

## So, Who Cares for the Caregiver?

by Kevin Harding

At our house, the caregiver is my wife, Kelly. We have been married for thirty-five years, twenty-two of them playing the role of caregiver. Having your spouse as the caregiver often comes with its own unique challenges. Caregiving can involve dealing with tremors, kidney issues, slow movement, rigid muscles, impaired posture and balance, loss of automatic movements, speech changes and unreadable writing. Parkinson's Disease manifests itself uniquely to anyone who has it. No two patients have the same symptoms nor are the buffet of medications the same.

In addition to addressing my needs, Kelly has other obligations of her own. It really should not be all about me. Unfortunately, it is I who have created her dual role. I have entered what is considered the late stages of Parkinson's Disease.

Over the years Kelly has read and gathered all kinds of resources to keep on top of the latest information available. We are convinced that staying positive and being proactive are two of the best ways to slow symptom deterioration and disease progression.

We are always poking fun at the situation we get ourselves into. You must have a sense of humor lest you dwell upon your attitude and ruin everyone's day.

Recently, my wife had planned a vacation week without any help. A week for our immediate families to visit her brother's house, go to the Creation Museum and the Ark in Kentucky. We also had some plans to stop by Springfield, Ohio. It just so happens that on the first night, I developed an infection from my kidney surgery from a few weeks ago, made even more complicated by the effects of my disease.

After being taken to the Emergency Room, I was admitted for three days, and Kelly drove back and forth from the hospital to her brother's house on limited sleep. When I was finally released, we cut our losses and left early for home.

This is just one of the many challenges that Kelly faces as a caregiver. Sometimes we both have emotional needs at the



same time, and we take the good with the bad. When I need a physician's office visit or a trip to the hospital, Kelly has always been my advocate. Since I have not been able to drive an automobile, she takes me to the specialists and calls for appointments and cancellations and so much more. Every week, she faithfully gets out all the medicine I will need. Then she fills each plastic day tab with just the right amount of dosage.

She has taken a lot of what responsibilities I might have had around the house which makes my life a little easier. I try to do most things on my own, but we have come to grips with what I can and cannot do.

We agree that we need more assistance with tasks that require heavy exertion. For example, mowing the lawn is now a major undergoing and daunting chore. I use the riding mower and then we both trim the lawn together. What took me a day to do now takes us two to three days. In the winter, we take turns using the snow blower and shoveling. We are a partnership. Kelly is still my confidante, my advisor and my best friend. We are in this together as a team.

Although neither of us were able to choose which part of the team.

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An Area Agency on Aging

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## Mission

To provide a comprehensive and coordinated system of services designed to promote the independence and dignity of older persons and their families in Muskegon, Oceana, and Ottawa – a mission compelling us to target older persons in greatest need but to advocate for all.



## Caregiver Support Staff

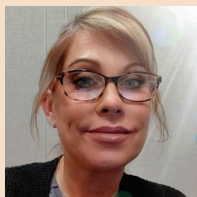


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*So, Who Cares for the Caregiver, continued from page 1*

She makes room for my slow movements and irrational behavior. Kelly realizes I talk too fast and slur my words together. Sometimes my short memory drives her nuts, but that could be part of the aging process. I am just so thankful that she keeps me informed. Sometimes I ask a question later in the day and I cannot remember the conversation a week later.

I know I take her for granted as I am no longer the person to whom she married. Kelly deserves much more than this. On the other hand, our vows thirty-five years ago said “in sickness and in health.”

Kelly never signed up for this role.

It requires a great deal of patience, love, leaving your comfort zone, and just about anything that I cannot do myself. No two caregivers have the same regimen, deal with the same side effects, and on and on it goes.

There is no way that Kelly could do this on her own. But God continues to use her in many capacities.

As the disease progresses, medication becomes less effective, and independence decreases to the stage where full time caregiving is required to deliver increasingly complex care. Parkinson’s disease interferes with physical and social functioning and affects the quality of life of the people with PD and their caregivers. Parkinson’s is a progressive disease where disease management is required to encompass the present state and plan for future changes.

Putting yourself between a vulnerable loved one and disaster is no easy task. It is hard to think clearly sometimes while amidst a seemingly relentless crisis. It takes humility to recognize that God cares and to let others help you. My message to caregivers is that you should not be too proud to seek help. I can only relate to a family member as the caregiver, but I am sure this applies to other organizations. You are a caring human being with feelings and emotions and being caregivers does not exempt you from needing emotional and other kinds of support.

