

# one source Empowering Caregivers

NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2023



## Caregiving and Men

by Michael West

My name is Michael West. I was a caregiver for over 2 years, 24/7 for my wife, Kristin, who suffers with Parkinson's Disease.

She is now in Long Term Care, a decision that, unfortunately, did not come easily. For both of us. Her, because she wanted to be at home, surrounded by familiar things. Me, because of the soul destroying realization that there was nothing I could do to stop the progression. There was nothing I could "conquer". That I made mistakes.

When I first joined the Caregiver Support Group through One Source Empowering Caregivers (OSEC), it was commented that men are a rarity at such groups. I think I know why.

Men of my generation, born in the 1950s, have been taught that we are supposed to handle things, to "suck it up, buttercup", that to want and ask for help is a sign of weakness.

We were supposed to be on guard for bears and wolves at the cave opening, to listen for the sound of Cossack hoof beats on the sod roof, to storm the beaches, to not coddle. To be ready to protect our loved ones, regardless of the cost.

To watch, helplessly, the slow death of a loved one is not included in the MAN-ual. Which is why I am writing this.

I am reaching out to the men who are providing care for their wives. We work together best as a team.

I am making myself available to anyone who feels hesitant to ask for help. Reach me at [michaelwest88@yahoo.com](mailto:michaelwest88@yahoo.com) or call (408) 694-8345. We can meet in person, preferably over coffee.

I will not hold your hand, but I will shake it.



## Message of Hope YouTube

One Source-Empowering Caregivers is now on YouTube. Please take a minute to review and forward our Positive Message.

**Positive Message:** [https://youtu.be/-u2gz\\_te66s](https://youtu.be/-u2gz_te66s)

## Today's Caregiver Family Checklist

by Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief, *Today's Caregiver*

The most loving gift a person can give to one's family is to put your affairs in order before a disaster or medical emergency.

- All bank accounts, account numbers and types of accounts and the location of banks.
- Insurance Company, policy number, beneficiary as stated on the policies and type of insurance (health, life, long term care, automobile, etc.)
- Deed and titles to ALL property.
- Loan/lien information, who holds them and if there are any death provisions.
- Social Security and Medicare numbers.
- Military history, affiliations and papers (including discharge papers).
- Up-to-date will in a safe place (inform family where the Will is located).
- Living Will or other Advanced Directive appropriate to your state of residence.
- Durable Power of Attorney.
- Instructions for funeral services and burial (if arrangements have been secured, name and location of funeral home.)



## Ah come on... give me a break!

by Pearce Boyer, *The Union*, May 26, 2023

That lead thought can register in many ways. Just running it by a few people as I was thinking this though pointed that out. Humor, as I rolled the putt by which definitely should have gone in... irritation, pulling into that parking spot ahead of my car... frustration, when confronted with a flat tire or a ticket. On and on, you get the idea.

Counting on a 'break' came pretty early for most of us. 10 a.m., noonish lunch, 3 p.m. break. That 10 minutes between classes way back then. The break I am referring to here and now is the one that is being missed by many, many people. And it is costing lives.

Caregiver breaks. Men and women are finding themselves, sometimes all of a sudden, in the role as the 'primary caregiver'. It is not a pretty statistic that reports caregivers passing away two thirds of the time sooner than one for whom they are providing the care. The message herein is: "please, give me a break".

A man caring for his wife who has become ill or injured is often not as well equipped as if the roles were reversed. 24-hour duty becomes more than wearing in either case: The caregivers need a respite break regularly. Family members sure help out the most, experience tells us, but they too have 'a life' and are not always available.

Certainly, private caregiving companies are often wonderful resources and locally "Helping Hands" can expertly provide such respite care. Gold Country Senior Services is a few months away from opening their Senior Center which many long for and yes, friends, neighbors and others can and do step in.

Now here is the kicker. So many families recognize the need for primary caregiver respite that the need for volunteers to fill the need is very great.

If you can help, men and women, go to the website: [www.empoweringcaregivers.org](http://www.empoweringcaregivers.org) and sign up for an interview or call (530) 205-9514. Having provided this care over many years now, I can attest that the gratitude expressed for 'giving me a break' will floor you. Win, Win.

# 7 Essential Do's and Don'ts for People Caring for Caregivers

by Lisa Lopez, *Today's Caregiver*

My father was diagnosed with Wernicke–Korsakoff syndrome, a form of dementia resulting from chronic alcohol abuse. My dad, who worked hard his entire life, raised a family and built a strong reputation in his community, spent the last 10 years of his life succumbing to this terrible disease that befalls so many. After the official dementia diagnosis, I was appointed his guardian and my family and I made the excruciating decision to place him in an assisted living facility. I've experienced everything from anger to guilt, from optimism to despair.

