

Family Assets 2018 Scholarship

Can you imagine running a multimillion dollar corporation or being the architect behind one of the greatest football stadiums in the world and one day not being able to put on your own pants, eat by yourself or use the restroom by yourself? I have witnessed first hand; fathers not recognizing their daughters, family members accepting the fate of the terrible, unforgiving disease their loved one has been diagnosed with, and worst of all son's signing their mothers DNR bedside because they were not going to make it from the facility to the hospital via ambulance. I have seen husbands love on their wives like they were the only woman in the world, even when the wife didn't recognize who they were anymore and I have seen wives look at their husbands as if they were on their first date again. The elderly have lived what we read in our history books, they've experienced things I will soon go through, and they have blazed their own path through this world. For the passed couple summers I have dedicated my days to helping the elderly. I worked in an Assisted Living and Memory Care Facility taking care of the most amazing residents every summer and school holiday I had. Most recently, this summer, I had an internship at an Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Support, and Health Care Facility completing 145 hours of work viewing and working with the administrative side of the facility just to gain a different perspective on how the background of the facility works day to day. Today, I am now caring for an elderly gentleman with severe health problems while reassuring his family on a day-to-day basis. I am not going to lie; at the very beginning of my time caring for the elderly I was extremely intimidated. I had always wanted to be a NICU or 'baby' nurse so when I got this first job while trying to get into nursing school, I was intimidated but knew I needed to see and experience this side of things. Life, after all, comes full circle.

With all of that being said, the most important thing I have learned while caring for the elderly, as cliché as it sounds, is compassion. Not that I did not have compassion before, but I really learned what it meant and how to apply it. I find it easy to write someone's diagnoses on a piece of paper and be told this is what you need to do for someone, but when you get in their room and see them either thriving or struggling to take their next step, you take a step back. It is no longer about the caregivers' thoughts and feelings, those have to be put aside, you are now their second arm or leg. I talked about being intimidated earlier, before beginning my time caring for seniors, and I quickly learned it is not about me or what I think anymore; I am their advocate, their voice, and an extension of them. Along with compassion, I have learned patience. When you are down on the floor looking after someone who has lived a magnificent life, who has been independent and raised their own family and cared for grandchildren, they are going to be frustrated some days and they are going to need a minute. Caring for an elderly person, you have to take into consideration how independent they have been in their lives up until this point in time; they've run households, corporations, you name it, and now you are coming into their space, or home even, to help them pick out clothes and put them on. I cannot imagine.

Compassion and patience is of the utmost importance when caring for him or her.

Working with seniors has changed my outlook on life immensely. I know my days are numbered, but at the same time I do not know what that number is. It is important to live your life, make a difference, and be kind; but at the same time know that every single day you are living it could be your last. I have cared for seniors who digressed over years time; while others were driving, looking 30 years younger than their age said and then three months later they are bed ridden with a necrotic foot and bedsores. Nothing lasts forever. Compassion and patience will go a long way to any senior. Caring for seniors has also taught me to be patient in day-to-day life; you never know what others are going through. Some may have just left their mothers bedside, some may have not seen their loved ones in years out of denial, and others may have just left a Care Plan meeting hearing those harsh words of a diagnosis.

I think society needs to raise the standards for caregivers in Senior Homes, raise the confidence in families that we are just an extension of them taking care of their loved one while they are away, and raise awareness that it is okay to have help and live in a facility. Raising the standards for caregivers will directly apply to the standard of care your mom, dad, aunt, or family member will get. Having more educated and capable caregivers will also help the families understand each and every thing their loved one is going through, having the caregiver being able to explain things is extremely comforting. I do not think society today values the elderly as much as they should, and some days I feel as if the world treats Nursing Homes or any other elderly facility like a throw away pile. People's views of nursing homes have a range of answers from poor quality to okay; when in reality they all should be positive and have positive experiences, if the quality is raised to what I think it should be. Promoting more senior holidays, like Veterans Day, and having more events that bring the community in will not only improve the facility but also the quality of life of a resident. I can see the difference when a resident's family visits every other day or even every week, compared to those other residents who only get an hour or so visit on a holiday. The quality of life for those who get visitors or go see visitors is far superior to those who, in no fault of their own, are recluses to their room. Making the community apart of their family or a frequent visitor will increase quality of life immensely. Lastly, regarding independence, we need to let seniors know help is okay, it is not demeaning; so many accidents happen (more so, falls) when a senior is trying to be too independent for their body. Promoting caregivers to come at some points during the week to help out will also lessen the blow **if** the day comes that they need to live in a home or facility where they have access to help all the time. Someone offering to help you all the time can be demeaning to oneself and lessen the quality of life making the senior depressed or try and be more independent and end up hurting oneself.

Money can also contribute to that burden of not being able to have all of your independence. To improve quality of life all over for seniors, more so for future seniors, is to make Long Term Insurance a normal thing 55+ year olds get, not a requirement but close to it. Not only will it pay for your care on a daily basis, or a large chunk of it, from the time you need it, it will also relieve stress from your family when the time comes to pay the bills. Money and paying bills can be extremely stressful for seniors and their families. Stress leads to many and contributes to many diseases; relieving or erasing all that stress of money when the time comes to have part time or full time care can be crucial for quality of life all around.

In conclusion, the most important lesson I have learned for caring for the elderly is compassion and patience. I could not imagine living 80+ years of independence and even raising children, grandchildren, and working a full time job then not being able to make my bed at the beginning of the day. Compassion and understanding goes a long way when caring for seniors. They may need an extra minute some days or may just need a day, which is where patience is key to helping them. Nothing lasts forever, make sure you treat everyday like it's your last while trying to make a difference or impact in this world. All the meanwhile, society needs to raise the standards for caregivers in Senior Homes, raise the confidence in families that we are just an extension of them taking care of their loved one while they are away, and raise awareness that it is okay to have help.