

How To Stay Positive - Three Tips For Caregivers

By [Elaine K. Sanchez](#)

Madelyn Kubin was a Kansas farm woman who overpowered her own failing health to care for her husband after he suffered a debilitating stroke. She chronicled her experience through writing letters to her daughter. Madelyn developed a myriad of coping strategies in order to maintain a positive attitude. The following survival tips are illustrated with excerpts from her letters.

Detach Yourself Mentally by Practicing “Creative Indifference”

The routine of caregiving can be confining, tedious, and exhausting. Practicing “creative indifference” can help shift your thoughts away from the drudgery of your daily activities and focus your mental energy in more positive ways.

Madelyn wrote about this philosophy after having a conversation with a friend who was suffering with terminal cancer.

“We talked about how we had changed because of the illnesses. He said he and his wife have developed a greater sense of humor. They see things funny that I guess most people wouldn’t. I told him I had developed a detached attitude. He says he calls it creative indifference and he has developed it too. I like that better, as detached seems cold. Whatever you call it, it means not allowing yourself to become emotionally ravaged by the progression of events.”

Learn Something New

Embrace the process of learning. Reading to expand your mind, developing a new skill, or even performing a routine task in a different way can be invigorating. Even though you may feel physically confined in your caregiving role, there are no restrictions on how far your mind can go.

Madelyn described it this way:

“I read that we have little root-like things called dendrites in our brain. The article stated that people can grow new dendrites to replace some that are lost from a stroke – or even old age. The secret is to develop some new habits. It seems that one good way is to exercise, develop a new hobby or to get very interested in something different – something a person enjoys. My flowers are my new hobby. As I was trying to get all the plants watered this morning, I couldn’t help but wonder if learning how to screw in hoses would help grow new dendrites.”

Savor Happy Memories

People who are chronically ill or suffer constant pain can become demanding, cranky, and depressed. Sometimes it can be hard to remember who your loved one was before he or she got sick. Remembering a happier time helped Madelyn look at her husband a little differently when she wrote:

“I’ll never forget Valentine’s Day, 1993 when we were in Port Richey, Florida. We were on our way to meet my sister, her husband, and another couple at a very elegant country club.

On the way, we stopped at a grocery store to see if we could find an inexpensive floral gift for Jean and her friend. We were about to give up when the clerk showed us an orchid mounted in a small white wicker basket. We selected two. I must have been looking wistful, because Quentin asked if I would like to have one. I said I sure would!

It was so pretty that I didn’t want to mess up the corsage by wearing it, so I kept it in the basket. Our meal was delicious. There was free champagne and a flower for each lady. As we drove around that day I had the most joyous awareness of how much I loved my husband of fifty-one years. The flower lasted three weeks. This is another experience I’ll never be able to repeat, but I’m so glad I have the memory.”

Madelyn survived her caregiving experience by taking care of herself physically, mentally, and spiritually. Although there is nothing that can make the job of caregiving easy, developing an attitude of creative indifference, learning something new, and savoring happy memories can help reduce the stress.

Elaine K. Sanchez, author of the tender, gritty, and uproariously funny book, *Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver* speaks to audiences across the country about finding hope and humor in aging, illness, and long-term caregiving. For a free Caregiver’s Survival Guide, visit her website at <http://www.LaineyPublishing.com>