



February, 2015



The Delightful Dozen

1. When I feel I am imperfect, I will remember that guilt is not an option, as long as I know I did the best I could with the knowledge I had.
2. I will find time alone for myself, even though that seems impossible. That may mean asking for help from people I've never considered.
3. I will say no to requests for my time when I know I can't do more than I am already doing, no matter how deserving the person or agency.
4. I will remember that family members and friends who are not care receivers deserve some of my time, which may mean a little less time for the care receiver.
5. I will carry through with my own health care appointments and screenings, including dental and eyes.
6. I will find a way to monitor my own energy levels so I can renew myself before I hit "exhaustion and burnout."
7. I will remember that getting advice from agencies such as the National Family Caregivers Support Program is a sign of strength, not weakness.
8. I will remember that my care receiver didn't choose the illness or disability that he or she is living with.
9. I will remember that I didn't choose this life for him or her, either, so I won't be a martyr to that person's illness.
10. I will remember that taking care of my own needs isn't selfish. Statistics show that 30 percent or more of the caregivers die before those they care for. Taking care of myself is necessary for everyone.
11. I will get appropriate help for myself if depression or other mental health issues become apparent to friends and family.
12. I will be open to alternative ways of caring for myself. This can include massage, aroma therapy (lavender or another relaxing scent sprinkled on a pillow or in a soothing bath) and/or some form of meditation. Meditation, from quiet time outdoors, reading inspirational material or sitting quietly, breathing deeply and clearing the mind have been shown in studies to improve mental and physical health.



Is It Time to Stop Driving?

Some people are able to continue driving in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, but it requires ongoing evaluation to ensure safety. Here are some tips from the Alzheimer's Association that it may be time to stop driving:

- Forgetting how to locate familiar places
- Failing to observe traffic signs
- Making slow or poor decisions in traffic
- Driving at an inappropriate speed
- Becoming angry or confused while driving
- Hitting curbs
- Using poor lane control
- Making errors at intersections
- Confusing the brake and gas pedals
- Returning from a routine drive later than usual
- Forgetting the destination you are driving to during the trip

The Alzheimer's Association also provides example driving contracts and local evaluation specialists. For more information on dementia and driving, visit www.alz.org/driving.



Feel at Peace: Lose the Caregiver Guilt

By Carol Bradley Bursack

Scene one: The first call of the day from your mom you can handle.

"Oh, hi, Mom. Yes, it's a pretty day. Maybe you should walk down the hall and see Marian?"
You chat awhile and then say, "Bye. Love you, too."

Five minutes pass. You answer the ringing phone again.

"Hi, Mom. Yes, it's a pretty day. Are you going down to see Marian, like I suggested when you called earlier? (this seems polite and gentle). "Yeah, you did call earlier. You just forgot. No problem. Love you. Bye."

Six more minutes and the phone rings again. You see it on caller ID. And you ignore it. The rule of three has kicked in and you let it go. You know Mom's okay as you've already talked. She has heard your voice. It's okay to ignore the call. But still, you feel guilty.

Get used to it – the guilt I mean. The phone thing was just one of the games I had to play. When Mom would call the first time, I'd answer and see how she was doing. The second time, I'd gently try to let her know she had just called. The third time – well, sometimes it just seemed better to ignore it. I knew she would be embarrassed (or else think I was lying, depending on the day) if I told her she'd called three times within 15 minutes. It seemed kinder to just not answer the phone and let her forget that she called.

Guilt has a purpose in life. If we are mean, we should feel guilty. If we owe someone an apology, we should be big enough to do so. But guilt is a complicated emotion. We take on the expectations of our culture, our religion, our family. And then we take on the expectations of our toughest critic – ourselves. That committee that meets in our head tells us we are not doing this caregiving thing well enough. If we were "good" people, we'd just keep answering the phone endlessly until Mom found something else to do.

Why Caregivers Feel Guilty

Scene two: You're visiting Mom in her apartment and you've been there long enough to do laundry and clean up the bathroom and kitchen. You visit a bit. She is watching her favorite show on TV, which you hate, but she wants your company. You've got kids coming home, but not for awhile. Would a little white lie be okay? I mean, is it awful to want to have a half-hour between Mom and kids; a half-hour for yourself to regain some sense of tranquility?

