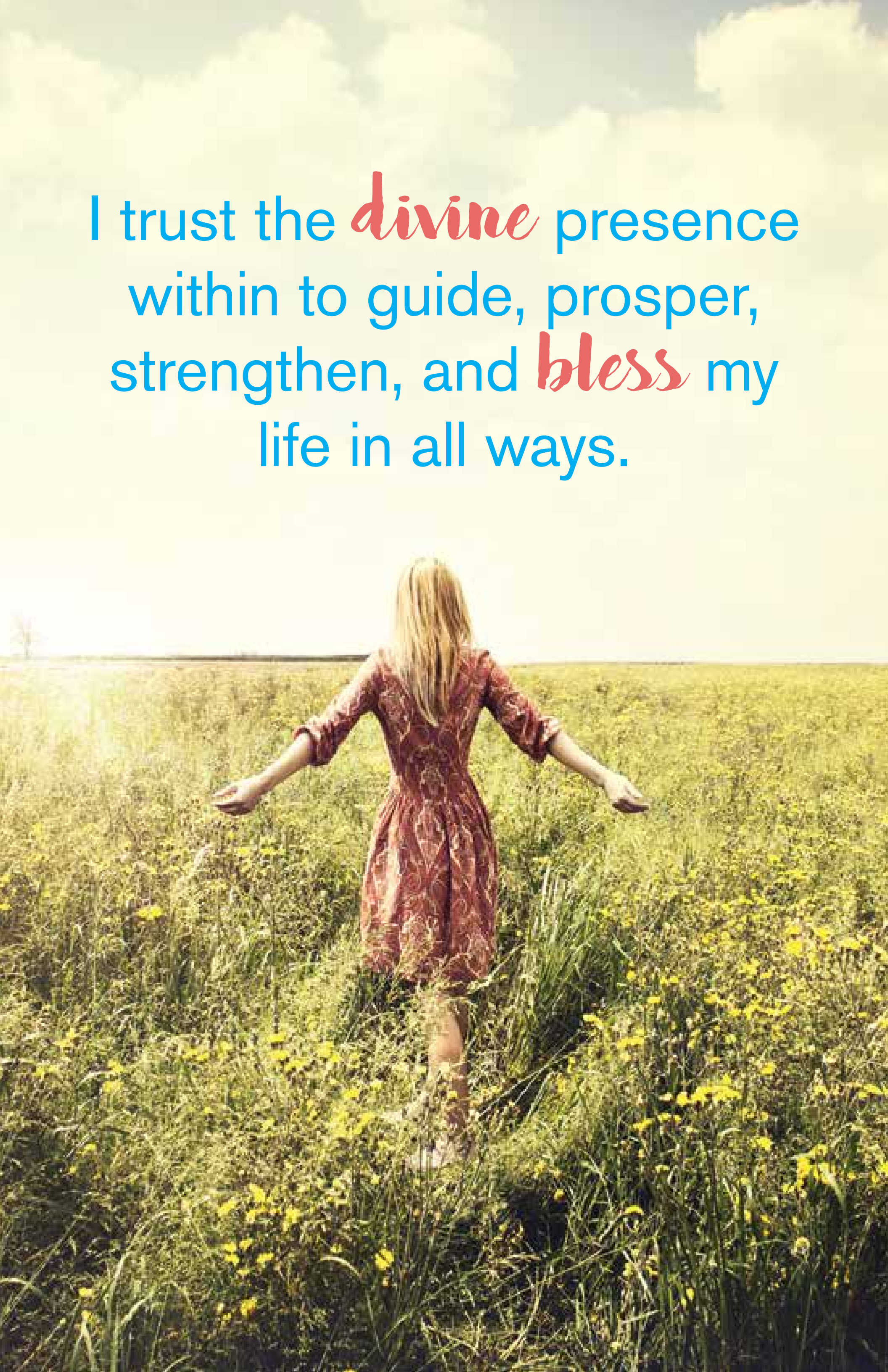
Take a self-compassion break often. It doesn't take a lot of time, but it will allow you to keep your heart open, and help you nurture and care for yourself, which in turn helps you care for others. ■

Read more from Rev. Kelly Isola at *kellyisola.com*.

The Caring Cup

By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman

I breathe
Fill the cup …
Walk down the path
Hear a lovely tune
Breathe in fresh air
Fragrant perfume.
Then
Long hours I
Sit by the bed
Hold the hand
Nurse the pain
Try to
Make it go away again.
Dank and stale
Tired and frail
How can I care more?
Empty the cup …
Wring a washcloth
Hold the place …
Consummate care.
Exhausted
Exhaled empty air
Then
Step away again
Breathe again
Find a prayer
In a quiet place
Calm the space
In a state of grace
Breathe
Filled again …
To go on again
To pour out
More love again.



I trust the *divine* presence within to guide, prosper, strengthen, and *bless* my life in all ways.

Prayers From Silent Unity

- Regardless of the situation I am facing at this time, I know that God is with me. God is my safety, my security, and my assurance of divine order and peace. I trust the divine presence within to guide, prosper, strengthen, and bless my life in all ways.

- As I center myself in the awareness of the presence of God, I allow peace to enfold and surround me. I know that the light and love of God are flowing and expressing in, as, and through every part of me right now. All circumstances unfold perfectly for my highest good, and I go forward to live life abundantly.

- God is forever within me as the power that directs my life and circumstances, the love that gives me peace and health, and the light that guides me to a sense of well-being. My every need is abundantly met.

- I acknowledge the sacred presence of God within me. I have the peace to keep me patient and positive guidance to show me the way through every challenge in my life, restoring me to wholeness in body, mind, and spirit.

- From the center of my being, the love of God flows into my life and circumstances, guiding and harmonizing all that concerns me.

- The peace of God wells up within me. No troubling thoughts or disquieting feelings disturb this indescribable feeling of tranquility. I am serene. I am relaxed. I am one with the pure peace of God.

- All things are working together for good, and I am working with them in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.

- My mind is poised and my heart is serene, for I know the spirit of God works in all, and through all, to bring forth great possibilities in my life. ■

10 Things
Not to Say
to a Caregiver

By Rev. Carla McClellan

Caregiving is definitely sacred work. It calls for heart-centered service and the ability to be completely present to the needs of another.

Most of us want to appreciate and encourage caregivers during difficult times and to offer some encouragement. We want them to know we notice what is going on. But often we don’t know what to say, and we don’t want to risk saying something that might hurt their feelings or somehow offend.

Having been a caregiver most of my life, and after coaching caregivers for years, let me share with you our top 10 comments *not* to say:

1. Do not comment on how tired they look. Do not focus on their appearance but on the importance of what they are doing.

2. Do not say, “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle.” Why? Because the caregivers might feel guilty if they are struggling and wondering whether they can, in fact, handle it.

3. Don’t ask what you can do to support them. It’s just one more item on their to-do list if they have to think of some way for you to help. Instead, say what you are willing to do—make a meal, run to the grocery store, give them a day to have some time off.

