

Generations

Saluting all caregivers

After traveling to Winston-Salem two weeks ago, waiting on pins and needles for my husband's amazing surgeon to call and let us know that all was well and that my husband was resting in recovery after a double cardiac bypass, it was one of those times when the tears began to flow uncontrollably down my cheeks.

It doesn't happen often, but relieving stress is so important to anyone going through something like this. I was no exception no matter how hard I tried to look heroic.

Baptist Memorial Hospital is the kind of hospital one dreams about when he or she or a loved one is faced with complicated, life-threatening surgery. You want only the best and we got it. I stayed at the Holiday Inn, almost within walking distance to the hospital on a sunny day.

Sure, the hospital is a gigantic complex with many towers, color-coded parking lots, hallways that never seem to end; it's almost a little city in itself. Most of the week, it took me 40 minutes or more just to find my parked car, and I must have continually looked lost holding a folder because when I stopped to ask anyone in the hall for directions, a crowd formed, not only offering help, but offering to walk with me. Everyone couldn't have been nicer.

Someone asked me how I was holding up during the week of my husband's stay and it was difficult to describe. It felt like I was in a bubble and that the world as I knew it was going on with daily chores, business, life, but I was in a bubble time warp, impossible to break out of until I knew my husband was safe and we were back on Interstate 40 traveling home. Friends and family were praying

and calling, but I remained in that bubble.

Once we convinced the excellent surgeons, doctors and nurses that my homebody husband would get better quicker in his easy chair than in a hospital bed, and we got him settled in at home, the bubble burst and I suddenly changed pace and stepped into caregiver mode.

The first job was to study and disperse two pages of medications to stop, start or change, and correctly fill the morning and night pill holders after making several trips to the pharmacy. Then, it was making sure that there was food to eat since most of what we had left in the house was dog food since the dogs were in boarding and we didn't want to come home to spoiled food.

A loss of appetite is tough to manage for a caregiver and my husband likes certain things that only a wife of nearly 20 years can figure out, so it was a full load at Food Lion of what I knew he would eat.

Finding a good sleeping position for him was difficult — everything hurt. But after more than a week of being home, cat naps were working well, especially in the mornings and late afternoons.

I have a new respect for caregivers because now that I am one, I realize how some of my dear friends and family members must have struggled when they were thrust into the role. Sure, most of us raised children as mothers and fathers, but caring for an older person is a lot different and requires extra patience, understanding, remaining calm and loving,



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and realizing you might make mistakes, but reassuring yourself that it's the best job that you can do.

There was a wonderful website I found that really feels empathy for the caregiver, www.caregiver.com, and it offers tips on not only taking care of your friend or family member, but taking care of yourself as the caregiver. I particularly liked the article by Pat D'Andria, "I'm Fine, Thanks," because I found myself uttering those words when people would offer to help me. That simple response is the life of a caregiver — you are always fine since the focus is always on the person that you care for. And most of the time, it isn't the person who asked you if you needed help that you have to convince, but rather yourself because sometimes you do need help.

The articles all tell the readers to seek help, accept it when offered, don't try and do everything on your own, accept flexibility and adaptability on your caregiver journey, look to your community for help, and join a support group to talk to others that may be facing a similar challenge.

And, finally, the article listed some ways to maintain a positive attitude and I picked out my favorites: 1) learn healthy ways to manage stress (for me, jigsaw puzzles seem to relax me at the end of the day); 2) think of challenges as opportunities to shine; 3) look for the best in others and yourself; 4) eat right and get plenty of rest (tough, but important), and 5) surround yourself with upbeat people.

To all the caregivers out there, I salute you.

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