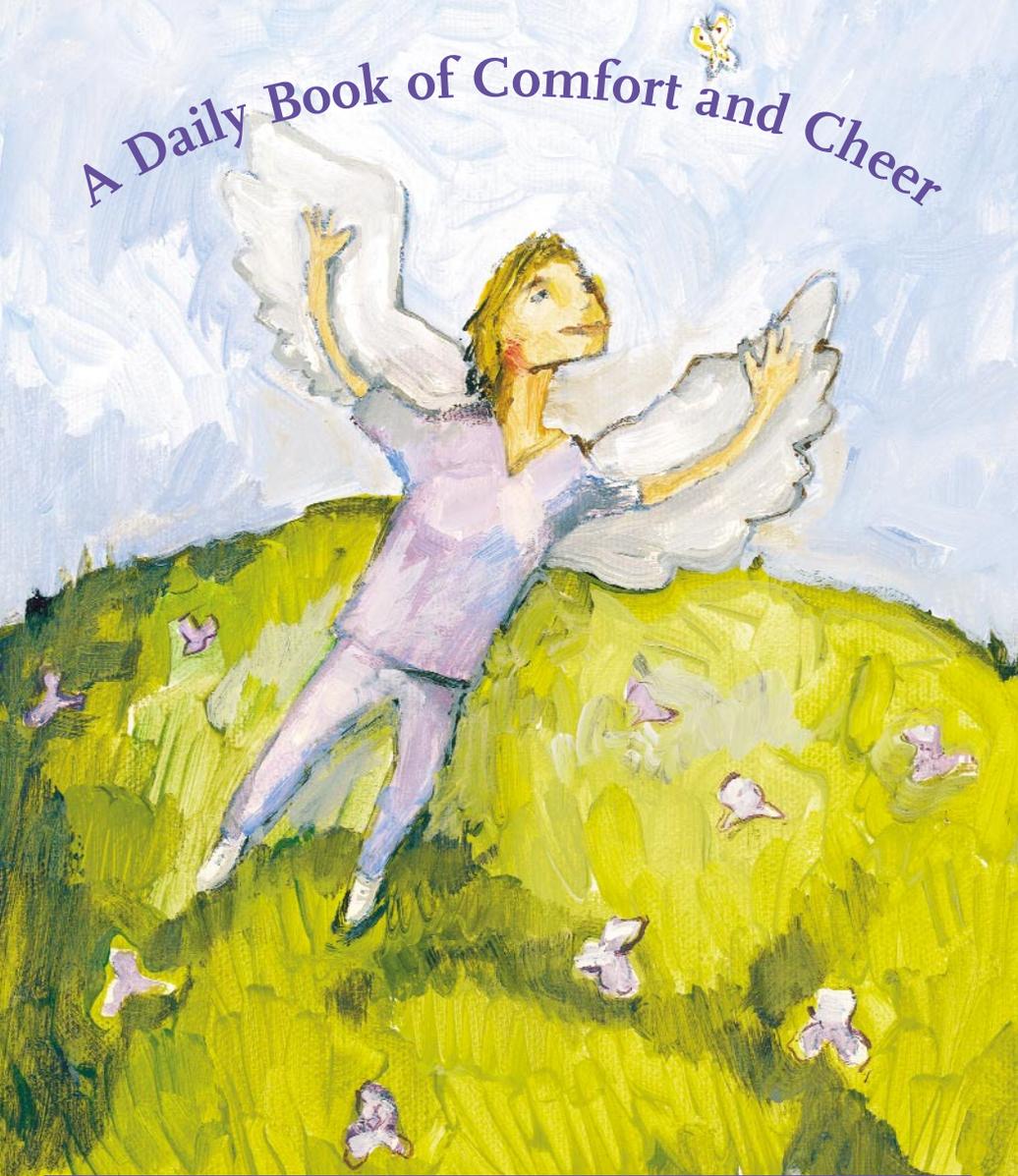


BLESSED ARE THE  
**CAREGIVERS**

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A Daily Book of Comfort and Cheer



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**Bethany Knight**

Best-selling author of *For Goodness' Sake*

BLESSED ARE THE  
**CAREGIVERS**

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A Daily Book of Comfort and Cheer

by

Bethany Knight



Hartman Publishing

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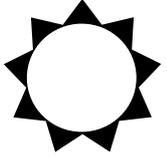
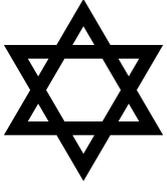
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## Foreword

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I first met Bethany Knight at an airport. She was to be the keynote speaker at the Portman conference, a day-long celebration of CNAs and the work they do with persons suffering dementia. I had volunteered to chauffeur, hoping to learn something in the precious moments that I would have her to myself.

I had second thoughts about whether or not I should have volunteered to pick someone up in my dearly-loved-but-definitely-used old car, “Mary Jo.” What would this nationally-known speaker think of an organization that sent such a courier?