4. Do not say their situation is “for the best.” You don’t know what is best, but you can offer some practical help, which actually is more encouraging and needed.

5. Do not say nothing. This is a time in which silence is not golden. Please encourage friends and family to ask the powerful question, “How is your loved one doing?”

6. Do not say there is a blessing somewhere here. Better to say, “How are you doing?” Then just listen.

7. Do not say, “I don’t know how you do it.” This implies you think what they are doing is something awful and hard. It’s okay to say, “This must be hard for you.” You can admire how courageous they are.

8. Do not say, “I know how you feel.” You don’t know because each situation is unique. Let them tell you how they feel.

9. Do not say, “This won’t last forever.” Those words can trigger grieving for the loss, and the loss will be painful whenever it comes.

10. Do not share your stories with them. They are handling all they can.

Actions speak louder than words. Ask whether they would like a hug; most of us appreciate a hug in difficult times. Bring them a treat, vacuum a room, do the laundry, wash the dishes, say which day you will bring a meal.

I promise you if you do these things, the caregiver will be touched and grateful. You will have accomplished what is being called for, and you will be an angel to them. ■

GIVING THANKS for CAREGIVERS

I open my heart to those who give comfort and care.

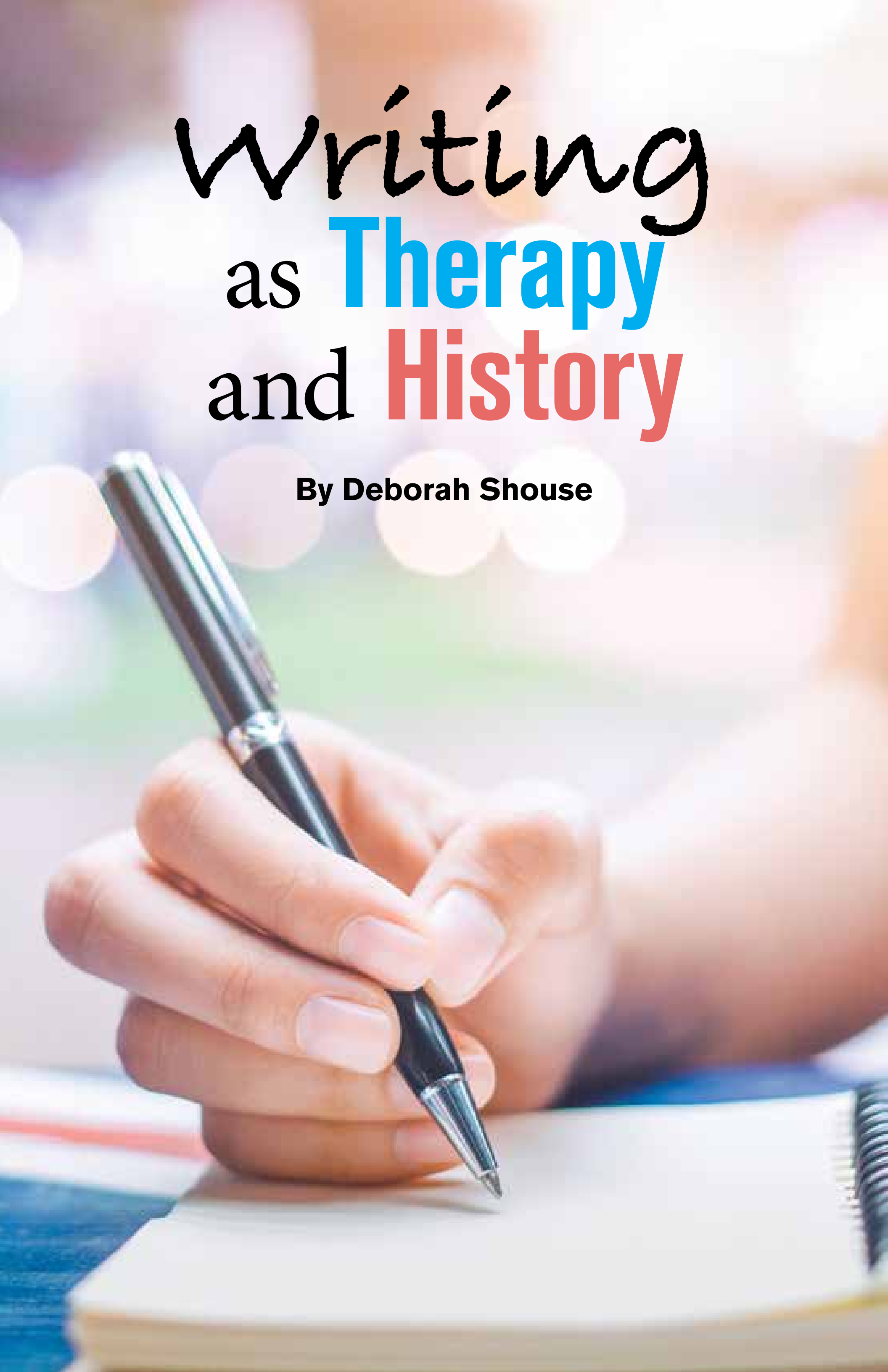
Today I express gratitude for those who, out of necessity, find themselves caring for others. In prayer, I appreciate all caregivers, grateful that their loving service makes life sweeter and better for those they serve. Their healing touch soothes, their emotional comfort heals, their prayerful support shines great light for those who need it.

Everyone can be a caregiver to the world community by expressing tender care and mercy each day in every word and action. I may have no idea of the difficulties that someone may be going through, but my one act of kindness may provide a lifeline for that person going forward. As I care for others, I become one in purpose with all who are giving from their hearts of goodwill.

This message originally appeared in *Daily Word*® in 2017. Read more at *dailyword.com*.

Writing as Therapy and History

By Deborah Shouse



My mother's Alzheimer's disease drove me to write. My writing helped me understand the deep spiritual gifts and blessings in dealing with dementia. Sharing my stories connected me with other caregivers, and that sense of community expanded my spiritual journey.

When I initially realized the depth of my mother's memory loss, I was shattered with grief. In the early days, my reaction was:

- Visit with Mom.
- Drive home, wiping tears from my cheeks.
- Stumble into the house, walk into a chair or table, and misplace my car keys.
- Sit at the dining room table and stare numbly into space.

One day, during the "staring numbly" phase, my partner Ron said, "Are you writing down your feelings?" It was a smart and sensible thing to say; the sort of suggestion I might make to him in a crisis. I was, after all, a writer.

"I don't feel like writing," I said.

But his words stayed with me. The next day, I slightly altered my behavior.

- Visit with Mom.
- Drive home, wiping tears from my cheeks.

- Stumble into the house, walk into a chair or table, and misplace my car keys.

- Sit at the dining room table and write numbly for 20 minutes.

