

Forget-Me-Not Spotlight

The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers Looking After Yourself and Your Family While Helping an Aging Parent

By Barry J. Jacobs, PsyD

A review by Shannon Nosbisch, C.D.P., co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness

This book is not just for caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia. It is a book for ALL caregivers caring for loved ones with any type of chronic illness or an aging parent that needs care.

Barry Jacobs' story began when he was in his early teens and his father was diagnosed with a brain tumor. His father died within the year, but the emotional turmoil and changes that went on after that were very challenging for him.

He now works with couples and families coping with serious health problems. The author states that just as in Alzheimer's disease, any serious illness affects the family, not just individuals. Communicating feelings and thoughts is one of the most important things that family members can do to strategize handling the illness in order to sustain the family.

Barry Jacobs uses the story of two siblings and their mother's experience with cancer to delve into the emotional aspects of caregiving. As the book (and the mother's disease) progresses through nine chapters, Jacobs discusses the feelings of and relationships among the family – mother, daughters, in-laws, grandchildren, etc.

He says that however satisfying or helpful these relationships are will be shaped by how successfully or poorly family members grapple with seven basic psychological tasks. Each of these tasks – defining commitments, utilizing support, handling sacrifice, weighing hope and acceptance, fostering awareness and flexibility, protecting intimacy and sustaining the spirit - are outlined in seven chapters.

At the end of each chapter, there is a section of questions and answers that explore different caregiving problems and offer specific tips and strategies for success.

Jacobs “hopes to impart to caregivers the skills needed to fare as well as possible during and after the serious illness of an aging parent or other loved one. By knowing how to recognize the early signs of caregiver fatigue and taking action to support all family members, our families can become stronger, through the caregiving experience, deriving greater regard for each member and a deepened love.”

This book was very thought provoking for me. I could see all the emotions my husband’s family went through caring for their mother living with Alzheimer’s disease and wondering how my five siblings and I (all with different personalities) will deal with my parents’ chronic illness if/when it happens. I recommend reading this book to help you better understand the many different emotions that present themselves during a chronic illness and to learn how to cope with them in your family situation.

This resource is available at the Effingham Public Library, Flora Public Library, Evans Public Library, Newton Public Library, Greenup Township Public Library, Shelbyville Public Library and the Mattoon Public Library in the Forget-Me-Not Resource Center. If you do not have a library card, ask at the main desk how you can check it out.