Traffic was unusually heavy that day. I had not left work as early as I had planned. The short-term parking was full. Without enough time left to seek out a shuttle, I parked in the long-term area and started walking. As I walked, I became more excited, but also more anxious. What would I say to this person? Would she see me (a ridiculous thought, as I carried a 2’x3’ bright orange sign)? Should I have her wait by the doors while I get the car?

I checked the monitor at the ticket counter and headed for the gate. Her flight was arriving on time. I had been told I could meet her at the baggage claim, but somehow that offended my sense of hospitality. No, I must meet her at the gate with my bright orange sign. Still plenty of time.

I got to the gate only to find a change had been made. She would now be arriving at the opposite end of the terminal, still on time. I once again started walking and came to a gate that didn’t look like one. There were no planes, no check-in counter, and outside was a street with taxis and shuttles. I stood, for what seemed like forever, as several shuttles unloaded. Passengers glanced at my sign, some even smiled, but they kept on walking. More shuttles unloaded, all without producing Bethany. Everyone was gone, even the skycaps.

By now I had several doubts. Did I misread the monitors? Did I have the right airline? Was I even at the right airport?

Who was I to think that I should be the one to pick her up in the first place?

As I walked into a nearby restroom, I heard another van pull up. I stepped out of that restroom, my sign tucked under my arm, almost the instant that Bethany walked in at the gate. She couldn't have read the sign at that angle, but she must have sensed this lost-looking soul was looking for her. Our eyes met, we hugged, and Bethany said, "Tell me about yourself."

A friendship was born at that airport, one that I believe God had designed a very long time ago. When I met Bethany, I felt as if we had been friends most of my life. I knew in a moment: here was someone who completely understood my passion in life, caring for "old souls." She shared this passion, and acknowledged the vision I have for a better, holistic, person-centered approach to eldercare in America.

Those moments of having Bethany to yourself are here. She will speak to you as she has to me—because she is real, because of her unshadowed vision for a better world for caregivers and those we care for, because she believes, as I do, that our work is holy, ordained by God.

Her words will meet you in the moments of pain, doubt, fear, celebration, anticipation, spontaneity, and purely unaltered joy that all caregivers experience, whether a CNA, a nurse, a housekeeper, a food service worker, or even an activities director like me.

My journey with Bethany has been personal, growing, spiritual, and most of all, blessed. I know that yours will be, too. Treasure the journey.

Jill R. Trewin, April, 2001

Jill Trewin is currently the Resident Services Manager at Father Murray Nursing Center in Center Line, Michigan.

## *Dedication*

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Standing at the foot of his modest grave, I placed a garland of gardenias across the stone inscribed “Bede Griffiths.” A Roman Catholic monk, Bede lived as an Indian in India for 35 years, a witness of the unity and harmony he wished to forge between East and West—between all peoples. He lived and was buried at Shantivanam (Peace Forest), the ashram he founded in southern India.

We have to discover the inner relationship between...different aspects of Truth and unite them in ourselves. I have to be a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jain, a Parsee, a Sikh, a Muslim, and a Jew, as well as a Christian, if I am to know the Truth and to find the point of reconciliation in all religion...the goal of each religion is the same.

Sitting in the sweet heat of a December day in northern India one week later, I listened to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist exiled Tibetan leader, talk about how he found the Beatitudes of the Bible so beautiful. He compared them to the teachings of his own religious tradition.

We must love without attachment, (blessed are the poor) with compassion and kindness, (blessed are those who show mercy) this is very important. Attachment based on one’s mental projection makes one blind. Too much attachment leads to hate, but too much expectation without attachment makes feelings towards enemies and friends equal, (blessed are the peacemakers).

On a plane that same year, a young wood carver shared his Bahá’í faith and teachings from Abdu’l Baha, and gave me a book.

Religion should unite all hearts and cause wars and disputes to vanish from the face of the earth; it should give birth to spirituality, and bring light and life to every soul. If religion becomes a cause of dislike, hatred and division it would be better to be without it, and to withdraw from such a religion would be truly a religious act. For it is clear that the purpose of a remedy is to cure, but if the remedy only aggravates the complaint, it had better

be left alone. Any religion which is not a cause of love and unity is no religion.

Last summer in Jackson, Mississippi, Hazel Williams, a certified nursing assistant with the heart and voice of a giant, opened a meeting with other CNAs by singing a rousing spiritual. We clung to her rich, swelling voice as it carried us across time and space. An aide 26 of her 45 years, Hazel could tame a mountain lion with her love alone. The Mississippi aides continue to meet monthly by telephone, with "Hazel Leads Prayer" a fixed agenda item. Everyone knows Hazel's prayers are heard.

Bede Griffiths.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Abdu'l Baha.

Hazel Williams.

Traveling these dazzling moments like rocks across the river, I have heard one single message: of a loving, whole, peaceful and just world. And nowhere does this message ring more brilliantly than in the lives of America's caregivers.