For weeks, I wrote and wrote, pouring out my fears, anger, confusion, and grief. After doing this for more than a month, I read through my notes and noticed how interesting my exchanges with Mom were—we were explorers on a wild inner trek.

I started documenting our time together, sometimes even scribbling notes during my visits. I wrote about the challenges, humor, and blessings. I wrote about my conversations with my father, with friends, family, and with the nurse's aides, the health care staff, and the social workers. As I wrote, I realized there was hope, promise, and energy in my new world.

Gradually, I shared my work with friends and family. As I read aloud to them, occasionally blotting my eyes, I realized I was chronicling my mom's last years and capturing part of our family history.

How do you take a challenging part of your life and bring it to the page? Here are a few simple tips:

Uncage Your Feelings. Give yourself time to feel your emotions, then let words flow onto the page. Capturing your feelings helps you understand the depth of what you're going through. For me, writing helped change my fear into curiosity.

Notice the Details. Write down the particulars and note simple, concrete facts. You are a researcher collecting data. That means everything, even the most mundane exchanges, can be interesting.

Uncover the True Story. Look for the universal meaning in your specific experience. What are the spiritual lessons? What are the uncharted gifts? How is the journey changing you? How will the reader change through reading your words?

Ask for Feedback. Read the story aloud, first to yourself, then to a trusted friend, and see how it sounds. What's working and what's missing? Read the story to several people, gathering feedback. Think about their advice and decide what is right for you.

The first time I read my essays to my parents, stories about our journey together, my voice trembled and my hands shook. When I managed to look up from the page, I saw my parents were both weeping. I was weeping. My father said, "I'm glad you're doing this. This is important." My mother said, "You're a good writer, darling."

But mainly I was a good daughter on an amazing spiritual journey, seeing beyond the challenges of the disease, seeking to celebrate my new relationship with my mother, trying to understand the true and deep lessons about love in the land of dementia, and hoping to inspire others to do the same. ■

Deborah Shouse's books are *Love in the Land of Dementia* and *Connecting in the Land of Dementia*. Read more at *dementiajourney.org*.

How THIS
Can I See
Differently?

By Rev. Dr. Paul Hasselbeck

After dealing with my diagnosis of HIV, caring for my father who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and serving as minister of pastoral care at a Unity church, I can definitively say: Caregiving and being cared for is not for the faint of heart!

At times, it downright stinks.

Attitudinal Healing helped me see things differently, which is an important step toward being better prepared to care for others. Learning and applying the principles of Attitudinal Healing were key components to my surviving a terminal diagnosis, caring for myself, and caring for others.

Attitudinal Healing is a practical application of *A Course in Miracles*, founded by Dr. Gerald Jampolsky as a way to provide free spiritual support to people facing illness, catastrophic events, loss, and life challenges. It is built on 12 principles:

1. The essence of our being is love.
2. Health is inner peace. Healing is letting go of fear.
3. Giving and receiving are the same.
4. We can let go of the past and the future.
5. Now is the only time there is and each instant is for giving.
6. We can learn to love ourselves and others by forgiving rather than judging.
7. We can become love-finders rather than faultfinders.
8. We can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.

9. We are students and teachers to each other.

10. We can focus on the whole of life rather than the fragments.

11. Since love is eternal, death need not be viewed as fearful.

12. We can always perceive others as either loving, or fearful and giving a call for help for love.

While each of them is useful for shifting caregivers' attitudes, let's focus on six of them.

The essence of our being is love.

Caregivers can sink into doubt, anger, resentment, and flat-out fear. These temporary states mask the awareness of love's presence. Knowing ourselves and others as love helps shift these negative attitudes. We need self-care based on self-love to be the best caregivers we can be.

We can let go of the past and the future.

Resentments are based on the past but are experienced in the present. Worry, fear, and doubt seem to be about the future but are experienced in the present. We let them all go in the present, increasing our awareness of our love essence.

We can learn to love ourselves and others by forgiving rather than judging.

As caregivers, it is easy to judge others and ourselves. Caregiving is more peaceful when we love ourselves and others by forgiving and offering grace in place of judgment and condemnation.

We can become love-finders rather than faultfinders.

Faultfinding gets in the way of inner peace. Judging, comparing, contrasting, evaluating, and categorizing seem natural. Since the core of our beingness is love, we can use those skills better to be love- and solution-finders.

We can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.

The events and demands of caregiving seem to be the cause of a whole range of negative, nonproductive thoughts and feelings. While there is a correlation between events and demands and how we respond or react, they do not actually cause our reaction. Each of us has absolute authority over our own minds. We live from the inside out. Our responses and reactions are caused by our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about events and demands. Therefore, we can choose and direct ourselves to be peaceful inside regardless of what is happening outside.

We can focus on the whole of life rather than the fragments.

As we care for others, our lives are full of details, to-do's, and have-to's. When we focus on these fragments, we lose sight of the whole of life. Focusing on the whole of life frees us from details so we experience the bigger picture.

There may be an Attitudinal Healing support group or center near you. Dr. Susan Trout's book, *To See Differently*, is a wonderful resource for learning and applying the principles of Attitudinal Healing to caregivers and those dealing with illness. ■

Read more about Attitudinal Healing at *ahinternational.org*.

Nine Ways to Lighten Up

By Deborah Shouse

I stopped having fun when my mother was diagnosed with dementia.

I didn't have time for fun because I had to spend every spare moment thinking about Mom, wondering how I could help her, talking to my dad, wondering how I could help him, and worrying about the future, including fretting over whether I, too, was losing my mind.

Then one day, I asked my mother what it was like, living in such confusion.

"I can't worry over it too much," she told me. "When I lose a thought or a word, I try to laugh and let it go."

I realized that's what I needed to do: Acknowledge that Mom had dementia, appreciate her, and then laugh and let go.

To help myself with the surrender and laughter aspects, I made a list of quick ways to inspire my own sense of creativity and playfulness. I'm still using this list.

1. **Give yourself a picture.**

Create a visual image for your week. This is a great thing to do on Sunday night or Monday morning. Think of how you want the week to feel and look and how you want to be.

Do you want to live the week with the abandon of a diver stepping off the high dive? Do you want to roller-skate through the week, listening to great music? Draw a picture or cut out a photo from a magazine. Working with an image helps you create your ideal week.

2. **Get literal with downtime.**

Each time you go home, make a point of putting something down, such as a purse, a sack of groceries, or a briefcase. Say to yourself, *When I put down this sack of groceries, I put down anything that might keep me from enjoying being here in my home.*

Saying this simple line helps you release grouchiness, tiredness, or other stuff that's bugging you.

3. Give someone a delightful surprise.

Think of an easy and unexpected way you can cheer someone on. Maybe your child needs a dollar under his pillow, regardless of the status of his teeth. Maybe your spouse needs a love note tucked into her briefcase. Maybe a coworker needs a bagel waiting on his desk.

