

Synopsis

From *The Soul of Caregiving, A Caregiver's Guide to Healing and Transformation* by
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Who are the caregivers? We all are, for at the heart of being human is the capacity to care, to reach out to others and explore the relationships we build. *The Soul of Caregiving* is about us and how we, as caregivers, serve, even sacrifice, for those in need. I invite you to explore with me how we have the opportunities to partake in a kind of pilgrimage along the path of our experiences as caregivers. Who will be your guide on this journey? Unlike other pilgrims who have a guide assigned to them, you will soon discover it is your own Soul guiding you. Professionally skilled as we may be to meet the needs of others, a fundamental core component of our busy lives as caregivers, is the necessity to stop and rest. It is not a waste of time, but rather a luxury of time, to ponder, reflect, and grow from our experiences. Not an easy endeavor in the midst of a whirlwind of activity. We, as caregivers, experience vulnerability, helplessness, fears, and pain over the traumatic events we experience because we care. We care about those whom we are called to serve. Compassion fatigue comes about because we care.

In Chapter One, I call this tension between activity and reflection, “the Dance of Caregiving,” a dance between the caregiver’s needs and those of the one in need. The chapter is an introduction to exploring something we do every day: to reflect on our experiences. Chapter Two, “Reclaiming Soul,” asks the question, “What is Soul?” and how is the caregiver empowered and sustained. Discovering Soul implies going deeper into the inner caverns of our being and listening to the inner beats of our heart where insight and wisdom abide. “Once Upon a Time in the Land of OZ,” Chapter Three, explores the universal underpinnings of the role of caregiving, as each profession exists in the broader mythic and archetypal realm of a culture.

In Chapter Four, “Truce or Consequences,” both the mythos and logos of caregiving are explored. Each relates to faithless science and unscientific faith, leading to a unity of the left and right brain functions. “The Ins and Outs of Hospitality,” in Chapter Five, discusses how the caregiver, as host, experiences three different dimensions of hospitality: the caregiver who hosts the stranger, the caregiver who hosts his or her reactions and experiences, and thirdly, the caregiver who welcomes the stories of the guests they host. Chapter Six, “Love is a Wounded Healer,” addresses an ancient question of the frailty of humankind. There is within each of us a space that seeks wholeness and transformation, an area of woundedness which often shows its face in the midst of our caregiving. In a unique and profound way, those who serve are transformed in the healing relationship that is created with those in need. We are wounded healers.

“Cultivating the Soul’s Garden,” Chapter Seven, addresses the art of reflection as a fundamental skill for caregivers. An understanding of Soul implies allowing the moment to take root and to reflect on how to nourish and sustain ourselves as caregivers. Chapter Eight focuses on “Spirituality: The Sinew of Human Experience” where imagination helps one discover meaning, arguing that the essential actions of a caregiver are spiritual. In Chapter Nine “Practice, Practice, Practice” I explore what a practice is and how caregiving is a spiritual practice. The

ordinary becomes spiritual, as inner strengths and values give birth to meaning, insight, and transformation. The “*Soul of Caregiving*” concludes with Chapter Ten, “Warning: Our Tank is Almost Empty” which explores compassion fatigue and its two sisters, secondary traumatic stress and burnout. We experience compassion fatigue because we care. We look at how to recognize the warning signs, take action to avoid them, and learn how to recover from them in building compassion resilience.

Each chapter invites the reader to ponder and reflect. There are questions at the end of each chapter to facilitate this process.

Introduction



Reflection on a life of nearly fifty years, as a caregiver in multiple healthcare and leadership roles, gives me pause to seek to find a voice and be heard. There are many reasons why one would want to write a book, and as a caregiver, something within me aches to share the insights and wisdom that I hold as a sacred treasure. I want to reach out to all who care selflessly for others. I want to say that the scars or interior wounds that you experience as caregivers are invitations to rediscover your Soul. You are not alone. You are not going mad when your soul aches because you have cared.

The vocation of a caregiver is a deep archetypal calling that sustains and allows one to enter another’s life as no other. In those moments where you hold what seems to be unbearable, you stand firm, maybe with knees shaking, and give life to those in need of your care. In holding what seems to be unbearable, you also experience pain and suffering in your acts of caregiving. Caregivers suffer because they care. Who hugs the hugger when h/she is at their wits end and is often feeling confused, overwhelmed, and even alienated from his or her peers?

Why do so many caregivers downplay the normal reaction to traumatic events or vicarious suffering they experience? Why are caregivers often fearful to reach out to another in confidence, or to share their story that screams to be heard? Why is it difficult for caregivers and for their peers to recognize and support those internal aches that gnaw and throb until the caregiver listens and then takes action? Who among us will listen? Do we know how? Who among us will care and who will be the first to reach out?

These are themes that are explored in *The Soul of Caregiving*. Not to give answers, but to create a space for each reader to listen to, become aware of, and claim their own voice by the

power of reflection. This is not a how-to-do-it book, because the guide to caregiving is not about an exterior action. The caregiver's guide is interior, it is about rediscovering one's Soul. It is not a quick fix, but a journey, a pilgrimage. Soul takes one deeper, through the resistances, through one's interior Soul pain and sufferings, to a reservoir of wisdom. Travel any way you like. You can walk, hike, sit on the back of a camel, ride in a rickshaw, or sit on an imaginary magic carpet, as you become a participant in a pilgrimage that is being assembled.

My definition of caregiving is broad in scope and covers a diversity of occupations and professions. Our cast of characters include caregivers in the healing arts, healthcare professionals, physicians, nurses, therapists, health-care and ancillary workers, certified chaplains, certified coaches, spiritual leaders, pastors, wellness coaches as well as first responders including firefighters, safety officers, and emergency medical service personnel. How about active and retired military, educators, and parents who care for their chronically ill children, and adult children who care for one or two parents? We are all caregivers.

This journey is one that is familiar and unfamiliar, one that is laden with surprises, struggles and monsters that appear to challenge us. Interior promptings of the Soul encourage the caregiver to reflect on daily triumphs, challenges, joys, and sufferings. Caregivers experience vulnerability, helplessness, fears, and pain over the traumatic events because they care, because they are human. At its core, the practice of caregiving requires a discipline of the heart, a focus to be present, to listen, and create an interior space of welcome for the one in need. Simultaneously, caregivers are given the opportunity to reflect on experiences, a process that is not foreign, just one that is lost or clouded over by the busyness of everyday lives. These promptings support of Soul, sustain, and empower us as caregivers. This is the *Soul of Caregiving* reclaiming one's interior guide through the process of reflection that leads to healing and transformation.