Caregivers are great lovers of life, with faith like a furnace. Regardless of the tenets, their faith burns within and fuels words and deeds over long lifetimes of giving beyond measure.

Employers are forever seeking the secrets for recruiting these extraordinary souls. I suggest the formula lies in recognition of their faith life. What makes someone care for a stranger with the tenderness reserved for a family member? Faith. Faith in a loving, whole, peaceful and just world.

It is in this spirit of recognition for the saints among us, and with great affection, I dedicate this book. Based on the Beatitudes, may this little book feed many a furnace!

# *Introduction*

## *Gift of Good Things That Are Useful*

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What are the Beatitudes?

Derived from the Latin *beatus* meaning blessed or happy, the Beatitudes are the lines that begin Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, found in the fifth chapter, verses three through twelve, of the Gospel according to Matthew.

But what are the Beatitudes? Eight or nine teachings that name the virtues leading to a blessed life. The Beatitudes are a recipe for right living, for a way of life that includes good works and blessed feelings. Sounds like caregiving to me.

Within the Russian Orthodox Church, the term Beatitudes has been translated as "Gift of Good Things That Are Useful." A two part sentence, the first clause states the cause for blessing, the second half is the benediction, the promise or reward.

The Beatitudes

January: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

February: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

March: Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

April: Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for holiness, for they shall be satisfied.

May: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

June: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

July: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

August: Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Because we have 12 months, I have extended the Beatitudes by including verses thirteen to sixteen of the Sermon:

September: Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.

October: You are the salt of the earth.

November: You are the light of the world.

December: Let your light so shine that they may know you by your good works.

Ester Mary Walker wrote the *Beatitudes for the Aged*, a poignant poem saluting caregivers, but lacking the second half of the Beatitude classic form, the benediction. Perhaps this book will provide Ester's missing benedictions.

*Beatitudes for the Aged*

Blessed are they  
Who understand  
My faltering step  
And palsied hand.  
Blessed are they  
Who know today  
My ears must strain  
To catch what they say.  
Blessed are they  
Who seem to know  
My eyes are dim  
and my wits are slow.  
Blessed are they  
That looked away  
When coffee spilled  
At the table today.  
Blessed are they  
With a cheery smile  
Who stop to chat  
For a little while.  
Blessed are they  
Who never say,  
"You've told me that story  
Twice today."  
Blessed are they

Who know the ways  
To bring back memories  
Of yesterdays.  
Blessed are they  
Who make it known  
That I'm loved, respected,  
And not alone.  
Blessed are they  
Who know I'm at a loss  
To find the strength  
To carry the cross.  
Blessed are they  
Who ease the days  
On my journey Home  
In loving ways.

—Ester Mary Walker

## *Acknowledgements and Appreciation*

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To caregivers far and wide who have shared their stories, dreams, poems, and spirit.

To Dorothy Bonnette for introducing me to so many classic prayers and blessings.

To Tanya Looney for restoring her faith.

To Debra Medders for being a rock and a fortress.

To Sister Del Ray for doing the right thing and sharing it.

To the tender hearts of Countryside Place.

To Maureen Osis and Terry Bucher for rounding up such grand material.

To Elise Nakhnikian of [longermcareprovider.com](http://longermcareprovider.com) where some of these ideas first appeared.

To Share Ernst for moving beyond reaction to creation.

To Jill for saying “yes.”

To Susan and the rest of the Hartman Family for moving New Mexico next to Vermont.

To my students at Northern State Correctional Facility for their honesty and inspiration.

To Dolly for keeping food in the house and dirt off the floor while I wrote.

To my family who understood.

In some instances the names have been changed to avoid heartache.

—Bethany Knight  
Glover, Vermont, April 2001

## *January: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*

---

Those who know the freedom of being poor in spirit speak of feeling blessed. Not motivated by greed or desire for great material wealth, they live life on a different plane, focusing on the joy of living, the majesty of relationships.

Caregivers who are poor in spirit see themselves as answering a call, not rationally weighing career options. While the world may consider them powerless, low on the totem pole, the humble caregiver approaches each day with a deep sense of security and certainty. She knows that her faith alone will preserve her in the midst of life's afflictions. She does not turn to her own resources nor rely on her achievements to overcome whatever difficulties she faces.

Such men and women are not peacocks pridefully displaying their feathers. Compliments are humbly received but do not falsely build egos. Leading lives of simplicity, they seem uninterested in flattery. Trusting in their God, their lives become the kingdom of heaven. If you're looking for someone to give you the shirt off her back, look no further.

A certified nursing assistant for 34 years, Mary Morrison had a full weekend planned when her employer summoned her to a national retreat in Atlanta. “You’ve been selected as a charter member of Mariner Post Acute Network Certified Nursing Assistant Professional Advisory Council.”

“My son was getting out of prison, but I told him I had to go to Atlanta. I wanted to be on the Council,” Mary recalled.