Here is a short list of ways to keep you from caregiver burnout:

- The more you take time to take care of yourself, the more time you will have for what you need to do for yourselves and for others.
- Think of challenges as an opportunity to learn.
- Look for the best in others and yourself
- Learn healthy ways to manage your stress
- Have a good sense of humor ❖

### OFFERS 2 SUPPORT GROUP OPTIONS TO JOIN

**In-Person Support Group**

**AND**

**Virtual Support Group**

**Tanglewood  
PARK**

Wednesday Afternoons

1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

560 Seminole Rd., Muskegon

**zoom**

Friday Afternoons

1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

All sessions are drop in – you can attend all of them or choose the topics that interest you.

For more information about Caregiver Support Groups call **231-739-5858** or **800-442-0054**.



# Are You Caring for Someone From Far Away?

Check out these tips to make your job a little easier:

- 1 Learn What You Need to Know as a Long-Distance Caregiver.** Learn as much as you can about your family member or friend's illness, medicines, and resources that might be available. This can help you understand what is going on, anticipate the course of an illness, prevent crises, and assist in healthcare management.
- 2 Plan Your Visits with an Aging Parent or Relative.** Set realistic goals for visits. Talk to your family member or friend ahead of a visit and find out what they would like to do while you are there.
- 3 Activities to Do When Visiting an Aging Parent or Relative.** Try to make time to do things unrelated to being a caregiver. Finding time to do something simple and relaxing can help everyone and it builds more family memories.
- 4 Get in Touch, and Stay in Touch.** Many families schedule conference calls with doctors, the assisted living facility team, or nursing home staff so several relatives can participate in one conversation and get up-to-date information about a relative's health and progress.
- 5 Help an Aging Parent Stay in Contact from Afar.** Whether it's installing a private land line in a nursing home room or getting them a cell phone, staying connected with your aging parent can give everyone some peace of mind.
- 6 Organize Paperwork.** Organizing paperwork is one way that a long-distance caregiver can be a big help. Focus on gathering the essentials first and fill in the blanks as you go along.
- 7 Get Caregiving Training.** Whether you are the primary caregiver or a long-distance caregiver, getting some caregiving training can be helpful. For example, training can teach you how to safely move someone from a bed to a chair, how to help someone bathe, and basic first aid. Information about training opportunities is available online.
- 8 Gather a List of Resources in your Aging Relative's Neighborhood.** Searching the internet is a good way to start collecting resources. Check with a local library or senior center, Area Agency on Aging, or Eldercare Locator to find out about sources of help. ❖



## March's Website

[thecaregiversvoice.com](http://thecaregiversvoice.com)

## Irish Quotes, Greetings and Blessings

"Top o' the mornin' to ya!"

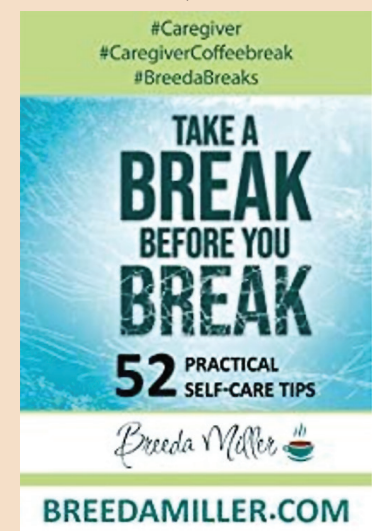
"Wishing you a pot o' gold and all the joy your heart can hold."

"May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back."

## This Month's Book

**Take A Break Before You Break** by Breeda Miller

This slim little book is filled with inspiration and practical ideas for anyone who needs a nudge to take better care of themselves. Concise and filled with good humor, this tip book is just what the doctor ordered for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed and exhausted and just too tired to think of something for themselves. Good things come in small packages and this book is just the ticket.



## Respite is a Gift



It's time to start making your list of those people you know you can count on to pitch in and support your respite program. Let them in on your plan and see what they will commit to doing - it can be anything from cooking dinner one day a week to watching your loved one while you go to the park. You'll be surprised at how little favors add up and how willing people are to help once you ask.

Remember, respite does not have to be found outside of the home or take the entire day. Having someone watch your loved one for a few hours while you luxuriate in a long hot bubble bath counts, too.

Accept the help others offer. Suggest specific things they can do for you and your loved one. This is rule #1 for a reason. No one is a Superhero. Don't feel like you're the only one that can take dad to the doctor or your wife to her physical therapist. REACH OUT and ask another family member—or close family friend—to assist you occasionally so you have time to yourself. Trust in their willingness to help. Many times, they do not know how to reach out and help unless you are able to communicate your needs.

