

# The Thurston-Mason Senior News

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## “Love and Caregiving Part 1”

What is your definition of Love? We asked around and found many definitions of love. First, we ignored the Hollywood versions like “never having to say you are sorry,” and “a many splendored thing.”

Next we found ‘love is love is love,’ nice. “Love is change,” daring. “Love is a verb,” thoughtful.

True love is often defined as putting someone else’s needs above your own. Think raising children. Most of us understand putting your need for sleep aside because your child needs a midnight feeding or requires a trip to the emergency room.

But for caregivers of family members who have long acting, chronic illnesses like Parkinson’s, Dementia or a traumatic brain injury, it is more than losing sleep for a developmental phase of life or brief illness. It is for the long haul. It is life altering.

For caregivers the non-romantic, non-maternal, psychological definition of love which works for many, can be “putting your needs equal to and as important as another’s.”

There are two parts to this love definition: “equal to” and “as important.” They need to see the doctor. So do you. They may



have an urgent need (read “Important”) to see the doctor. So might you.

Note the definition is about “needs,” not “wants”. Your care receiver needs food and companionship. So do you. Your caregiver needs sleep and safety. So do you.

Your care receiver may “want” to still drive the car or use the oven. Just as you may “want” to read a book without interruption or play a round of golf. In caregiving, love is a balance of needs. “Wants” may go wanting when love seeks its equilibrium.

We have asked many caregivers their definition of love. Some have told us they knew what love is, but after providing care for a family member for several years, their definition of love changed. The list grew long. For some love is: change, choice, forgiveness, trust, compassion, patience, magic, growth, and acceptance.

A relationship where love is mostly a fulfilling, balanced exchange of needs and wants, profoundly changes when a chronic disease like dementia strikes. The harmony and intimacy that once came easily, gives way to watching them

around a hot stove and coaxing the car keys from them. It is the end of love as you knew it, but not the end of love.

The partnership in a marriage or a parent child relationship inevitably changes with caregiving, providing an opportunity for a deeper sense of who you are and who you have become. One long term caregiver described her change as, “I love my husband, because I own love. With his dementia he can no longer love me or even remember my name. Even though it took a while and with lots of help, I love what he was to me, what we had and what I now have and who I have become. I love him enough to get help for myself, hire caregivers and plan for the day he will need out of home care. He does not have to love me for me to love him, because I own love.”

So we offer that definition of love today. If love is change, perhaps there will be a Part 2.

This article is a service of the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging. For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program, call (360) 664-2168 and ask to speak with a Resource Manager or visit our website at [WWW.LMTAAA.ORG](http://WWW.LMTAAA.ORG)