

The Jewish **Post & Opinion**

*Presenting a broad spectrum of
Jewish News and Opinions since 1935.*

This week I received phone calls from three different friends who, like me, have moved in with elderly parents in order to care for them. Even though this arrangement is the easiest for the parents, I realize it is usually impossible for most offspring because they are still raising children and/or grandchildren of their own. It would be very difficult to uproot their immediate families from their familiar surroundings, not to mention jobs, schools, and friends.

Two of the friends called on the same day to tell me the sad news that a parent had died. One of the two was David Kodicek. His father, Rudy Kodicek, who lived most of his life in Munster, Ind., was 96. He had been a subscriber to the *Jewish Post & Opinion* for more than 60 years. Rudy was active in and served as president of numerous Jewish community and Israel-related organizations.

David told me that he had moved down to Deerfield Beach, Fla., about 14 months ago to help his parents. Now that his father is gone, he must help his mother, Anne Kodicek, to cope with the loss of her husband of 74 years.

The other call came from a friend in Silver Spring, Md. She and her 9-year-old daughter moved in with her elderly mother a couple of years ago. She had e-mailed me recently explaining some of the very difficult daily challenges she was facing. Her mother's cancer had spread. More than once a day she had to change bandages that covered blisters all over her mother's body.

The third friend's elderly father had become dehydrated to the point of needing to be hospitalized. In the past she has talked to me about some of her challenges caring for him. One of them was that some days he sits around the house doing nothing. She wonders if she should persuade him to get out more and do things with friends.

These kinds of challenges for caregivers, along with sleep loss, lacking time for oneself, having to make difficult decisions and deal with other family members whose opinions differ with theirs, are the most well known. However, there is a positive side to such work.

Some of the beneficial results were listed in an issue of, *The Outstretched Arm*, published by the National Center for Jewish Healing, a Jewish Connections program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Inc. in cooperation with the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA). The winter 2002-03 issue is on "Caregiving and Caregivers." It is devoted to those who share, or have the full responsibility for, the on-going care of a family member or loved one.

The issue lists four unexpected gifts that sometimes arise from this role. They are:

1. Discovering that you have the strength and power to make a difference.
2. Learning that you can survive the most difficult of trials.
3. That you can reach out and find or even create a caring and supportive community.
4. Understanding that hope, gratitude, and joy can exist even in the most difficult situations.

From my experience caring for my mother and father, I would add three more:

5. Hearing words of appreciation, gratitude, and love more often than ever before.
6. Healing/Resolving long-standing relationship conflicts.
7. Learning to be very thankful for the simple things and basic functions that we take for granted, such as the ability to eat solid food, to use the bathroom unassisted, to shower and shampoo our hair.

I wanted to share this list with my friends and inquire if they have gained any of them for their efforts. Even if only one of these seven benefits were attained, it would make the job worthwhile.

Jennie Cohen 3-16-05

Last week I wrote about unexpected gifts that come from caregiving, some of which were listed in the winter 2002-03 issue of *The Outstretched Arm*. This particular issue was devoted to those who share in, or have the full responsibility for, the on-going care of a family member or loved one.

This newsletter is published by the National Center for Jewish Healing, a Jewish Connections program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Inc. in cooperation with the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA).

One of the articles in this issue suggested that caregivers compose their own prayers, because things can change so quickly that one hardly has a chance to recognize and acknowledge their feelings. Prayers from the heart can help one to articulate these moments. A guideline is given showing how to go about doing this, and then a beautiful example is given.

This process could be beneficial not only for caregivers, but also for mourners and anyone facing difficult challenges. This includes taking care of young children which, like caregiving, can be so unpredictable, requiring loads of patience and faith that the actions one is taking will be the best for the child. The following is what was written in the article.

- 1) Begin by addressing your prayer. Call that address a name which is comfortable to you. Here are some examples: Source of Life, Creator, Merciful One, Holy One, Shekhinah.
- 2) State what is going on at this moment. Be honest. State what you feel about the situation right now. Note any changes or transitions you may be facing. Do not be afraid to express anger and other negative feelings.
- 3) Call out for what you want and/or need or hope. You can use words like: help me; guide me; let me; may I....

4) If you feel you can, try to include in your prayer an expression of gratitude, naming the good that is present in your life.

Source of All Creation,

Today has been so hard. The doctors have called with more bad news.

When hope is gone, where can I find comfort? Where can I find You in this dark time?

Help me to find the strength to face what is ahead.

Give me the wisdom to live each remaining moment with my loved one to the fullest.

Shelter my whole family beneath your wings of peace.

I am grateful for all the wonderful times we have had. May those memories continue to comfort and inspire us.

Amen.

Jennie Cohen 3/23/05

Copyright © 2011 The Jewish Post & Opinion. All Rights Reserved