Ask for and accept favors such as a friend staying with your loved one

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## Does Approach Matter?

*by Julie Bigham*

If you are providing care for a loved one living with Alzheimer's, it might seem that the word "no" has become a natural response to any question. "Ready for your shower?" "No." "Are you hungry?" "No." "Would you like to play a game?" "No." If you feel like you are living the "no," here are a few approaches that just might help you turn a "no" into a "yes."

First, let me say that the "no" is not your fault. While it can have something to do with approach, which we're going to address, I've found that a "no" response is pretty common when caring for someone living with Alzheimer's. You'll need an arsenal of approaches. If one doesn't work, pull out another. So be open to learning and being flexible, and don't take the "no" personally. You'll also need to respect the "no." Time may be short, but giving your loved one a little space may give them the chance to relax, and a calm environment is much more conducive to a "yes" response.

According to Dictionary.com, there are several ways to define the word approach, but a couple of them don't really seem like good approaches for caregiving.

Approach - v.

1. To make advances to; address
2. To begin work on; set about
3. To present, offer, or make a proposal or request

To "make advances to" sounds a bit like you're heading in to battle. You never want providing care to feel like war. To "begin work on; set about" seems to imply you're in charge, which can force your loved one into a "stand your ground" mode. If you start your caregiving tasks off following either of these two approaches, I would almost guarantee you'll get the "No."

But let's look at option 3. To "present, offer, or make a proposal or request". Now, I believe we're laying out the groundwork for a more successful outcome. Present the task, "It's almost lunch time." Offer choices, "Would you like your favorite soup today, or a chicken salad sandwich?" Propose or request, "Do you mind helping me in the kitchen?"

### Tip #1

Offering choices whenever possible gives your loved one back a little of the control they may feel they have lost. Asking for help offers them the opportunity to feel needed and sets them up for success.

### Tip #2

How you "present, offer, or make a proposal or request" is also important. Five elements that I have found helpful include: smiling, greeting warmly, communicating thoroughly, remaining positive, and being patient. Here is a step-by-step example you might try if preparing to give a bath:

Have a routine. Offer tasks like bathing at the same time/day of the week when possible.



When you approach, smile and make good eye contact as you explain the task.

Offer choices as you can. (Would you like a shower or a bath today? Would you like your bath now, or after the news? Do you want to try the new lavender soap, or your favorite rose scented soap?) Always give plenty of time for response and if too many questions seem to overwhelm your loved one, stick to those that require a simple yes/no response.

If they respond “no” respect that. Step back and try to redirect them away from the task at hand. Engage them in conversation about a favorite memory and give them time to relax. Then try again.

Offer a favorite game, TV show, or snack once the task is complete. (“Mom, today is bath day. I bought some of your favorite chocolate ice cream, would you like to have some after we’re finished with your bath?”)

### Tip #3

We convey a whole lot more through our non-verbal communications than our verbal. This quote is right on and a great tip for caregivers.

From Livestrong.com - “Nonverbal communication is made up of tone of voice, body language, gestures, eye contact, facial expression and proximity. These elements give deeper meaning and intention to your words. Tone includes the pitch, volume and inflection of your voice. Eye contact suggests interest.”

Always be sure that your verbal and non-verbal communication are sending the same message of positivity. Respect your loved one’s personal space and allow them the dignity of providing as much of their own care as possible. Making and holding good eye contact will help you know your loved one is tracking with you.

### Tip #4

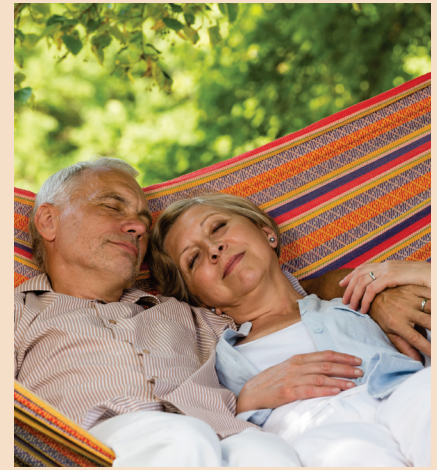
Now, we’ve looked at some of the approaches that I know do work. What about those that don’t? I have, unfortunately, witnessed examples of these too. Respect and dignity of others should always be most important in caregiving. Negative approaches like those listed below can cause fear, anger, anxiety, frustration, and a feeling that life is out of control, which leads to negative caregiving outcomes.