She was no stranger to having relatives in and out of prison. All three of her children were mentally handicapped, and trouble with the law came easily.

What caused the retardation? “Well,” Mary would answer, “getting kicked in the stomach during every pregnancy, I expect.”

A tiny woman with a fashion flair, Mary’s eyes were deep and bright. Her hands were like leather gloves; how many thousands of times had she washed them while washing others?

Crowned Council Queen, Mary wrote her first poem:

To me, caring means taking the time to love, listen and touch.

To my residents these three things mean so much.  
Even if it is a second, a minute or an hour,  
These three things help my residents feel like they have power.

If you’re as afraid and fragile as they are  
This tells them that I’m their shining star.

I am their family away from home  
When I care for my residents they never roam.

I am the one they tell their stories to  
And I know that in the future it could be me or you.  
So when talking with my residents I’m not anxious  
Because I know caring is about being patient.

—Love, Queen Mary  
Brian Center Health and Rehab, LaGrange, Georgia

Julia Jones walks through life like a woman on a free shopping spree at the grocery store. Everything looks interesting; she grabs a handful and keeps moving forward.

Julia has been a certified nursing assistant since she was a teenager. Now in her forties, there is little she hasn't mastered in a nursing home. Upon discovering that CPR classes were extraordinarily expensive, she became certified so she could offer them for \$5 a person at her facility. She also took on staff scheduling, medical transport, orientation of new staff, drug testing, the nursing budget and more. When the activities director goes on vacation, Julia fills in. This is also true for covering vacancies in social services and rehabilitation.

One of life's cheerleaders, Julia doesn't roll with the punches, she just plain ignores them. When she decided to have a baby, 19 miscarriages preceded the birth of her treasured Jasmine.

Julia worked four jobs to give Jasmine a home, ballet lessons and after-school programs. Days off were unheard of, and Julia's only experience with sick days was filling in for others when they were ill.

Hearing about a new job at a brand-new facility, the curious Julia applied. Days later, she jubilantly celebrated her acceptance of a great offer.

"You know what the best part is? I can have just one job, and be like everyone else. Now I can volunteer at Jasmine's school, and help tutor kids in reading."

---

TODAY: *Prepare for your reward.*

Regardless of civilization or era, all communities of human beings have had activities and property that signal success, saying, "I made it."

During the first thousand years of recorded time in Europe, blessings from the dying and from caregivers were among the most sought-after possessions to receive. Both were seen as holy people: the dying because they had one foot in the next world, and the caregiver because she was humble.

Following a day-long workshop on caregiving held in a Wichita church, a group of nursing assistants was treated to a building tour and impromptu organ concert by the church organist. It was a powerful moment: 15 dedicated caregivers perched on pews, majestic music moving from the pipes to the vaulted ceilings. At times, the cushioned pews seemed to vibrate as the organ took over the sanctuary.

Afterwards, the CNAs were asked to stand and bless one another and all others present. The sacred nature of the gathering had not gone unnoticed.

Someone asked the organist, "Why do you play those constant really low notes?"

"That's the foundation of the piece; you can't have any music without it. Everything is based on them.... kind of like you, I suppose."

High quality nursing assistants are the foundation of all caregiving enterprises. Everything good is based on you.

---

TODAY: *Bless one another.*

To my cellist husband, the greatest composer who ever lived was Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach was a member of a remarkable family of musicians, whose three sons also became composers. J. S. Bach wrote all kinds of vocal and instrumental music, including the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the *Mass in B minor*.

Like all great creators, Bach was inspired; he carried inside a Divine Spark. Certainly the study of music composition and learning to play instruments was essential to his success, but without his inner genius, nothing would have ever been produced.

Exceptional caregivers share Bach's deeply personal sense of inspiration. Of course, being well grounded and versed in the practice of caring for others is essential, but without one's heart as the motivator, the driving force, nothing enduring can be produced.

Whether he was writing a piece for the solo flute or a grand scale chorale for one hundred voices, Bach began each composition exactly the same way. Before one note was penned on to the blank sheet, he wrote his dedication on the upper-left-hand side of the page: To The Glory of God.

Summoning strength and a sense of mission at the beginning of every day, humble caregivers undoubtedly whisper a similar pledge.

---

TODAY: *Give glory where it is due.*

Entertainment Tonight blares the news of stars splitting and couples coupling. People magazine spills the nasty stories of celebrity addictions and rehab nightmares. We're forever being told about the diets, wardrobes and vacations of the rich and famous, whether we're interested or not.

With such constant reminders of their Bigness and our Smallness, what sense can we make of our own lives? No TV reporter seems interested in what we eat and wear, and our vacation spent cleaning the kids' rooms will hardly be broadcast by Mary Hart!

In truth, every life is just that, a full and complete life, worthy of right living and good works. Publicity and hype do not make a life better or more meaningful. In fact, how often do we hear the most popular singers and actors grieve for their privacy and a simple life when they are no longer able to go to the mall without being mobbed?

