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# GUEST OPINION

## Fearless family caregivers must also care for themselves

BY GARY BARG  
Editor of Today's Caregiver magazine

I started my journey as a family caregiver 17 years ago as I helped my mom care for my dad, who was diagnosed with bone marrow cancer. Mom went from loving spouse to caregiver as his condition worsened. Dad passed away a year later and immediately afterwards, mom became caregiver for her parents who were living with cancer, Alzheimer's and strokes. Although I was living out of state, I would return home once every six weeks for a few days to help in whatever way I could.

Late in August 1994, I was able to spend two weeks back home. Within hours of returning home, I was racing around town helping mom do all she needed to do as family caregiver. We were making midnight dashes to the hospital and life and death decisions for both grandparents. The evening before I was to leave, I told mom that I was grateful to be able to come home during this time of overwhelming challenges. She didn't understand what I was trying to say, because what was for me the most intense, scary and sleepless two weeks of my life was for Mom just a regular

two-week period in her life as a caregiver. This is a story to which every caregiver can relate.

According to an AARP study, if a caregiver does not reach out for help, they cannot be as effective as possible in their caregiving role, are less likely to navigate the complex health care system, and are more prone to physical and mental illnesses. In the most disconcerting statistic, a recent Stanford study concluded that nearly 40 percent of caregivers will die from stress-related disorders before their loved one dies.

Then why do we do it? The answer is simple: because our loved ones need us. So, how do we go from being a dedicated daughter, son or spouse to being a dietitian, psychologist, pharmacist and incontinence specialist? We have actually found significant common traits among the most successful family caregivers. First, they believe that they can make a difference. Second, they see their role in their loved one's care as being just as important as any other member on the care team. Third, they ask lots of questions and do not easily take "no" for an answer.

The most important thing we can do for our loved ones turns out to be the hardest

for so many of us; we need to learn to care for ourselves. Unfortunately, many times a caregiver's reaction to the concept of self-care is "Who has time to care for me? I spend all my time caring for my loved one." Anytime I hear that reaction, my answer is, "Okay, but who will care for you AND your loved one when you take ill due to not caring for yourself as well as you care for your loved one?"

We must learn all we can about the disease or illness that our loved one is battling; in this case, knowledge truly is power. But we must also learn all we can about our role as caregiver. When it comes to caregiving, knowledge is truly power. ■

— Gary Barg is founder and Editor-in-Chief of Today's Caregiver magazine and caregiver.com as well as the author of the book: *The Fearless Caregiver*. He hosted a Fearless Caregiver conference on Nov. 7 at Three Oaks Conference center in Estero. The keynote speaker was Florida's Secretary of Elder Affairs, Dr. Douglas Beach. Lee Memorial Heath System provided 200 area family caregivers with complimentary tickets to the event.

## How JFK assassination changed liberalism

BY RICH LOWRY

From a distance of nearly 50 years, the liberalism of 1960 is hardly recognizable. It was comfortable with the use of American power abroad, unabashedly patriotic and forward-looking. But that was before The Fall.

In his eye-opening book "Camelot and the Cultural Revolution," Jim Piereson argues The Fall was the assassination of President Kennedy. It represented more than the tragic death of a young president, but the descent of liberalism from an optimistic creed focused on pragmatic improvements in the American condition to a darker philosophy obsessed with America's sins. Echoes of the assassination — and the meaning attributed to it by JFK's admirers — can still be heard in the querulous tones of contemporary liberalism.

The real John F. Kennedy wasn't the paladin of liberal purity of myth. He was friends with Joseph McCarthy. In his 1952 campaign for Senate and his 1960 presidential campaign, he got to the right of his Republican opponents on key issues. "Kennedy did not want anyone to tag him as a liberal, which

he regarded as the kiss of death in electoral politics," Piereson writes. As president, he was vigorously anti-communist, a tax-cutter and a cautious supporter of civil rights.

