

*May God bless you this day...with a love that shines!*

**Caregivers – You Are Amazing!**

*By Hal Harris, Director, Ciloa*

We had absolutely no clue just how difficult it really was! And once we knew...we didn't understand it. Even now that we experience it, it's difficult to grasp how remarkable it was. Taking care of Mom.

You see, until last year my Dad was the primary caregiver for my Mom. Seven years ago she was diagnosed as having a form of dementia, which might be more familiar to you as Alzheimer's, a progressively debilitating mental disease that affects memory, then cognition, and sometimes physical health. When Dad passed away from a very aggressive cancer my, brothers and I were suddenly thrust into caring for my Mom.

What was it that we didn't "get"? Well, three things really.

**The Difficulty of the Task.** First of all, we learned from Dad (and now learning ourselves) how difficult it is to be a caregiver. In the early stages, Mom just seemed more forgetful, but as this disease advanced, it robbed her not only of memory but also her ability to think abstractly, carry on conversations, read, understand where she was and what was happening around them her, and to handle tasks...even simple ones like dressing herself, going to the mailbox, answering the phone. In time she became more and more dependent on someone else...her caregiver.

Eventually, Dad had to take over almost everything the two of them needed, like cooking and cleaning, shopping, washing – all the household duties. He chose the clothes she would wear, and then helped dress her. Constant attention...all day, every day, every night, month after month, all year long...so exhausting and time consuming that Dad had little time for himself.

Even more difficult is the emotional side of taking care of someone you love, especially when the condition is incurable or untreatable. Constantly wondering and worrying if you are making the right medical decisions...wishing, hoping, and praying that the incurable becomes curable. Trying to live every moment, dreading all the hours, fighting feelings of helplessness...and anger...and guilt that you aren't doing enough. Hurting as you watch your loved one suffer. And sometimes, as with Alzheimer's, dealing with the emotions, frustrations and anger of the one you love as they lose ground to the disease. Over time these physical and emotional demands seem so constant, so unrelenting, so hopeless, they physically, mentally and spiritually wear out the caregiver.

**To you, Caregivers:** You are amazing! Being a caregiver is more demanding, exhausting, and difficult than others can imagine. My encouragement to you is to hang in there and do the best that you can, for what you are doing is good and honors God. Lean on and have faith in Christ for strength. And be brave enough to let those who love you know how you feel and what you need. Let them get the blessing of helping you...of standing with you...of honoring your commitment. Depend on God. He loves you just as He loves Israel.

*When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end - Because I am GOD, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior. I paid a huge price for you: all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in! That's how much you mean to me! That's how much I love you! Isaiah 43:2-4 (MSG)*

**Next week..."Caring for the Caregiver" and "The Extraordinary Encouragement".**

Take care and be God's,

***Hal***

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