Your place of work, be it a hospital, nursing home, assisted living facility, school, group home or private home, is as rich and deserving as any Hollywood studio or mansion. Humanity is the great ocean, and your life is a single drop, containing all the ingredients of the ocean, just in a smaller amount. As you live, so could the world. Never minimize your greatness, your precious life and the gratitude of others for the gift that is you.

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

—William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

---

TODAY: *Hold infinity in the palm of your hand.*

From an advice column asking readers about doctors:

Stand back. You're in the way of an avalanche. Doctors are motivated by greed..If you took the dollars out of medicine, our society would rid itself of the parasites in the medical field, as well as those in the pharmaceutical and insurance industries...these people are killing us...If I treated my clients the way doctors have treated me, I would be unemployed or in jail.

Bob in Massachusetts

And from a Healthcare Provider Formerly Known as Doc:

Government meddling, managed care, red tape and overzealous lawyers have totally destroyed the doctor-patient relationship. In the eyes of insurance companies, we are no longer physicians, but 'healthcare providers.' The rising cost of medicine has been a factor, but it is the MD who has taken the blame, even though our financial reimbursement has dropped substantially.

We've heard this and worse before. Americans no longer trust the healthcare system; they think it is expensive, poor in quality, and places too much emphasis on technology. Patients miss the bedside manner, the human touch, and the feeling that they matter.

Regardless of the extraneous and annoying pressures, humble caregivers who are poor in spirit don't take their eyes off the prize. Even when time is short, the human touch is always present.

---

TODAY: *Show that health care still has a human face.*

*I Said a Prayer for You Today*

I said a prayer for you today  
And know God must have heard.  
I felt the answer in my heart  
Although He spoke not a word.  
I didn't ask for wealth or fame  
(I know you wouldn't mind).  
I asked Him to send treasures  
Of a far more lasting kind.  
I prayed that He'd be near you  
At the start of each new day,  
To grant you health and blessings  
And friends to share the way.  
I asked for happiness for you  
In all things great and small.  
But it was for His loving care  
I prayed the most of all.

—Anonymous

Today may be the birthday or anniversary date of a co-worker, or possibly the date s/he became a caregiver, some five or ten or more years ago. Perhaps someone in your care is celebrating today.

Rather than going to Wal-Mart, just go to the store of your heart—that storehouse of love and good will. You'll find whatever they need.

---

TODAY: *Say a prayer for someone.*

Since I live 20 miles from Canada, my mailbox is full of shopping guides and flyers, inviting me to cross the border and spend money to save money.

“What do you notice about this advertisement?” my husband asked one winter morning, handing me a full-color newsprint publication called *The Shopper: Your Saving Guide*.

Was it the prices? I didn’t recognize a lot of the brands. Wait a minute.

“The grandmother in the picture!”

We both noticed her. The photograph was a kitchen table scene. Dad was leafing through *The Shopper*, with his son seated next to him, eagerly pointing to something. Standing to dad’s right was a smiling mom. And standing to dad’s left, looking over his shoulder sweetly, was GRANDMA!

How many times to do we see a healthy older woman in a commercial or business promotion? Rarely. Our older men and women are banished from the cameras, as Americans like to pretend we stay young and thin all our lives. Seeing Grandma in *The Shopper* made us happy, as the simple photo implied, “Our Grandma is still an important part of our life. She helps us make decisions and enjoy our home life together. She counts.”

---

TODAY: *Value Grandmas.*

Perhaps more than anyone else, those blessed to be poor in spirit know the truth of the axiom, “It’s the thought that counts.”

My father specializes in garage sales, flea markets and other random dispersants of other people’s junk. He loves a bargain and loves to shower his family with the bounty of his hunts.

For years I have collected hearts—on coffee mugs, jewelry, art, clothing, anything. Papa enjoys casting his net wide at sales in search of another heart. He’s agreed to search for little heart pins I can use as favors and prizes during workshops and presentations.

During a particularly nasty Nor’easter, I flew as far as Boston before the airports closed. My home was one cancelled plane flight away. Closed runways left me deplaning at Logan’s terminal E, the international gates, though I had only flown from Arkansas.

Hotels are routinely \$150 a night or more in the Boston area, a charge I couldn’t bear paying. Yet it was only 9:30 PM, and I couldn’t face sitting up all night in the chilly terminal.

“\$59.99 a night! Free shuttle!” the sign blinked, one of many designed to welcome foreigners to the States. I called and Kathy answered. She heard my anxiety and exhaustion and disappointment. I’d been gone two weeks, and I was missing home.

“We’ll come and get you, don’t worry,” she promised, and sure enough, the van arrived and I was soon checking in. “Where’s the candy machine? I didn’t have any dinner and what I want is sweets—comfort food.”

“We don’t have one, I’m sorry,” Kathy said, “But wait.”

From under the counter she pulled a basket of European chocolates, wrapped in Christmas foils. She gave me a big handful. I felt so cared for!

