

Being an emotional caregiver has its challenges



Senior Beat
Carol Higgins Taylor

My mother just turned 89. Often, when people learn of this, they bow their heads knowingly and say, “I took care of my elderly mother, too.” I meet their understanding with gratitude and understanding, except that I don’t take care of my mother. She is 100 percent self-sufficient. Aggravatingly so. I am a caregiver, however, in the emotional sense. And this is the caregiving that is rarely discussed. It’s the subtle changes that happen as a parent ages until you wake up one day and you are worrying about everything.

Is she OK? If she cannot be reached at a time when she should be available, my first thought now is that something terrible has happened. When did, “Gee, Mom must not be home,” shift to, “Oh God, she’s hurt on the floor and can’t reach her phone.” Over the top? Maybe. But it’s a very real phenomenon. More than once, I have driven to her house or called a neighbor to check on her. She is grateful for my love and concern, if not a little annoyed at my compulsive need to know where she is at all times.

I look back and wonder, when did she start coming to me for advice instead of vice-versa? Not that she takes the advice, but that’s another story.

While caring for an aging parent or spouse can be rewarding, it also can be challenging at times. The term “caregiver” is defined as anyone who provides free assistance to an older adult, be it transportation, running errands, preparing meals, yard work, house cleaning, bathing, dressing, or helping with bill paying. Anything the older person can no longer do independently.

These tasks may not seem like much, especially on an occasional basis, but over time the stress can add up and performing these chores can make you feel stretched pretty thin.

For example, do you ever sit at work and start wondering if your mother has taken the right medication, or if dad has eaten a healthy lunch? I ask my mother consistently what she has eaten for the day.

There is also the emotional component. Seeing an aging or ill parent or spouse become increasingly dependent may give way to fear, anger and subsequent guilt.

But there are things you can do. First and foremost, make some time for yourself. Now that may sound like just one more thing to try to and fit in an already bursting schedule, but it is vitally important.

Try to relax and take it one day at a time. Worrying serves no purpose and only gets in the way. As a lifelong worrier, I know from where I speak.

- Have lunch with a friend, maybe one who also worries too much about a parent. There is comfort in that.
- Take a stroll somewhere pretty and quiet to calm you. Plus, the exercise will decrease your stress levels.
- Watch your favorite movie and relax in the familiarity. One of my favorite de-stressors is watching reruns of “The Big Bang Theory.” I know all the episodes by heart, but there is comfort in that. I recently read that watching or reading something where you know the outcome is soothing because you can enjoy the process without any disquiet about what will happen next or how it will end.

Other stress reducers include making a list of things that need to be done so that if someone offers to help, you’ll be ready. Maybe the parent’s neighbor can change an out-of-reach lightbulb, or possibly make a quick run to the grocery store.

Remember, you don’t have to make this journey alone. Eastern Area Agency on Aging’s Family Caregiver Support program can help. EAAA has specialists who work hard to help individuals and families who find themselves in a caregiver role. From making referrals to advocacy to a phone call to “just to check in,” these specialists tailor the program to suit the individual need. For information, visit eaaa.org.

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Duck of Justice
From the Bangor Police Department Facebook page



The Fourth of July was extremely busy. When the folks at Kohl’s called about a group of suspicious individuals behind the store, Bangor’s Lady-Cop dynamic duo, Kim Donnell and Jamie Fanning went to investigate. They figured it would be just another group of people wearing ‘tourist clothing’ trying to burglarize a big box store. Nope. What they found there, shocked millions ... (always wanted to write that).

Geocachers! The scourge of every green-space and rock wall between here and Sacramento. Kidding.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BANGOR POLICE DEPARTMENT

Being the helpful public servants that they are, the officers assisted the group while looking for the cache and then got a photo.

Seen here are Tyler Thibodeau, Alana Sirios, Shelby Condon and Taylor Thibodeau. Of course you all know Kim “Kommando” Donnell. Fanning took the

photo. She is shy. They never found what they were looking for. Something about, Carpe Snowplow? Seize the snowplow? I don’t have any idea.

Keep your hands to yourself, leave other people’s things alone and be kind to one another.

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