

Caregiving *with* Strength

Raising Self Care to New Heights

By Acknowledging the Losses

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Foreword

There is a dirty secret about caregiving. It cannot only be a struggle to offer care to a disabled adult. That is no secret. Caregiving can be strenuous work. It can entail sleep deprivation, involvement in unpleasant duties such as dealing with incontinence, and it can sap both strength and spirit.

The dirty secret is this: *We are often offering care to someone who would rather not have such care.* The truth is that no adult ever wishes to reach a state where he or she is physically dependent on another person – be it spouse, sibling, parent, or child. Think back to when we were young. We can remember how we celebrated each emerging act of budding independence – feeding ourselves, tying our shoes, or dressing by ourselves. Can we think now of how it would be to become dependent on another for these basic yet daily activities of living?

In dementia, caregiving can be even more complicated. We may find ourselves offering care to someone who does not recognize who we are, who is resistant, or who simply lacks understanding of what is happening. In the early stages of dementia the affected individual may recognize, fear, and even grieve the changes experienced. As the dementia progresses, they may recall longer

term memories but constantly ask for reaffirmations of short term events. “Did we eat yet?” “Is this the day I go to program?” As the disease continues to progress, the individual with dementia might have a sense of “wrong-being” – that is a sense that something is wrong.

Caregivers experience grief as well. Our losses are many – our own independence is diminished by the constant demands of caregiving. We lose a relationship with the person who once was. We lose our sense of an assumptive world. Who among us ever assumed, for example, that we would spend our retirement years changing diapers for a person who no longer even knows our name?

That is why Eleanor Silverberg’s *Caregiving with Strength: Raising Self Care to New Heights by Acknowledging the Losses* is such a gift for the caregiving community. Ms. Silverberg has provided support for many years – both personally as a caregiver to her father and professionally as a social worker laboring in the field of dementia care. She knows the road. She has traveled it. She also knows the literature – about grief, even about the growth that can be experienced in the caldron of bereavement.

Her work emphasizes three key words – *Acknowledge, Assess, Assist* – Ms. Silverberg’s *3-A Approach*. By this, Ms. Silverberg stresses three components of caregiving for someone with chronic illness. These include acknowledging our grief as assessing and assisting in caring for our patient/client – and ourselves. There may be a

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fourth A, *Allow*, for this allows caregiving *with*
strength.

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