The next morning, I left a thank-you note with the day clerk for Kathy, and attached one of my dad's heart stickpins.

"Dear Mrs. Knight: I am writing to say thank you for your wonderful gift. The pin is really lovely and will be worn every day." Kathy mailed me a note that week, and closed hoping we would meet again one day.

---

TODAY: *Please pass the hearts.*

For more than 30 years, the nursing home world has been defined and designed by government. Staff training, resident quality indicators and environmental conditions are dictated by those who do not live or work in nursing homes. Some observers suggest that having care defined by individuals who prefer to sit at desks and write rules rather than provide care is the cruelest twist of fate yet.

Consequently, a very real piece of a human being's experience of life, his spiritual life, can remain virtually unnamed and unimportant in the eyes of regulators and surveyors. Caregivers can unknowingly surrender their sense of spirit by losing perspective and becoming obsessed by the government's power and unannounced inspections.

Our challenge daily, in the midst of the sterile environment outlined by policies and protocols, is to see the extraordinary in the ordinary. With this set of eyes, we quickly recognize that repositioning a patient every two hours through the night is not just to be in compliance with the law, or even to prevent bedsores. Rather, this wordless moment of tenderness is loving reassurance in the dark of night, reminding residents they are not alone.

With this set of eyes, we quickly recognize that changing an adult incontinent product is not just to keep someone dry and comfortable, but may well be the longest period of contact they have with another human being all day. And even the simple act of washing a window becomes an opportunity to create a clear view of the world beyond.

Out of this awareness, you can discover the significance of your work and see the impact of your contribution. Through the performance of ordinary daily tasks you can define and honor the spiritual life of your facility.

---

TODAY: *See the extraordinary in the ordinary.*

Oh, I used to love snow days. Just think: Mother Nature loved me so much that she would pile snow high enough during the night to force the cancellation of school. Wow.

When my son Elliot was little, he would bring that same sleepy excitement to the radio on icy mornings, hoping against hope to hear “Montpelier Elementary is closed.” Surrounding country school districts would always close, the roads being too risky for bus travel. But the city rarely had to close school, and Elliot came to feel discriminated against. He begged that we move out of town.

I couldn't blame him. We all feel hemmed in and overly managed by city life. The more man is able to control the environment, the less mystery life holds.

Now I do live in the country, and I still love snow days. We have a glass barometer full of turquoise-colored water, and when the water starts to climb the stem, it means a front is coming through. Yippee, an Act of God! The power goes out and we cook on the woodstove, use candles, listen to our crank radio, watch the barometer and thermometer and somehow, in experiencing the unknown, we feel safer. Back to basics, keep it simple, focus on the quiet between us. Cut loose from our phones, computers and television, we are blessed to be poor in spirit.

Caregivers who live in four season climates are well acquainted with the contingency plans triggered by Acts of God. Doug, a darling CNA at Countryside Place in Mishawaka, Indiana recalled the valiant efforts of his coworkers during a fierce winter storm. “They were amazing. They were ready to sleep here, work double shifts, help in the kitchen, whatever was needed.”

Crises call forth our best. Next time there's an Act of God, watch how you act like God.

Growing up in the United States, we are trained from an early age to identify and solve problems.

Remember story problems in math class? Those darn 35-gallon fish bowls and how much water five four-ounce angelfish would displace? (I always wondered why anyone would need to figure this out. Wouldn't you take some water out if needed when you added the fish? Sheesh.)

Women's magazines and television programs are full of makeovers, with before pictures of poor ugly ducklings who, voila! are transformed by Leo of Hollywood and his 15-person crew. In America, everything and everyone is a candidate to be improved, a problem to be solved, enhanced, fixed by cosmetic surgery.

Living in India my 18th summer, I was stunned by the absence of this problem/solution mentality. People didn't walk around proposing improvements. And when something did come up, like flies landing on the food, they did something that left my Western head spinning: they put a dish of sugar on the table for the flies, and the flies complied.

As I have aged and fallen deeply in love with India and its people, I have learned about maya, the Hindu belief that all we see is illusion and what is real is what can't be seen. Squabbles, troubles and problems are just distractions, keeping one from a real-life relationship with the Universal Self, the great love that unites us all. Grounded in the eternal, Hindus ignore the fleeting annoyances of the material world. All is maya.

---

TODAY: *Get grounded in the eternal.*

Used bookstores are full of stories. The stories aren't just on the pages of the books, but on the envelopes, photos, postcards and other scraps of paper that once served as bookmarks.

Virtually every tiny town I visited in Ireland had its own used bookstore. Browsing through the hardback novels in the little store in Dalkey, I found and bought the sequel to *Gone with the Wind*. In Ireland? Reading the book, I learned Scarlett O'Hara returns to her Irish roots, and even survives the famine.

The book also offered up a frayed strip of cardboard with this blessing:

Let nothing disturb thee.  
Let nothing affright thee.  
All things are passing.  
God never changes.  
Patience gains all things.  
Who has God wants nothing.  
God alone suffers.