4. Make instant art.

Create a three-minute collage. Think of something you'd like to do or someplace you'd like to visit. Then get an old catalogue or magazine, tear out appropriate pictures or words, and tape them on paper to make a mini collage.

Stick this collage in a place where you will see it often. Or put it in a self-addressed, stamped envelope and ask a friend to mail it to you within the next two months. These collages also make lovely birthday cards for friends.

5. Leave loose change for others to find.

Walk down the street and, every block or two, drop a dime, a nickel, or a quarter on the sidewalk. Imagine how people will smile and feel lucky when they discover these small treasures.

6. Trigger your reality.

Think of what you want more of in your life, such as a sense of surrender, more time for creative exploration, or more serenity. Then create visual cues that remind you of your quest.

A small white flag tucked into the corner of your desk signals you don't have to fight so often. For a creative jolt, make a cardboard letter B, attach it on a spring to your wall, reminding you to "B off the wall." A piece from an old puzzle taped to a map of your state reminds you to live in a "state" of peace.

7. Swing your feet.

Sit somewhere high, stare into space, and swing your feet. You'll get a delightful sense of freedom and irresponsibility. It's a relief, not always having your feet on the ground.

8. Bat a balloon.

Blow up a brightly colored balloon and bat it around. This is a great way to lighten up the energy. Do this alone in your office for a few minutes during that late afternoon draggy period. Or invite in a simpatico coworker and see how long you can keep the balloon up in the air.

9. Coax out your creativity.

Make a list of 10 fun and creative things you really want to do. Plan to do at least one of them.

Writing this article was on my "fun and creative" list. What's on yours? ■

Read more from Deborah Shouse at *dementiajourney.org*. This piece first appeared on *tinybuddha.com*.

The Wisdom of Myrtle Fillmore

The founders of the Unity spiritual movement, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, healed themselves of lifelong ailments using prayer and the creative power of thought. Myrtle later wrote extensively about healing, and she continually answered letters asking her to pray for the healing of others. These are some of her thoughts, previously unpublished, about how best to be of service. She cautioned against martyrdom and championed boundaries and self-care.

- "Now while it is a virtue to be always ready to help others, we must be sure that we are truly helping them, and not hindering them by allowing them to continue in the unwise habits that have brought them to lack."

- "Don't feel that you must open your hands and pass out everything that you have. Conservation is one of the rules of success. You must expect others to do their part. And everyone, no matter how many failures he has had, can do his part."

- "Do you demand of others that which you demand of yourself, that they use good judgment, and self-denial when necessary? Do you make them understand that God prospers those who do their part and that you expect them to do their part?"

- "There is a saying that 'God helps those who help themselves.' You are God's executive, and your indwelling Lord depends on you to make His glory manifest. Then be up and doing. Do the will of Him who sent you. In so doing you are not only helping yourself, you are helping others." ■

COMPLICATED GRIEF:

When Caregiving Finally Ends

By Rev. Chaz Wesley

Although a long-term illness affords us the opportunity to say our goodbyes, in the end, death is no less painful.

For caregivers who have witnessed their loved one’s slow deterioration in health and subsequent loss of independence, death can still feel traumatic. Not only have we lost someone important to us, but we might still carry the deluge of caregiving stressors such as burnout, isolation, and culpability. And we’ve lost one of our primary reasons for existing at this time.

Many caregivers have put personal goals and dreams aside, choosing instead the selfless task of providing constant companionship and compassion. Our everyday career duties may have been improving the quality of life for another while being robbed of our own energy and liveliness.

Remember these helpful coping tips regarding caregiver grief:

- **Grief is very real.** Pretending you aren't grieving accomplishes nothing. Give yourself permission to acknowledge, feel, and express your sorrow. You get no awards for being an emotional stoic. In fact, you’ll be healthier physically and emotionally if you allow yourself to grieve.

- **Grief doesn’t follow a predictable path.** It is as unique as your fingerprint.

- **Explore your “new normal.”** Caregivers often forget what “real life” is like because we have not nurtured some parts of ourselves while caring for our loved one. We feel displaced and often experiencing a true identity crisis.

- **Believe and hope for the future by caring for your spirit.** Be gentle with yourself by finding a meaningful way to mourn as well as filling yourself up with whatever feeds your soul.

> You might join a support group with others going through a similar experience or volunteer to raise awareness about the very illness on which you're now an expert.

The initial step of renewal after any loss is to acknowledge there must be time and space to allow and express your emotions. Our feelings can surprise us, whether it's anger or regret for letdowns and disappointments, to a case of the blahs—a numbness that often feels as if we are removed from our emotions completely.

An especially surprising, although common reaction in caregiver grief, is a feeling of relief. Relief that your loved one is now free from illness, and relief that you no longer must work so hard. A sense of guilt for feeling such relief often follows. Rest assured, each emotion from grief to relief is natural.

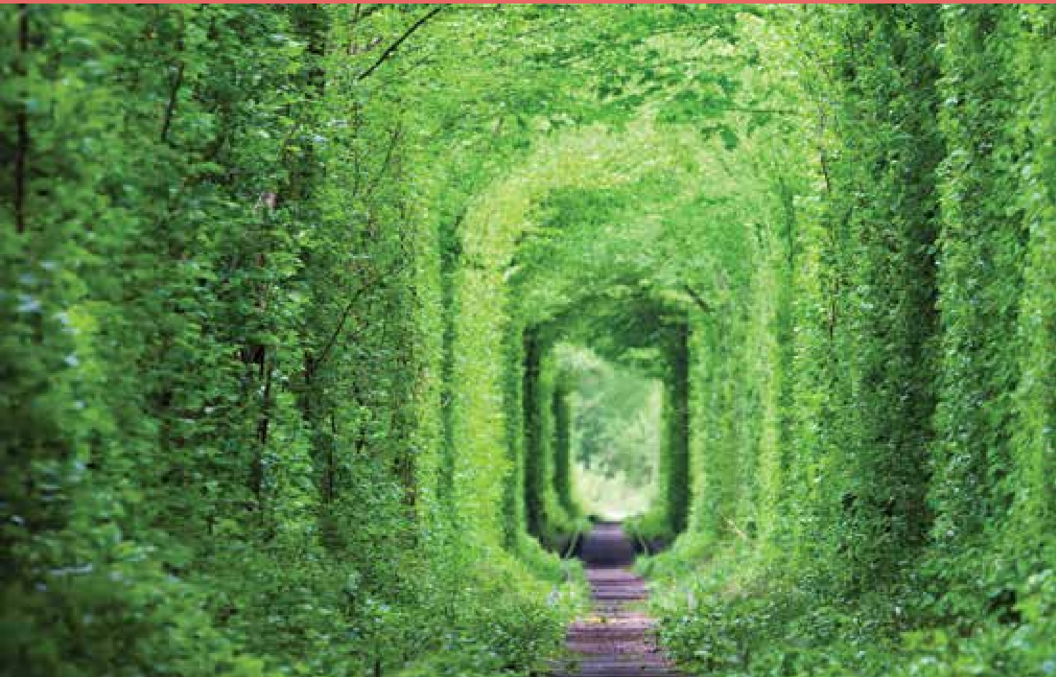
Without your loved one's physical presence and without the responsibility of caregiving, finding peace is now your only job. Your healing depends on your willingness to let go of who and what you once were, so you can move forward to who and what you are becoming.

