

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

We can't live with them. We can't live without them. The vital role that family plays becomes increasingly apparent when the need arises to support an aging parent, ailing or chronically ill relative. The shortage of human resources in the healthcare system leaves us with most of the responsibility of providing care for family members who can no longer manage independently. We are required, by obligation rather than by choice, to step up and manage the care of serious conditions such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and acquired brain injury. This is a challenge that no one signs up for. Some appear to take on the challenge willingly. Turning away from what is asked of us is not really an option. For the most part, whether willingly or not, we are most likely to step up with firm commitment to assure our family member is receiving the best care possible – often at the risk of losing ourselves in the process.

I wrote this book in order to prevent family members from losing themselves while caregiving. In this reprint, the references are updated. I did not change or add content except to reflect the development of the featured 3-A Approach, it is now the 3-A Coping Framework.

Keeping It Together: How to Cope as a Family Caregiver without Losing Your Sanity is a product of the insight I obtained since writing my first book *Caregiving with Strength*. Both are cocoons, offering refuge to reflect and work towards making change for potential growth. My first book was written for both the family and the professional caregiver. Based on the feedback I received and my continued work with family caregivers, I came to see that you, as a family caregiver, required a book written just for family caregivers. This book is more practical, intended for you to feel you are being heard, offering appropriate tools and exercises that can be helpful in moving you forward with renewed purpose. It is not intended to replace any work you are doing with your present counselor, doctor, or therapist. It may be beneficial, though, to share this book's content as you see fit with the professionals you are working with.

Although I often refer to caregiving for the chronically ill in this book, the content pertains to all levels of caregiving. Some of the many ways in which you can provide care include:

- Shopping for an aunt
- Taking your spouse to medical appointments
- Reminding your grandmother to take her pills
- Paying the bills for your parent
- *Assisting* with bathing, dressing, and feeding
- Providing relief for a caregiver

As our population ages, you will see an increase in the number of people who step into a caregiving role for an aging relative or chronically ill family member. Often this will be by default rather than choice. It may be in small or large doses.

Just as there are no two trees that are exactly alike, there are no two caregivers who are exactly alike. The level of care and the impact of caregiving are based on several factors including the care recipient's needs, caregiver's health, whether the caregiver is living with the recipient, and the number of available supports. In the reference section at the end of

this book, you gain access to a helpful resource. It is a short questionnaire that I devised for information purposes entitled *Am I a Light, Middle or Heavy Weight Family Caregiver?*[™] Your responses serve to inform you on the weight you are carrying as a caregiver and to *assist* you in *acknowledging* that caregiving is work. You may take for granted that the weight from the caregiving can impact on other areas of your life and on your health.

If you have recently started your caregiving journey, this is a good time to be proactive and open to the material presented in this book. Consequently, you will see that you are more than a caregiver. You will obtain helpful information that will prevent you from burning out. If, however, you have been providing care for several years, perhaps 10 years or more, you may have heard enough. You may feel at your wits' end, and you may not believe that anything is going to help. You may be feeling trapped without a way out. If you are reading this and *acknowledge* feeling totally discouraged, it could be the first step to feeling better. This book can help you, but my advice in cases of burnout is to work first at feeling stronger and then go through its content when you feel ready. Depending on how you are feeling, it may be best to go through it with the support and *assistance* of a qualified professional.

Whether you are being proactive or considering making change for your own welfare, you will reap the benefits of reading this book. We can all learn from Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist, and Holocaust survivor. He made peace with his circumstance of living under unbearable conditions in the work camps during World War II. While living under those conditions, he found meaning and purpose, which helped him survive. While in the work camp, he passionately developed his psychotherapeutic method with the objective of sharing it with the world after the war – and that is just what he did. He wrote and published his book *Man's Search for Meaning* in 1946. His strong message relayed that you cannot avoid suffering but you have the choice on how to cope, finding meaning and moving forward with renewed purpose. Frankl died in 1997 but his monumental work and strong message live on: “When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

As a caregiver, you likely are not able to change the fact that your family member has a chronic illness or is now requiring more help with activities of daily living. You are therefore challenged to change yourself to cope and feel better living with the unchangeable circumstances. This book offers you *assistance* in facing the challenge, bringing in new life for the sake of your own health and the health of those you care for.