Like finding money or a four-leaf clover, there is something magical, even mystical, about a stranger's message fluttering from a book. What is the Universe trying to tell me? What am I supposed to learn?

Traveling by myself, I took great comfort in my bookmark's promises. The random nature of the blessing affirmed my belief that I am never alone, regardless of where I am or what I am doing. I need not be afraid. I am safe. I am loved.

---

TODAY: *Look and listen for unexpected blessings.*

*A Call From God*

Although I am not extremely religious, I do believe in God.

When I was 17, I started helping the elderly. This would be my journey through life. I worked in a little town-house taking care of seven people at night. The lady I worked with took people right into her home.

Yes, she was a loving, caring person on a crusade! I worked there at night so she could sleep, only to get up the next morning to serve these loved ones.

I worked in two other places before moving on to the best place I have ever worked, Maple Lane in Barton, Vermont. Yes, the building is nice but that's not going to do the work for these beautiful people we care for every day. We are the hands that feed them, and the legs that help them walk. God bless these people. They did not ask to end up this way.

So, if you're in it for the money, you better leave. That's not what a true nurses' aide cares about. Yes, there are times that you might get mad, and it takes a lot of patience. You don't make a lot of money, but the smiles on their faces should be enough reward for you! Yes, I've gotten mad at doing someone else's work, too, but I feel that everyone is there to do his or her own job. Yes, you get upset if you're hit, scratched or kicked.

I guess the bottom line is I don't think they asked God to make them this way. I don't think they said, "Well, when I get old I'm going to hit these aides." They didn't ask to be this way and we won't either. We are all coming to this, and patience is indeed a virtue. You see you don't get love and thanks from one patient. You receive it from many.

This word "caring" makes a true nurses' aide. But everyone in a nursing home should be honored, for all of them bring love to these special people. Housekeeping cleans their room like they were able to clean their hous-

es before. Laundry does their clothes for they no longer can do for themselves. Kitchen makes their meals so they may eat. I'm sure they wish they could still prepare their own.

Office takes care of their business, so they no longer have to worry about anything. Administration and activities make their lives more comfortable for them, to live day by day. Daycare takes care of the staff's little ones. All departments bring their hearts full of love, to many people, everyday.

—Rhonda Monfette

Rhonda has worked as a nursing assistant for 32 years,  
well over half her life.

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TODAY: *Bring your heart full of love.*

The old circus elephant looked like she was nearing the end of her tour. Welts, scars, bumps and dents marked Daisy's toughened hide, souvenirs of countless parades and performances.

We're like Daisy, toting around the damage unfairly inflicted upon us during our journey. Fifth grade gym class, being the last one picked for the kickball squad. Ninth grade dance, never asked to Twist. Age 30, overhearing coworkers gossiping about me. My wounds may not be as visible as Daisy's, but these stored memories are with me, dangerously shaping my reactions and actions in a brand new day.

If I am to live as one who is poor in spirit, I cannot rely upon yesterday's baggage for guidance. Hauling the past into the present only guarantees one outcome: reliving my pain. Instead, I have come to think of my memories as stored mass I must discard. Like a log tossed into the fire, the past provides me energy for today. Processing and working through painful recollections, I grow and move forward.

Mass is the substance of the created universe, the matter that makes the earth. What stored mass is fueling you? Daily discarding of old hurts gives us more energy for the present. As my Grandma Tante used to say when cleaning a closet, "If in doubt, throw it out!"

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TODAY: *Let go.*

Just when my family thought they knew me, I mastered the headstand. Age 48, with gravity taking its toll, I stuck my toes into the sky.

I've longed to be someone who could do a headstand since my cabinmate flipped up into one at Girl Scout camp. Headstands came to symbolize freedom, breaking the rules, being independent. To snap into a headstand would mean I had a carefree spirit, untethered by convention. Oh, I wanted to do a headstand.

Unfortunately, I brought equally intense feelings to the fear that held my feet on terra firma: I was afraid I would break my neck. I suppose someone once relayed a story of someone who had become paralyzed attempting a headstand.

Like my experience driving a go-cart, I floored the brake and the accelerator at the same time and froze.

Melissa, my yoga teacher, replaced my blind anxiety with her calming instruction. Breaking a headstand into many steps, she showed me how to slowly balance my weight on three points, tipping myself gradually and methodically until the headstand almost happened by itself. I cried victory and declared a new family holiday the day I went up and down without being next to a wall.

Confronting and disposing of fear is a mighty way to build one's self-confidence and trust. My headstands have greatly influenced my overall sense of worth. I learned I could count on myself, that I won't let myself down. I learned that I could call upon an inner strength greater than my fears.