Approaches that won’t help overcome the “no”:

1. Arguing
2. Intimidating
3. Demanding
4. Physical force
5. Threats/guilt



Instead try redirection. Change the subject or direction to draw your loved one from a negative to a positive. Using information that you know about your loved one, you can offer a favorite candy, start a conversation about a cherished memory, play a game they love, or break out in dance to their favorite music. Redirection is 1-part knowledge of your loved one, 1-part creativity, and 1-part common sense. Okay, redirection is bribery at its finest. I’m not ashamed to say that I’ve used it, I’ve loved it and I’ve gotten good results with it! ❖



*Respite is a Gift, continued from page 4*

while you can get out of the house for a while, a dinner being cooked for you and your loved one once a week, an offer to go to the supermarket or drugstore in your place. Respite can be achieved daily with the smallest of kindnesses.

Know your limits! If you wear yourself out caring for your loved one, who will step in to care for the both of you? Remember, caring for yourself is not selfish, it’s the greatest gift you can give your loved one. ❖

## Checklist for lightening up

When you find yourself taken over by what seems to be a horrible problem, ask these questions:

- Is it really worth getting upset over?
- Is it worth upsetting others?
- Is it that important?
- Is it that bad?
- Is the situation irreparable?
- Is it really your problem?

Humor takes you to a higher place where you can view the world from a more relaxed, positive, creative, joyful, and balanced perspective. ❖

## Coaxing Spring

We are entering the time of year that some of us find hard to bear—and that is late winter.

The sparkle of the holidays end; family members go back to their cross-country locales, and so begins, for those of us in the colder parts of the country, the longest, starkest part of the year. Add a serious illness to that image, and it is no wonder that those afflicted, and their caregivers, feel especially overwhelmed and let down.

But even when caring for a loved one, there are things you can do to brighten long days. The following are simple ideas you can try, even if you are not feeling very energetic, to remind yourself that there is life and regeneration all around us.

### Coax Spring

Prepare a little windowsill garden of fragrant herbs. Or, cut a few prunings of your favorite foliage. A low-maintenance, mini-greenhouse project can result in new growth that's ready for summer planting.

### Sunshine in a Box

Light boxes have been used for the treatment of various mood conditions like depression, seasonal affect disorder, even jet lag. Though they tend to be expensive – ranging from \$150 to \$500 – experts recommend them for the treatment of the winter blahs. If you're unable to travel to a warmer climate to break up the winter months, this might be an option. Be sure to consult your doctor and research the variety of products before buying.

### Spring via Aromatherapy

Instead of the common 'comfort' scents such as cinnamon, apple pie

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## Healthy Eating Helps Seniors Stay Stronger and Live Longer

*by Rebecca Rushing, BSN, RN*

Sometimes getting older loved ones to eat balanced, nutritious meals can be challenging. For seniors who live in a setting where they receive meals prepared by an on-site team that provides healthy foods, it's easier to manage. But for seniors living alone, healthy eating can be something they don't pay much attention to.

Experts agree that a Mediterranean-style diet, with lots of vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains combined with reduced sugars and red meat can actually help stave off cognitive decline. It can also have other health benefits, and according to [Medicalnewstoday.com](http://Medicalnewstoday.com), many studies have been conducted that point to the long-term benefits of such a diet. An eight-year study of more than 5,200 adults aged 65 and older, combined with other similar studies for a total of 11,738 participants, showed that adherence to a Mediterranean diet showed a definitive improvement in life expectancy, even for those over age 65, according to the results published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.



Despite the benefits of a healthy diet, there are many reasons why seniors may not get as much nutrition as they need:

If they live alone and feel isolated, they may suffer from depression that leads to a lack of interest in things they used to enjoy, like food.

They may be on a tight budget and foods like fresh produce are too expensive, so they rely on cheaper, starch-filled foods that are easy to prepare.

They may have lost some of their sense of taste as they age, leading to loss of appetite if foods taste the same.

They may have more cognitive issues than they realize, and shopping for and preparing foods have become too difficult for their abilities.

There may be something medically wrong, and a visit to their primary care physician could help pinpoint why they are not interested in food.

While seniors who are less active need to eat fewer calories than they did when they were more active, getting the right nutrients in the right proportions makes a big difference. If you are a care provider for an older loved one, here are some tips on how you can help make sure they are getting nutritionally balanced meals. (Make sure to check with their primary care physician and discuss any dietary changes before implementing.)

Create nutritionally balanced meals. Most Mediterranean diet websites suggest two to three servings of fruits and vegetables a day. They can be spread out or served as side dishes. For protein, try for three servings of fish or seafood and



three servings of legumes each week. One weekly serving of nuts or seeds rounds it out, but these are high in calories, so keep that in mind. Add some pasta and red tomato sauces twice a week with olive oil and garlic. Try eating just two main meals a day while seated at a table, and snack according to the plan.

