

Caring Comes Full Circle

If we are lucky, we were raised in a loving home in an upscale place with plenty of comforts, preferably with two parents and a large support system of loved ones. However, it is just as likely we were raised by one loving parent or grandparent in a small place in a neighborhood full of challenges, and that still resulted in a loving and caring young adult. Love and care are the critical elements, no matter who raised and cared for your *every* need from the time you were an infant to virtually every need until you became an adult. In today's world, with so many living longer, so many healthier and yet so many more in need of assistance, the need for care is coming full circle for so many children who recognize the importance of giving back to those that gave so much for us.

We all know advances in medical science result in many of us living longer. We are a society that relishes the bravado of youth, yet we are an unprecedented aging society as well. As per the U.S. Census Bureau, from 1990 to 2000, U.S. population grew from 249 million to 281 million, rounded, less than 13%, yet the number of those 85 years and over grew by **over 37%**. Yes, women do live longer than men; almost three out of four seniors in that age group are ladies. We live longer, with more complexities, like Alzheimer's disease that affects 4.5 million Americans.

Imagine when all the Baby Boomers get older; a generation that took better care of itself than any group before it? Boomers also are the first generation as a whole to embrace the "Weekend Warrior" philosophy, from hiking to the never quit playing sports attitude despite aching bones, joints and muscles. It is commonplace for a 50 year old to have be "scoped" or have his knee or hip replaced, but what will be breaking down when the Boomers hit their 70s, 80s and beyond?

What about Social Security, with the Social Security Board of Trustees annual report in March 2005 projecting that Social Security's trust fund reserves will run out in 2041. Who will be the seniors or disabled in thirty or forty years? Yes, maybe you.

There are options available for those that need care, the frail, disabled and the chronically ill. For the wealthy, there are virtually no restrictions as to the extent and quality of professional caregivers available at home. For many with insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, Workers Compensation and other resources, there is access to Home Health Care to a large degree. Home Health Care includes a wide range of health care and social services typically provided at home. While most caregivers in the home are home health aides or personal care assistants, home care includes nurses, therapists, high tech pharmacy professionals, social workers and more.

What about those that are either not eligible for home care or do not receive enough hours of care to meet their needs, let alone the shortage of home care providers in many areas? Unfortunately, these aides are grossly underpaid and some clichés are true, like "You get what you pay for." Of course, care you have to pay for presumes that there isn't a family member or loved one as a primary caregiver.

The world in general, let alone home by home, would be a better place if there were more caregivers. From Roslyn Carter, “There are only four kinds of people in the world - those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers...” This makes sense, but where are the caregivers of today for our aging population?

From Family Caregiver Alliance, which provides a myriad of resource nationwide, “Approximately 44 million American families and friends provide unpaid care to another adult, sometimes around the clock. Wives, daughters, sons, partners, fathers, nieces, brothers—they provide approximately 80 percent of the long-term care in the United States.” Americans are heeding the lessons of so many cultures from across the world, and caring for our own more and more. That means in the home, the place where you were nurtured into your very being, where care should come full circle.

There are many issues that come into play for those that make the commitment to care for a loved one, from financial implications, maybe time away from the caregiver’s job with or without sufficient offset from assets of the loved one needing the care. We have to see how it impacts other family members, like grandchildren of a grandmother needing care from their now less available Mom. The literal home environment can be an issue, from the number of bedrooms, let alone bathrooms, to having enough common space for Nana or the caregiver. For the disabled, ramps for wheelchairs, bigger bathrooms, with a tub that is safe, and reconfigured furniture are all part of the consideration of caring.

Many frail and disabled require care 24/7 or close to it, and the primary caregiver needs time off, and sometimes an additional family member is not available. Church groups can often be a source of help through volunteers. Adult Day Care is one option in many communities, with transportation usually provided. Many counties assist in this area, like Alameda County in the Bay Area, <http://www.adsnac.org>. Many organizations will provide counseling and interaction with other caregivers can help with the emotional aspects of caring.

The Family Caregiver Alliance, <http://www.caregiver.org>, provides access to care options in each state, and you will find a handful of resources in your State or County. For those that need a guide navigating Medicare options, the Center for Medicare Advocacy, <http://www.medicareadvocacy.org> is very helpful. Another resource is the American Society on Aging, <http://www.asaging.org/nchs>.

Janice King, the gracious publisher of Soul, asked me to address options for home care and provide resources for caregivers. I welcomed this opportunity, with this article only touching on the generalities. In future editions, Soul will seek to provide solutions and resources for many aspects discussed in this article for caregivers and their loved ones.

June 2006, by Timothy Bradley Cassidy