His kind of liberalism — "tough and realistic," as Piereson puts it, in the tradition of FDR and Truman — was carried away in the riptide of his death. In a crucial and counter-intuitive interpretive act, the nation's opinion elite made JFK a martyr to civil rights instead of the Cold War. Kennedy had been killed by a communist, Lee Harvey Oswald, who a few years before had tried to defect to the Soviet Union. Liberals nonetheless blamed the assassination on, in the words of Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, "the hatred and bitterness that has been injected into the life of our nation by bigots."

Thus, the assassination curdled into an indictment of American society: "Kennedy Victim of Violent Streak He Sought to Curb in Nation," read a New York Times headline. Until this point, 20th-century liberalism had tended to see history as a steady march of progress. Now, the march had been interrupted by the country's own pathologies.

American history no longer appeared to be a benign process, but a twisted story of rapine and oppression. "With such a bill of indictment," Piereson writes, "the new liberals now held that Americans had no good reason to feel pride in their country's past or optimism about its future."

Their agenda took on a punitive edge, focused on compensating victim groups and expiating the country's guilt. The conspiracy theories and anti-Americanism that had so appalled liberals about the far right in the 1950s had now gravitated to the left.

This downbeat and adversarial disposition is — more than any specific policy weaknesses on, say, national security — a drag on contemporary liberalism's long-term appeal. One day a Democratic politician will emerge who is compelling enough to vanquish the foul spirit of JFK's assassination from the left.

Until that happens, JFK has to be remembered, in Piereson's words, as "the last articulate spokesman for the now lost world of American liberalism." ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

## LETTER to the EDITOR

### Florida Weekly Editor:

The plight of dogs and cats in shelters is such a tragedy (Buying time, Nov. 1). It is so disturbing to read/or hear about their situation.

I read your paper's article and it is so sad and I just wanted to share my opinion. I called about a male Chihuahua who was on the lost and found site. He isn't available for adoption yet since they have to wait for the owner should they show up. The person I spoke to didn't take my name or seemed interested in finding out information in regards to adopting their animals to people who couldn't physically come in. They don't take credit cards (I would have sent a check) etc. She did say I could call back should the animal become available and talk to someone else about their policies.

I can understand if this place was a "no kill" shelter and was looking out for the best interest of the animals they have. I can see why meeting people in person and paying in person etc is important.

Unfortunately, this place euthanizes more animals than they adopt out according to the article I read. I was moved by their plight and over the last couple of years I have adopted 2 dogs from another Rescue Group and 1 dog from a shelter. I thought maybe I could adopt one more. I always adopt from a shelter or adopt a stray dog. I don't go to breeders to find a dog. There are just too many homeless dogs in shelters or dropped off/abandoned in the countryside to fend for themselves. I would adopt a poor homeless cat if we weren't so allergic. The homeless cats plight seems even worse than the homeless dogs plight. Because I can't adopt a cat, I donate money/items for yard sales etc to help them out.

The shelter that I am a "travel companion" for has a wonderful program and several sister cities they work with that take the dogs into foster homes until they can find homes for them. They work with volunteers that are flying to different cities on vacation or business that are will-

ing to accompany the dog on their flight. The shelter pays the airfare for the dog through donations and fundraisers so they have a chance of finding a home in a less saturated area. When you reach your destination the Rescue group is there waiting to pick the dog up at the airport. I wonder if people even realize that they can participate in these programs if the shelter is participating with other Rescues in different cities. If you are traveling to that particular city it really isn't that much work to bring a dog along with you. Bringing dogs in the cargo hold of a plane is a little more tricky since it is based on weather conditions/time of year (too hot or too cold for the animal to travel safely).

I just wanted to offer my opinion since I was very discouraged from even trying to attempt to adopt from this shelter. I don't live in Florida and was willing to pay airfare for a dog if the shelter could find a travel companion coming to Boston.

Leslie McShane  
Mendon Massachusetts ■