

Parent Care: Finding your footing after the care-giving's done

by *Marsha_Kay_Seff*

It's not only the parents of grown children who grapple with the empty-nest syndrome. Caregivers who lose their elderly parents go through a similar loss. Dutiful and loving adult children look after parents for years, advocating, cooking, laundering, chauffeuring, toileting, medicating, etc., etc. Then Mom or Dad dies, and the grown children are left with countless hours to fill and, eventually, energy they don't remember ever having.

Now what? What do you do with your extra time? How do you redirect the effort you once put into care-giving?

To begin, you have to get through the grieving process. Be patient with yourself; give yourself permission to feel sad, to grieve in your own way and in your own time. Some people limp to the other side much slower than others, and that's OK.

But you will get there. One morning, you'll awake and realize that the sun is shining. A whole world awaits you, one that doesn't revolve around prescription drugs and diapers.

Take advantage of this opportunity to reclaim yourself and your life; you've earned it. What is it that you used to daydream about doing? Did you want to return to school, resume your career or find a new one?

Would you like to find a job or volunteer work that's 180 degrees from your responsibilities for an aging parent? Work with children, crunch numbers, write a steamy novel?

Or would you prefer to piggyback on your care-giving experiences? How about returning to your parents' skilled-nursing facility to help make it what you always knew it could be? Do you want to become a nurse or a nursing assistant or volunteer to make a difference?

How about being an advocate for older people with no children or a help and inspiration to families just beginning this journey?

What you learned from your care-giving experience can make a difference. And what a wonderful tribute to the parents you loved and helped through their last stage of life.

OLDER POTENTIAL

Workers 55-plus are more productive than younger workers in white-collar jobs, according to 56 percent of respondents in a recent survey. At the same time, 41 percent of respondents believe older workers in rank-and-file jobs are more productive.

The bad news is that a higher percentage of employers believe older workers are costlier, according to the survey, *Employer Attitudes Toward Older Workers*, by the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. Considering all aspects of employment, two-thirds of employers think an older employee is neither better nor worse than a younger person.

According to the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, other studies show today's older Americans are more capable of working at later ages than in the past. Several studies suggest that today's 70-year-olds are as healthy and mentally competent as were 65-year-olds three decades ago.

NOTE: An online bereavement support group is on www.sandiegoeldercare.com. To sign up for Coping With Loss, click on Online Support at top of the home page.

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