Since becoming one of my dad's caregivers, the people I've leaned on the most are my friends. Somehow, my friends just get it. I don't need to tell them what questions to ask, when to ask them or when to leave me alone. In the beginning, however, my husband and some other close family members had to be reminded how to react to the very fragile and stressed side of me. I am happy to report that after a few meetings of the mind and heart, my own circle of caregivers, including husband and family, is right on track. I decided to write this article to provide some tips to the wonderful people who are caring for caregivers.

## The Do's...

**DO LISTEN** – It may seem like a simple concept; but for some people, the idea of listening can be a hard job. Once, early on in my dad's journey, I returned home from one of the worst days of my life. The day involved a neurologist, an escape attempt by my father and a deputy sheriff. You get the picture. When I walked into my house that evening, I was distraught and grief-stricken. My poor husband had no idea how to react to me. A word of advice to those caring for caregivers: when your loved one is stressed or wants to talk about their day, just listen. Stop what you're doing and give them your full attention. You don't even have to speak. A hug every once in a while wouldn't hurt either!

**DO GIVE THEM THEIR SPACE** – When you're given the enormous responsibility of caring for someone else, you feel like you're in a fishbowl. Family members, doctors, bill collectors, you name it are constantly in need of something. Occasionally, I need time and space to recharge my batteries. Whether it's a nap, time with friends, a massage or a weekend away, caregivers need to take the time to care about themselves. When the caregiver in your life says they need a break, don't hesitate – pack a suitcase, make reservations for a weekend away, or just follow their lead. Time and space away from the duties and responsibilities of caregiving is essential to avoiding burnout.

**DO HAVE EMPATHY** – If your caregiver's family member doesn't already live with you, make a point to accompany them to visit their loved one from time to time. This will give you a glimpse into their world and what they are going through. In my case, my dad lives two and a half hours away. It takes every ounce of energy I have to get in the car, drive to see him, spend time with him and then drive another two and a half hours back home. Doing it alone can be downright drudgery. It's nice to have my husband along so that I can vent, cry or even laugh.

**DO LAUGH** – It's been said that laughter is the closest distance between two people. No truer words have been spoken, especially when it comes to caregiving. Laughter is the main thing that has gotten me through this past year. My aunt and I have a saying, "If we didn't laugh, we'd cry." Even though there have been a few times when we never thought we'd ever see another ray of sunshine, my aunt and I have somehow been able to find humor, and sometimes in the most bizarre, morbid places. When I try to explain some of the perversely funny things I've seen and heard since taking over my dad's care, some of my friends and family look at me as if I have two heads. I want to say to them, "Hey, lighten up! It's okay to laugh." So, loosen up and follow your loved ones' lead. If they're laughing, join in. It's contagious and that's a sickness everyone can afford to catch.

## The Don'ts...

**DON'T OFFER UNSOLICITED ADVICE** – During his first memory care unit experience, my father was involved in an altercation with another resident. As with most of these cases, there were about five sides to the story. In the end, however, it was my father who was discharged from the facility. We all believed, including me, my aunt and the ombudsman I had enlisted for help, that my father had been treated unfairly. In the one or two hours my aunt and I had to make vital decisions about my father's immediate care, I'm sure we made a few mistakes and in hindsight, probably would have done things a little differently. However, we did the best we knew how under the circumstances. But that didn't stop a few family members from telling us exactly what we had done wrong. If you're caring for a caregiver, stop before you offer advice. Remember, chances are the caregiver in your life has never had a dress rehearsal for this role. They're doing the best they can and will ask you if they need your advice.

**DON'T GIVE THEM A GUILT TRIP** – Before I became my dad's caregiver, my husband and I spent a lot of free time together. We don't have children, so we had the luxury of spending the weekends hiking, gardening or doing a whole lot of nothing. When my dad was diagnosed with dementia, my home life and much of my work life was sucked away. I had to spend days on end with my dad and family visiting assisted living facilities, meeting with lawyers, and talking to social workers. When I was at home, I was either on the phone talking to my dad, talking about my dad or doing paperwork. My husband quickly felt abandoned. He got in the habit of making me feel guilty any time I spent attending to my dad's needs. I explained that this only made my highly stressful situation worse and it only made me resent him. He eventually came to understand that this was my choice and the only way for us to be a functional, happy family was for him to support me. Again, the tough parts are only temporary and it's a lot easier if you support the caregiver in your life.

**DON'T JUDGE** – No matter what your loved one's relationship is to the person they're caring for, remember, it's their choice to be the caregiver. In my case, my husband didn't understand why I wanted to take on the responsibility of becoming my father's guardian. My father and I weren't very close when I was growing up. Add this to the fact that his dementia was most likely brought on by alcoholism and my husband had a couple of handy rationales as to why I should wash my hands of the whole thing. I had to explain to my husband that the past doesn't matter and I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I didn't do everything in my power to make the rest of my dad's life comfortable. So, no matter the circumstances, leave the judgment out of it, accept your loved one's choice and support them in any decision they make.



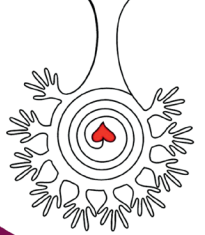


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