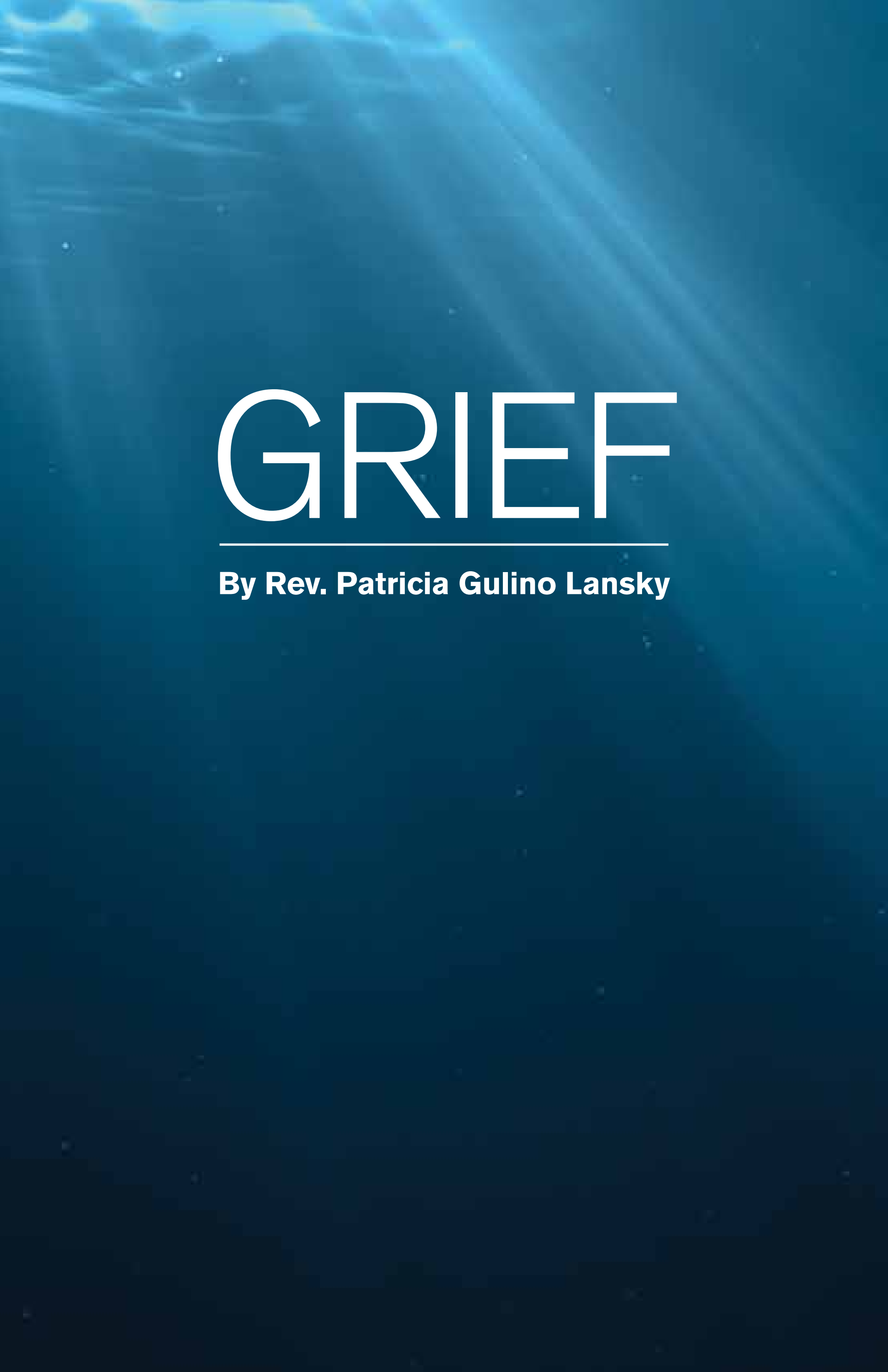
You cannot avoid the fact that change is demanded now. Pay attention and appreciate the lessons of truth and grace behind each wave of emotion, and remember that although there is no normal in grief, it is normal to grieve. By doing so, you give care to your loved ones and yourself by honoring a new season of life and basking in the healing for which you've prayed.

Read more at *chazwesley.com*.

"We often think of death as the supreme reality, or at least the one with great certainty. But death is only a tunnel through which we pass from SUNLIGHT to sunlight. Grief over death, too, is a tunnel, with LIGHT at both ends–something we pass through."