You say to Mom, "Jenny's coming home, so I'd better get going. You enjoy your show and I'll check with you later."

Then you run out and jump in your car, drive home and grab a soda. You put up your feet and listen to the blessed silence. And feel guilty.

Again, get used to it. These are typical caregiver guilt feelings. You never will do it all so well that everyone is happy. You have to remember that you, too, are part of the equation. [Talk with other caregivers](#). When people feel safe, as they often do in a group or even chatting with one other caregiver, they let down their guard. They can admit that they do the same thing.

Much of the guilt caregivers feel is, like the above, rather minimal in nature. However, there are things that linger after death that can cause guilt as well – or perhaps just regret. It's hard to say which.

Start Forgiving Yourself to Stop Guilt

I remember a time when I wrote my grandma, who lived two hundred miles away, a letter once a week. She told me once how much those letters meant to her. But then – in my mind it was right after that letter from her telling me how much she loved our correspondence, but more likely it was a month or two – I went through a serious personal crisis. Her regular supply of letters from me dried up. Eventually I returned to writing her, but I had moved several states away and she had declined. I wasn't even there when she died. I feel guilt about that.

While I'm baring my soul, I'll say I wish I had known more about the need for physical touch later as my parents were dying. I was there. I was present. And yes, I did talk to them, touch them and keep them comfortable. However, as I've read more about physical death and the dying, as I've studied more hospice material, as I've talked with more people who have attended more deathbeds, I've found myself feeling guilty. I feel that I was less than perfect in how I handled their deaths.

Does my guilt over any of these things help anyone now? That is what I have to ask myself when I find my mind mulling over these old issues. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can change things. I didn't do anything terrible. I just didn't do my "caregiving" as perfectly as I'd like to have done. Wallowing in guilt helps no one.

My solution? Move forward. Tell people my stories. Tell them my successes and my failures. When I do that, it gives me hope. I think that maybe one more person will hold their loved one more, comb his or her hair, lotion his or her skin – just spend more time touching than they would have spent had I not told my story. And maybe there's someone reading this who has neglected writing a note to an elder because he or she is "too busy." Maybe that person will sit down and write. If that happens, then I've made my amends. It's all I can do, as I can't live my life over, nor do I want to.

Then I need to forgive myself for all of my imperfections. I am human. I do my best with what I have at the moment, and that has to be good enough. Guilt erodes the soul. Be done with it.

RECIPE CORNER



Chicken Enchiladas

- 2 12.5 oz cans of chicken breast
- 2 4 oz. cans diced green chiles
- 8 oz. Neufchatel cheese
- 1 10 oz. can mild green chile enchilada sauce

1 pack 8 count large whole wheat tortillas
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

Mix first three ingredients with a fork. Scoop ¼ cup mixture onto tortilla lengthwise. Roll tightly. Spray a 9 x 13 pan with oil to keep from sticking. Lay the rolled tortillas crossways. Pour the can of enchilada sauce evenly over the tortillas. Then top with the shredded cheese. Bake 350 for 20 minutes until hot and bubbly and cheese is melted.



Meditation for Caregivers

Psalm 13:1-2

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
And every day have sorrow in my heart?*

There are days when caregivers feel lonely, isolated, and forgotten. The first two verses of Psalm 13 may be your thoughts on some days. But read the last verses (Ps. 13:5-6) and see the praise and rejoicing that David writes:

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
My heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
For he has been good to me.*

It's not always for us to know all things. Trust is so important. We know God's love for us is unfailing and we feel comforted, loved, and at peace. God has been good to us, but when we're tired and doubts and fears cloud our brain, we slide a bit in our trust.

David was praying for relief from despair. We must continue to trust God even when he doesn't answer us immediately. Like David, we must affirm that we will trust God no matter how long we have to wait for his answer. When we feel impatient, remember David's steadfast faith in God's unfailing love.