Make sure seniors are provided with colorful vegetables. The more color the better, and by offering different colors, seniors may be more inclined to try them to vary their diet. Taste buds change over time, so it might be the perfect time to add something different into a typical green bean or salad green side dish.

Remember not to overcook vegetables for better taste. Sometimes people overcook vegetables to make them easier to chew for seniors, but overcooking also makes vegetables lose nutritional value, mutes their taste, and makes vegetables mushy and less palatable.

Introduce colorful fruits that are easy to eat. Cut up papaya, mango, orange slices, grapes, cherries, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and other colorful fruits into small enough pieces to be easy, nutritious snack foods for seniors.

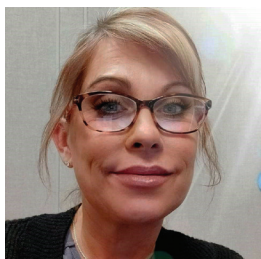
Replace red meat with fish or white meats. Fish is a great food for seniors because it's good for their health, it is simple to prepare and easier to chew than a big serving of red meat, such as a large steak. White meat chicken or turkey can be substituted for red meat and as a change from fish dishes.

Reduce snacks or meals that include lots of sugar or butter. Try and steer clear of pastries, sugary beverages, cookies, donuts, and the like. Also steer clear of fried foods and snack foods like potato chips.

The National Council on Aging offers an infographic with links to many helpful websites for seniors who are dealing with things like food insecurity or who are unsure of what a healthy plate of food should contain. Also, there are food delivery services that deliver nutritional meals right to their doorsteps. Take advantage of these resources to help you manage your loved one's diet, and possibly increase their chances of living a long, fit, and healthy life, even if they start a healthy diet after age 65. ❖

## Welcome New Caregiver Support Staff

*Paula Kolberg, Caregiver Support Specialist*



“I was born and raised in Muskegon, MI. I currently live in Twin Lake. I have three children and three grandchildren. I started my career as a CNA doing homecare at North Ottawa Community Hospital in 1999. After that I became a Hospice CHPNA (Certified Hospice and Palliative Nursing Assistant) in 2001. I did the homecare program of it for 18 years and then transitioned to the inpatient unit for the remainder of the time I was there.

“I decided late last year that I needed a career change. I have always enjoyed working with the elderly population and knew I had to have that in some form of a new career. I'm very excited to be at Senior Resources and look forward to helping all the caregivers I'm working with navigate the difficult task of caregiving.” ❖

*Coaxing Spring, continued from page 6*

and vanilla, why not infuse the air with the smells of summertime? Coconut, citrus, lilac, cucumber and melon can remind us of the beach or backyard. (I'm still waiting for a candle that smells like grass clippings.)

### Our Feathered Friends

Install a bird feeder or hang suet balls from a tree or similar spot, preferably near a window that you can see out easily. The most basic “suet” ball is a pinecone slathered in peanut butter and rolled in birdseed. Before long, the winter birds will congregate and entertain with their lively spirit and cheerful song. Note: Invest in that squirrel-proof feeder – the birds will thank you with their frequent presence.



Another option is to change your view of winter altogether. Living in colder regions of the country is to be blessed with a dramatic change of seasons; and when you decide to, you can find beauty in the soft snowflakes, bare branches on a canvas of white, or the good fortune of a cozy house on a winter's evening. You can begin to see how this seasonal cycle parallels your own experience, and how this quiet, barren period is promise of an exuberant springtime.

*Excerpted from article by Jennifer Cleveland, Today's Caregiver*

# Saint Patrick's Day

*From Wikipedia*

**Official name:** Saint Patrick's Day

**Also called:**

- Feast of Saint Patrick
- Lá Fhéile Pádraig
- Patrick's Day
- (St) Paddy's Day
- (St) Patty's Day

**Observed by:**

- Irish people and people of Irish descent
- Catholic Church
- Anglican Communion
- Eastern Orthodox Church
- Lutheran Church

**Type:** Ethnic, national, Christian

**Significance:** Feast day of Saint Patrick, commemoration of the arrival of Christianity in Ireland



**Celebrations:**

- Attending parades and a céilí
- Wearing green and shamrocks
- Drinking Irish beer and Irish whiskey

**Observances:** Attending mass or service

**Date:** 17 March

**Next time:** 17 March 2022

**Frequency:** Annual

*Happy Saint Patrick's Day from Senior Resources of West Michigan*

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