—Eric Butterworth, *In the Flow of Life*





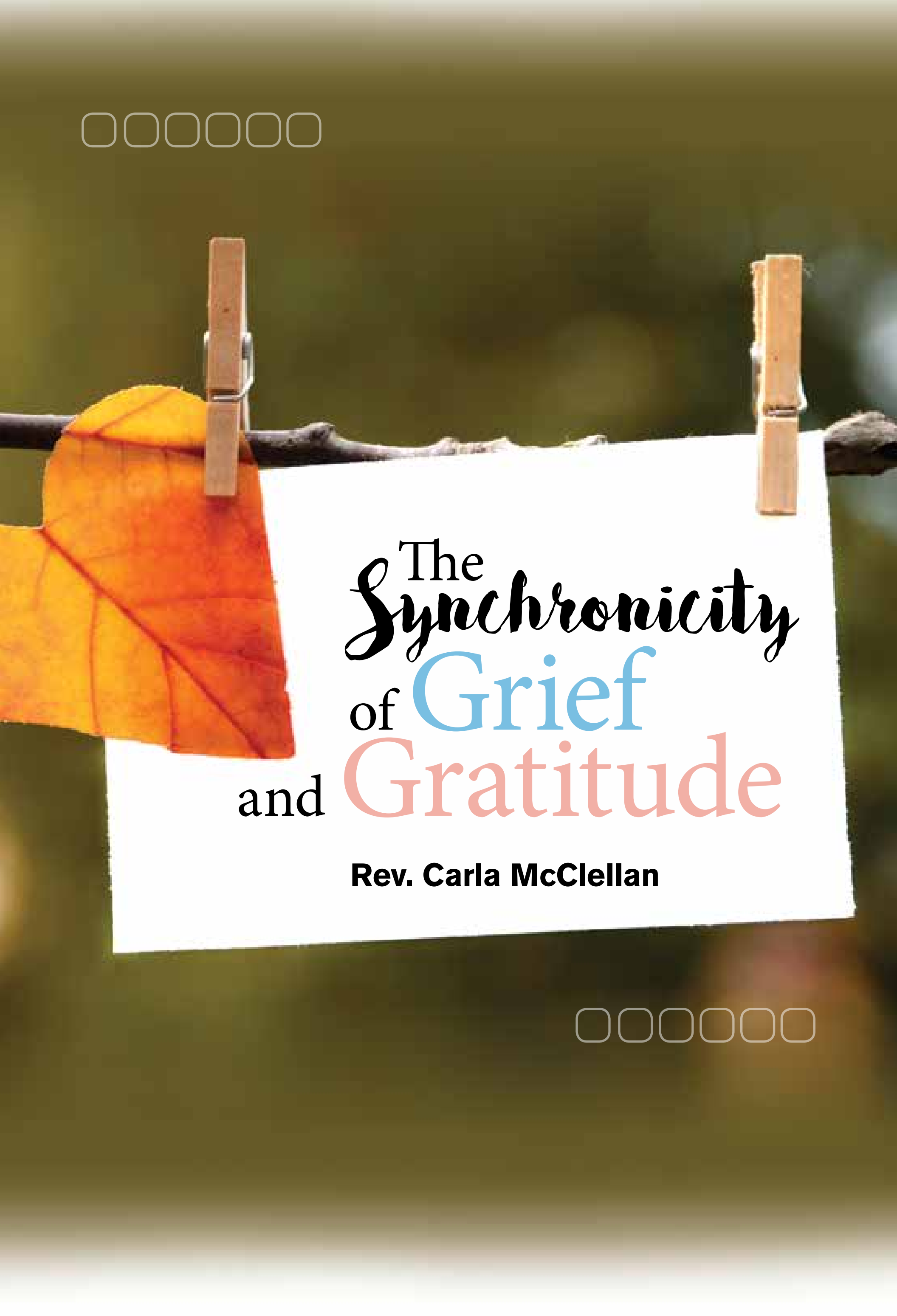
GRIEF

By Rev. Patricia Gulino Lansky

I wade through swirling white foam
laughing, jumping in dark, dense surf.
Catching a wave, instantly I am upside down,
not knowing which way is the surface,
which way holds my oxygen.
Indifferent, the wave rolls on,
tossing me like an eggbeater.
All alone, heart racing, fighting,
eyes wide seeing only black,
with no sense of movement at all.

Suddenly I'm dropped on the shore,
weighted down, graceless,
shaking with fear, lungs sucking air,
hot salt tears swallowed in sand,
safe, yet angry and embarrassed,
grateful, yet horrified.
It's not fair!
I have spent enough time in grief.
I want to get on with my life
without the dread of repeat performances.
When will it be
finished?

Everyone else is frolicking by the sea.
Once more, I am upside down in a black wave,
thrown down in wet sand
like a clump of tangled seaweed.
Will I ever again glide happy and carefree,
skim the surface with long, easy strokes?
Will I once more languish on my back seeing sky,
legs fluttering while slow, graceful arms
dip into the water,
arching up and back?



The Synchronicity of Grief and Gratitude

Rev. Carla McClellan

Grief and gratitude are interlocked in a unique way. Patricia Campbell Carlson at A Network for Grateful Living says it like this: “Grief and gratitude are kindred souls … each pointing to the beauty of what is transient and given to us by grace.”

Grief and gratitude are not simply attitudes of mind; they require us to accept gifts from each of them to know the joy of life.

Grief guides us to gratitude, and gratitude guides us to an understanding of peace and the healing power of love. Grief shows what is important to us personally, and gratitude gives us the energy to contribute to others what we have learned and to sit beside them in their grief.

Let me share a story of how grief and gratitude helped me heal. In 2004, within a six-month span, my mother, brother, and 27-year-old daughter died. This was my first year in ministry. Within the next year my brother Kent decided he needed time to grieve, so he didn’t want contact with my entire family. He completely cut himself and his wife out of our lives.

The grief those of us remaining were experiencing now rose to a new level. We were rejected with no explanation and no time frame for reconnection. We had once been a family that laughed, loved, and played together. Now it all seemed gone.

Kent rejected any invitation we sent, so the rest of us shared our grief and pain with each other. We generously and lovingly remembered those who had left our lives; we shared memories, laughter, and tears. We were so grateful for our parents—both of whom were Unity ministers—who taught us spiritual principles and taught us to look for the beauty in life even in the midst of drama and circumstances. We were raised to be grateful for all that life offers us. How could we be grateful for Kent? Eventually we realized our love for him was stronger than our anger at him. We wanted to see him once again.

In early 2015, I received a phone call from Canada that my father had a military life insurance policy no one had redeemed. My dad had passed 20 years earlier, and I was just hearing about this now? I took this as a sign from my parents that reconciliation had to happen right away. I had the perfect excuse to reconnect with Kent.

Even though we lived in the same city, I had never run across Kent. I finally found him in a local hospital—dying.

Our reunion in that hospital room was amazing. Kent beamed when he saw the family come in. He was able to hear how my brother had missed him and loved him. He shared with me that he could feel our mom sitting on the bed with us and he wasn't afraid. This message verified for me that love never dies, and we never die alone.

My brother and I stayed with Kent and his wife Michelle until he left his physical body. We laughed and loved each other again. My logical, practical brother shared with me how he saw beautiful angels all around, and let me know when my dad came for him. Michelle asked me to perform his memorial service. In the Silence preparing what to say, I knew exactly what Kent would want me to share: Life is precious; love is eternal; gratitude is our superpower, and we never die alone.

Read more from Rev. Carla McClellan at *lifecoachcarla.com*.

Affirmations for Caregivers

A loving Presence is with me,
right here and right now.
I live in peace, happiness,
and abundance.

All things before me are in divine order.

I live from peaceful, unlimited joy within,
expecting only the best.

God's perfect peace comforts
and soothes me now.

I am always enfolded in divine love.

I release any confusing thoughts
and act in confidence.

The indwelling spirit of God
powerfully guides me.

What *If* It's Hereditary?

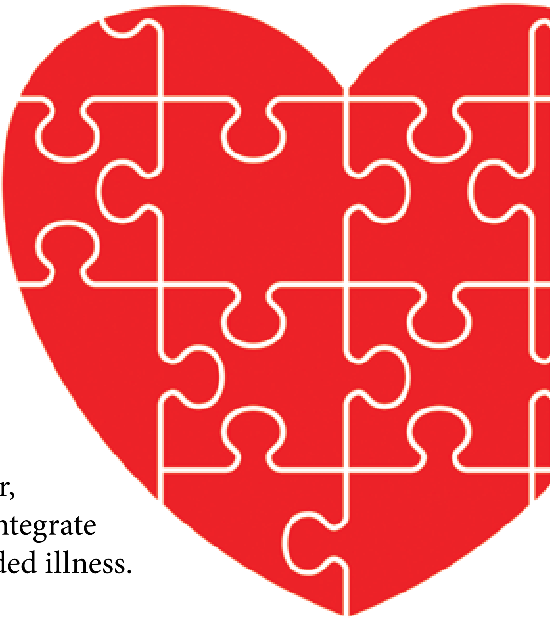
By Rev. Patricia Gulino Lansky

When it was Kevin's turn to tell the group why he decided to take my workshop about accepting death, Kevin blurted out, "My father had Alzheimer's and he died a terrible death. When I start to show signs of this disease, I will take my own life rather than go down the same path my father endured."

