



October 2006

Keeping In Touch

News For Family Caregivers

by Lynn Cibuzar, LSW, DARTS Service Coordinator

Give Me a Break!

"You Are So Strong"

By Joyce Wahlquist,
DARTS volunteer and
former caregiver

As a caregiver for my
husband who was
suffering with
Alzheimer's disease,

it seemed like I heard

"you are so strong" so many times that I felt if one more person said it, I would probably punch them in the nose. Particularly when I didn't always feel strong. Fortunately, my nature was never to handle things like that.

To keep up the outward appearance of things "going very well" for friends and family and, most importantly, for my husband, was hard. The daily pressures of the mood swings and the eternal "playing the mental games" to make his life more comfortable were very draining on both of us. Watching a loving, kind, very intelligent person slide down the Alzheimer's slope was extremely difficult. And, for him, it was devastating at the beginning because he was aware he had a problem. Totally helpless, he kept slipping away more and more and was frightened and angry.

Thank goodness for my Alzheimer's support group; this helped me so much. Just talking to other caregivers who were experiencing the same symptoms was a life saver for me. A chance to discuss our different caregiving roles was so rewarding. And, obviously, that helped my husband as I was much better equipped to deal with the reality of Alzheimer's and the 24/7 battle.

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MAXIMIZING YOUR STRENGTHS

By Pat Samples

How well do you know your strengths? Understanding your strengths can give you confidence and courage as you face the many demands and emotional upheavals of being a caregiver.

Take a few minutes to list your strengths and consider how to make the most of them. Here are some examples.

Inner Strengths

Love and care. The love you have for the person in your care is perhaps your greatest asset. Make a point to renew your loving feelings often. Scientists have shown that by putting your attention on positive feelings such as love, compassion, and appreciation, you can decrease your stress, along with its negative consequences to your health.

Resilience. Draw on your history of overcoming difficulties to help you now. Make a list of past "victories" to buoy your courage and remind you of what works.

Creativity. If you've ever found a solution to a vexing problem, you're creative. Creativity is the ability to come up with a fresh approach. How do you keep yourself thinking freshly? How can you do more of that when your loved one's situation seems impossible?

Wit. We all feel better when we laugh. What makes you laugh? Who makes you laugh? How can you view your present circumstance with a sense of humor?

Emotional balance. When we feel in balance, we make good choices and manage our lives well. What are some ways you keep your emotional balance?

Emotional honesty. Staying in balance doesn't mean denying your feelings. Willingness to feel your fear, grief, resentment, or other uncomfortable feelings is a strength that can help you stay present and connected to yourself and others.

Spirituality. Your personal beliefs and spiritual practices can be big assets, helping you find meaning and comfort in your caregiving experience. How can you stay connected with them?

Common sense. Sometimes we can overlook the obvious. When things seem to have gotten out of hand, you can always step back a moment and draw on your common sense. For example, if you need help, ask for it.

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- *Maximizing Your Strengths continued* -

Material Strengths

Living arrangements. Do you have a place to live? Does your loved one? Is it conveniently located? What else is helpful about your living arrangements?

Transportation. Do you have adequate private or public transportation that allows you to take your loved one to appointments and get to other services?

Money. Consider all your financial assets, including your ability to borrow. Include any insurance you have when naming your strengths.

Community Strengths

Family, friends, neighbors. Who are the people close to you who can help, in big ways and small? What exactly can they do for you if you ask?

Pets. A comforting companion can make you and your loved one smile and help you get through dark days. If you have a pet you love, that's a big asset!

Faith communities. Check with your place of religious affiliation to see if it has home visitors, prayer support, or other services you can call on.

Day care and respite programs. Look for services in your community that will provide care for your loved one regularly or occasionally so you can have time out from caregiving.

Home care services. If you're caring for someone at home, check with your health care plan or with local senior service programs to find out what health care, personal care, and chore services are available to assist you.

Support groups. Many health care facilities, senior programs like DARTS, faith communities, and illness-specific organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association offer support groups. Find out what is available in your community.

Information. These same groups may have written information, classes, or individual training that can help you know how to give good care and take care of yourself. Also, many useful websites are available for caregivers, offering information, resources, online support groups, and other types of personalized support. Google "caregiving" or "caregiver" or visit www.caregivermn.org.

What other inner strengths do you have? What would it take to expand them? The more you know your strengths and use them, the smaller your problems will seem.

Pat Samples, MA, MFA, is the author of *Daily Comforts for Caregivers and Self-Care for Caregivers* and a speaker who helps caregivers find peace of mind. Learn more at <http://www.agingandcaregiving.com>.

New Adult Day Care Program Opens in Hastings

Bridgeview Adult Day Care is now open and operating out of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 615 Vermillion Street, Hastings. The personal care provided during the day allows the care receiver to enjoy interaction and activities and gives the caregiver some free time. The center is open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and the cost is \$58 for an 8-hour day.

For more information, call 651-437-0090.

- *Give Me a Break continued* -

The support group gave me the verification I needed to ask for help and get my husband into an adult day care situation. The respite time from that was so wonderful. And, when it came time to go into a nursing home, it was a great help to realize that by giving him these opportunities, I was doing the very best gift of caring for him "through sickness and health." **By preserving my mental and physical health, I had the opportunity to visit and help him.** I will always treasure the warm fuzzy feeling I got when he saw me come in and had this huge smile. Even with his dreadful sickness, he always had that special smile.

It has been six years now since he died, but I treasure all our memories, the bittersweet and the sweet.

Editor's note: If you would like to try a caregiver support group, DARTS offers several. Call 651-455-1560 for more information.



NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVERS MONTH

National Family Caregivers Month is a nationally recognized observance to draw attention to the many challenges facing family caregivers, to advocate for stronger public policy for addressing family caregiving issues, and to raise awareness about community programs that support family caregivers. It's a time to thank, support, educate, and celebrate more than 50 million family caregivers across the country.

Not only during National Family Caregivers Month, but every day, we encourage family caregivers to take three steps (noted at left) each day to make their lives easier and to raise awareness about the issues they face.

Believe in Yourself • Protect Your Health • Reach Out for Help

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