

The Thurston-Mason Senior News

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The Family Caregiver

No Like Left



What do you do when you have no *LIKE* left? What do you do when you no longer have the feeling that you *LIKE* the person for whom you are caring?!

"I have been caring for my husband for 7 years, which gets harder by the month, week and day, due to his worsening dementia. We have always loved each other, and always enjoyed each other's company. But most days now, and many days in the past year, I do NOT *LIKE* him, or the work I am doing for him."

It takes courage, frustration and fear to admit that to yourself and say it out loud. Courage and Frustration may be obvious reasons to get up the nerve to say what you feel.

So how does fear fit into such an admission? Most caregivers have a deep fear of saying or acting in a way which violates how a loving or liking relationship should work. We also know the deepest sort of violation in any relationship is when someone you trust acts against the rules of love, against the rules of liking, civility, compassion, trust or kindness. Entering the NO *LIKE* zone can weigh heavily on caregivers.

When you feel like you have no *LIKE* left there is an insidious implied SHAME: the shame of not feeling the same for someone you love. It is also a dangerous time for caregivers - danger of becoming ill yourself. Or saying or acting in a way which would be unsafe for either of you.

So how do we maintain an intrinsic trust when we are struggling with even liking our care receiver? To do so we need to look at the AGREEMENTS upon which we

base relationships. The agreements we most often base relationships upon are shared values and how we interact and speak to each other. When dementia or debilitating illnesses enter the relationship it is important to acknowledge that the agreements and expectation of the relationship have profoundly changed.

It may be very difficult to acknowledge the changes and admit to losing the verbal, physical, and emotional support of your family member, while accepting a new and often challenging role as caregiver. Many caregivers struggle with the loss of support and incredulity of how their spouse can no longer do the dishes or make their own tea, let alone balance the checkbook. Besides, the household was only manageable because there were two of you cleaning the house, shopping for groceries, and mowing the lawn. *LIKE* can go away when you realize all these decisions are left to you.

When someone with dementia can no longer speak or provide reciprocal love - it feels like THEY have broken the basic agreements of the relationship. Without reciprocal empathy, trust and connection, we are left with our love - a one sided love.

Is one sided love enough? When you run out of *LIKE*, can you run on LOVE alone?

Last February we pondered the following definition of love which was, "true love is putting someone else's needs, equal to and as important as your own." Yikes, equal to and as important! They have the needs and I have my last nerve.

How does this definition of love work when

you are running on caregiving fumes, beyond *LIKE* and holding onto one sided love?

Maybe it is not working. Maybe it is too late. Maybe you ran out of love and are running on an empty tank and the fumes of *LIKE*.

So what do we do now? Take a deep breath - just like the dementia expert Teepa Snow says (TeepaSnow.com). Teepa would say, "Now take another. Yes . . . actually do it. We can wait while you do that."

1. Now make a list of everything you are not getting because of the care you are providing. You do not have to show anyone.
 2. Make a list of everything you need to do and would have time for if not for caregiving.
- The two lists tell a story of what you are not getting and need.
3. Time to make a third list of everything you can do, find, negotiate, apply for, borrow to reduce your caring duties.

The list may include help from friends with whom you've lost contact, applying for FCSP or CFC/COPES services, or finding out-of-home placement.

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