Why did Kevin absolutely believe his father's illness and death would also become his own scenario?

Well, there appear to be countless cases of evidence supporting the belief that we inherit our parents' illnesses, and that death often occurs at the same age when one of our parents died.

There are families in which all have heart disease. I know a mother and her four daughters who each had breast cancer. My own cousin was recently diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Our family reacted with disbelief and horror, having witnessed his father disintegrate for decades from the same dreaded illness.



Many adult children who become caregivers to their aging and dying parents watch their parents' process believing, consciously or unconsciously, this will be their future, and it often becomes so. In our search to make sense of it all, "Oh, it's hereditary" is usually offered.

How heavy it can be to live in the shadow of an illness that hasn't happened yet!

But is this true? Is a certain prescribed illness and death our true inheritance, or do these examples point to an unexplored, unquestioned paradigm in our world?

When we look at how we learn as children, we know the majority of our behaviors, values, and beliefs come directly from observing our parents. Some will remember mother-daughter identical dresses, or Junior standing on a stool at the bathroom sink, shaving foam from his baby face just like daddy does.

However, no one necessarily taught us to witness and attend to the pain and suffering of a loved one. We might feel powerless in the face of all we observe and frightened about death. Sometimes in despair, we might wish we could take on our loved one's pain or illness if it would alleviate their suffering.

As a culture, we are at the precipice of a new discovery—a new belief about true heredity. This awareness comes from the idea that thoughts are things, and in each thought, there is a creative, vibrational energy that can carve out new ways of being.

The sciences of epigenetics and biology prove powerfully that our biology and genes need not be our destiny. Scientists now know the gene can be altered by (1) environment, (2) triggers such as signals from diet, social interactions, physical activity, prayer, and mystical experiences, and (3) chance, as discussed in *The Gene* by Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee.

Quantum physics tells us we may have thought form was primary, when actually consciousness is primary in our world. As we rise into a higher level of consciousness, we can move past the obstacles of our lives. Our biology is influenced by our consciousness. A simple example is that when we think an embarrassing thought, our cheeks glow red. In that way, our thoughts and beliefs influence the physiology of one's whole life.

This idea might seem radical, that the source of your healing resides within you, in your ability to change thoughts, beliefs, and consciousness. The world might respond to such an idea the way people responded to the revolutionary concept that the earth is round, not flat. However, questioning beliefs is the first step in changing earlier paradigms.

As compassionate caregivers, we have the right to reframe any antiquated paradigm. We can repeat the denial: *I do not need to take on your illness.* We can affirm: *Dear one, as I care for you with all my love and support, I am free to live my life healthy, whole, and at peace.* Of course, our loved one would want this for us as well. ■

Rev. Patricia Gulino Lansky's book is *Accepting Death, Embracing Life: How Death Teaches Us to Live*.

Show Me the Good

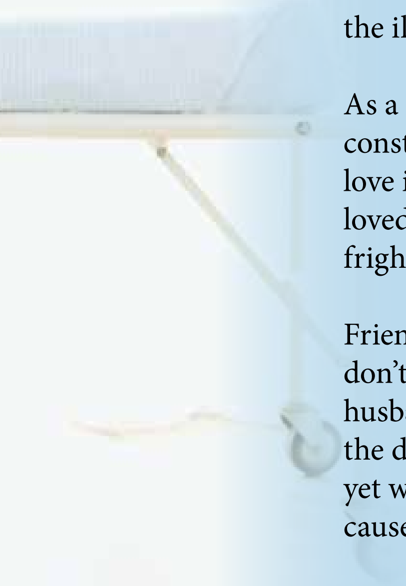
"The blessing? For the first time in my life, I felt unconditional love from my mother for myself. For the first time in my life, I had patience with myself and others. For the first time in my life, I learned, but more importantly felt compassion.

"I do feel it is necessary for us as caregivers to give thanks for this opportunity to make this trip with our loved ones. Not everyone gets this experience. Letting them know they are loved in every way is showing them God's love."

—A Caregiver

How to Be Truly Helpful

By Rev. Margo Ford



Receiving news that a loved one has a terminal illness is emotionally devastating. It's like being kicked in the stomach, unable to fill your lungs with air again—ever.

Living with the diagnosis becomes the new normal. Yet as the condition progresses, there is really almost nothing normal again—not for the ill person and not for you.

As a caregiver, each day is different, requiring constant insight, stamina, and unconditional love in meeting the ever-changing needs of your loved one. It often feels very lonely and very frightening.

Friends and family might wish to help but don't know what to say or do. In caring for my husband Ed, who lived only months following the diagnosis, I received much that was helpful, yet well-meaning folks sometimes unwittingly caused additional distress.

For instance, shortly after being told Ed had terminal cancer, a friend began describing the final days of her father's life. I was absolutely not ready to hear about death yet and had to ask her to please stop.

Visitors also sometimes shared detailed stories about people with similar cancer. I listened politely as they spoke, all the while wishing they would focus on something else—anything else, especially something uplifting.

People asked how Ed was doing, and I was grateful when they also asked how I was. Fortunately, there were several close friends with whom I knew I could share my honest feelings—my fears, my sadness, frustrations, and exhaustion. Knowing they would listen without judging me, no matter how I was feeling at any given moment, was a precious gift.

> What I appreciated most were friends who simply declared they would bring food or run the vacuum cleaner.

Friends sometimes asked, “What do you need?” At that moment, I usually couldn’t think of anything they could do. What I appreciated most were friends who simply declared they would bring food or run the vacuum cleaner. Others offered to stay with Ed so I could have a few hours of respite or take time to accomplish tasks outside the house. It was such a blessing when people could see what needed to be done and just did it.

When Ed made his transition, we held a meaningful celebration of life service a week later. Folks at the church created a beautiful meal, and I was surrounded by family and friends, many who came from great distances.

But then it was over—the caregiving, the daily routines, praying and meditating together with Ed every day, and I was alone. In many ways, this was the hardest part, especially knowing now this was the new normal.

The pain, grief, and loneliness were eased by friends who called, came by, or invited me to be with them at their homes and elsewhere for many months after Ed was no longer with me. They have my eternal gratitude.

Now that the experience is a few years behind me, let me offer some thoughts for friends and families who want to be truly helpful to a caregiver:

- Let the caregiver know (s)he and the ill person are in your thoughts and prayers, and be available just to listen without judgment or giving advice.

- Be aware of ways you obviously could help—provide food, help with housework, and so on—and just do it.

- Offer to bring something specific, but ask whether an alternative would be preferred.

- Provide normal conversation rather than focusing on the illness or details around it. Follow the caregiver's lead for topics of discussion.

- Be respectful of the caregiver's time; provide company without staying too long; call ahead to make sure it is a good time to visit.

- If the caregiver really doesn't want visitors, don't take it personally. Each person responds to illness differently.

- After the loved one's transition, be present for the caregiver for at least several weeks. Perhaps send little "Thinking of You" notes.

- During prayer and meditation, ask for guidance to know what is yours to do.

Blessings to all of you who are caregivers, and those who care for the caregivers. ■

What a Church COMMUNITY Learned About Caring

By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman

Sometimes people need to do things their own way. What friends and family can do is provide support so a loved one can keep living in an accustomed manner, as much as possible.

It allows joy to continue unbroken to the end.

Earl was a brilliant light of a man. He loved people, loved the railroad, and through a lifetime of “figuring it out,” he had learned to love God. He was so vital and alive that it was hard for him to let go. He stayed engaged until the end. He had things to do!

Saturday before he lay down to die, Earl insisted on attending one of his favorite activities at our church—the annual Circulation Day. He loved this day because the parking lot was filled with things—it looked like a ginormous garage sale—and everything was free.

Leaning on his cane, Earl stood feebly for hours, inching from one table full of goods to another, carefully focusing, poking, and picking out special things for other people. We could not get Earl to sit down.

Yet we knew he was going to have to. He was so incredibly fragile. That day as he stood in the parking lot, we knew he had a broken shoulder and broken ribs. Cancer had come back with a vengeance, making his bones as brittle as potato chips and his body frail and weak.

We asked ourselves how we could help. How could we serve at this time? And how could we support his wife Merry?

We discovered it was about loving, paying attention, and listening. We were vigilant. We stayed in touch. We prayed together. We took our cues from Merry and Earl.

It was important to affirm that Merry could do what she said she would. When she said, “I’m going to do this,” I said, “Yes, you are. How can I help?”

Earl said he wanted to do things his way. Merry promised him he could stay home and die in his bed. Amazingly, he lived more than a year longer than the doctors predicted.

Earl set himself to complete his creative projects, building dreamcatchers, wind chimes, and walking sticks. Most were donated to the church-building fund where he built a loving legacy and touched many lives.

During that time, he met with the minister, musicians, the mortuary, and with Merry to design his memorial service. He took an active part in comforting his family and friends and communicating his last thoughts. He read many Unity booklets. He talked out his questions and fears and shared his memories.

Until the day he finally sat down, Earl was useful and creative. Then he began to sleep. The times when he visited us became shorter. During a waking moment, I asked him if he knew where he was. He said, “Yes—somewhere else.”

Merry found comfort in Earl’s being able to be himself and do it his way. The hardest thing for her was getting enough sleep herself. She feared he would get up and fall. Yet she and Earl seemed to have faith that the end process would unfold as it should—and it did.

Merry and Earl gave each other a lifetime of joy and sharing. Today when many life processes are automated, compartmented, and formatted, they followed their spiritual guidance and supported each other with love, ease, and grace.

We learned about love and spiritual strength. They did it their way, and we are happy we could be there with them and support them as their spiritual community. ■

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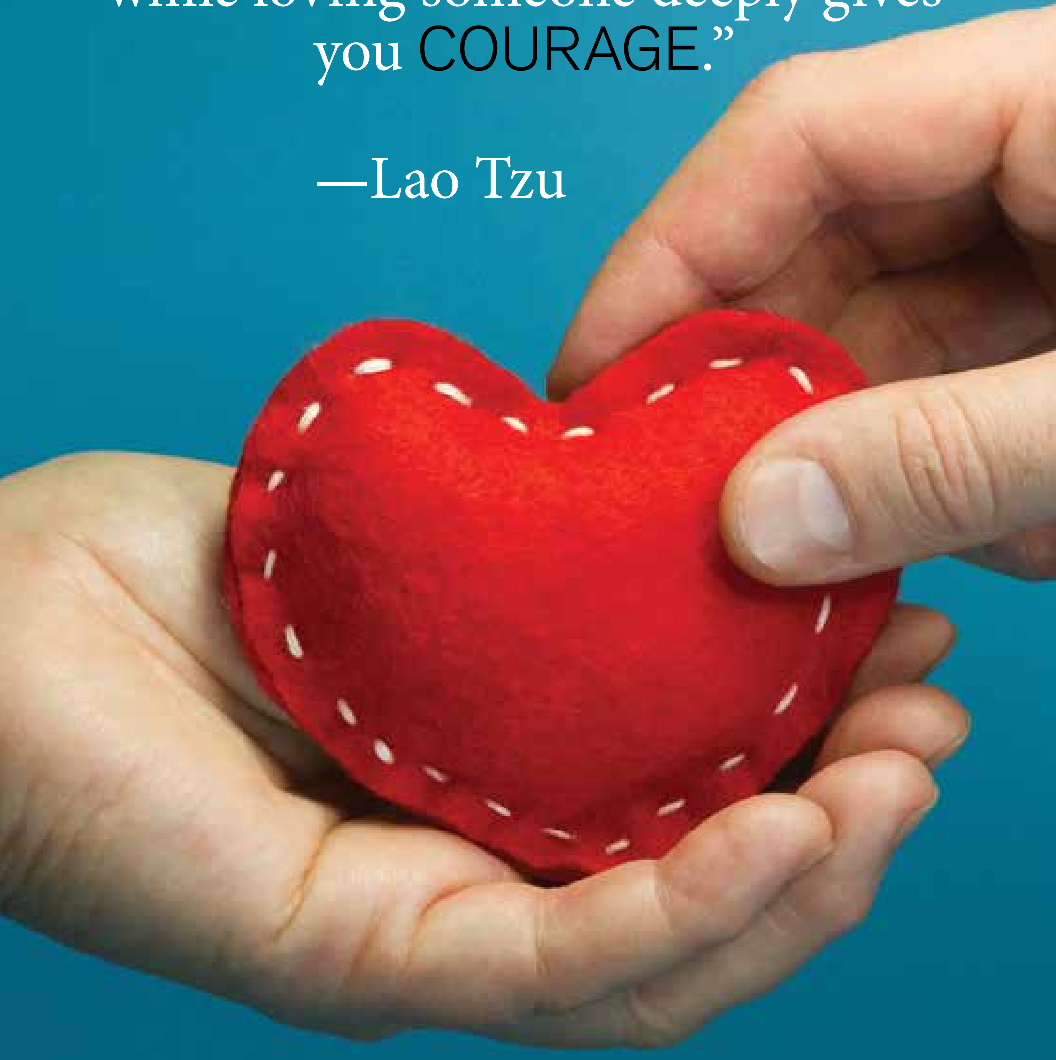
gives you strength,
while loving someone deeply gives
you COURAGE.”

—Lao Tzu



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