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TODAY: *Call upon inner strength.*

Joan Chittister writes:

Our entire generation has gone deaf. Scripture and wisdom and relationships and personal experience are all being ignored. We are, consequently, a generation of four wars and of the most massive arms buildup in the history of the world, in a period called peacetime. We are a generation of great poverty in the midst of great wealth, of great loneliness in the center of great communities; of serious personal breakdowns and community deterioration in the face of unparalleled social growth.... We believe in action and results and products and profit and youth, so we come to regard the elderly as essentially useless.

Do you long for the good old days?

An old friend used to complain about any number of societal ills by opening his comments with the same phrase, "Nowadays..." I would laugh, wondering how a 25-year-old had such a long frame of reference. Had the world changed so much in his short lifetime?

Tonight while I made dinner, two situation comedies played on TV. Obviously, lots of kids were watching as their parents prepared the meal. Both shows included plot lines that alluded to male characters having less than adequate genitals. Too small.

What were little kids in the audience thinking, I wondered? Why do we feel such silliness is worth featuring on a family show? I was sad and angry, thinking my own "nowadays" thoughts.

I was reminded of Joan Chittister's words about "community deterioration." As professionals whose lives are about not ignoring relationships, personal experience and the elderly, we must uphold the standards of civility and grace. Leading by example, caregivers remind the world that life is precious, holy and worthy of great regard.

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TODAY: *Uphold the standards of civility and grace.*

My friend George lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. He jokes that he can tell when his neighbors have had a fight: “The UPS trucks start to arrive with the ‘I deserve this because you owe me’ packages.”

One-click online ordering and gorgeous direct mail catalogues that arrive by the dozen make shopping too easy. I remember hearing a woman say she wouldn’t order anything that doesn’t arrive within three days. “When it comes much later, I don’t even know why I ordered it.”

Buying pretty things is fun. So is finding perfect presents for friends. But it can be an exhausting avocation.

One of the many grand yet unanticipated gifts of my October 2000 trip to Ireland was that I couldn’t shop. Not for any noble reasons. I just had a small suitcase that had to stay small so I could carry it on flights.

Part of my stay included a personal retreat on the Irish Sea, at St. Teresa’s, a Carmelite convent. On her day off, Sister Francis offered to take me by subway into Dublin. Our walking tour included churches, a café, and yes, the Pound Store. Just like the Dollar Store “in the colonies,” the Pound Store was loaded with cute, inexpensive wares made by the Chinese.

For a split second, I privately pouted that I didn’t have room in my suitcase to fit an adorable straw hat. Then, suddenly, I felt helium-filled. “I can’t buy anything!” I told Sister, “and it’s fine!”

I didn’t have to worry about whether it was a good price, if I should comparison shop, if I really needed it, where I would put it, if it was the right size and color or what my husband would say. I just browsed and enjoyed Sister’s company. I felt happier than I could remember on any shopping trip.

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TODAY: *Stop shopping!*

Prior to the life of Christ, caring for the sick was a job for families only. The Romans left sick paupers lying on the roadside, believing their families didn't regard them as worth saving. Only three kinds of people were rescued because of their value to the economy: soldiers, gladiators and slaves.

Society's values toward the poor were transformed by the life of Christ, ending the acceptability of human road kill. Believing Jesus might return any day, in disguise and possibly as a sick person, Christians regarded caregiving as holy work. All of one's shortcomings and mistakes could be absolved by caring for others.

Pilgrims walking to the Holy Land through the Alps became the first patients, falling ill far from their families. Usually taking the journey as a form of penance or for healing, pilgrims were already in a weakened condition. Travel was tough, the food strange and insufficient. Monasteries opened up hospices and infirmaries to serve the sick pilgrims, with priests and nuns the earliest caregivers.

In Syria in 370 AD, St. Basil opened his hospital and leprosarium. About one hundred years later, also in Syria, the Hospice of Turmanin was built as a campus, and included a church, an office building, a convent and the inn for dispensing hospitality to pilgrims.

By the year 1000 in Cluny, France, monasteries were building open wards in the shape of the cross, believing the design would aid healing. In the center was a chapel and altar visible to all patients, where daily communion was served. The layout also aided ventilation and supervision.

With the Reformation, care of the sick and operation of hospitals was taken from the Church and assumed by the King. The Crown began to collect taxes to support care of the poor, creating Europe's first system of social aid.

An order was issued in London in 1569 that the aged, sick, lame or blind shall be sent to St. Bartholomew's or St. Thomas's hospitals, as admission depended one's town of

residence. By the 18th Century, it became too complicated to send sick people to the hospital nearest their original parish. The new, nondiscriminating admissions policy. “Whatever corner of the world they come from they come without restriction,” also became the foundation of the American hospital movement. The first hospitals built in the New World were Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia, Massachusetts General in Boston and New York Hospital in New York City.

Healthcare providers of today are linked to this rich history. The wings built off a central area in modern nursing homes and hospitals are direct descendants of the ancient cross design. And like the caregivers of old, you are still called to perform holy work, to care when families are no longer able.

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TODAY: *Perform holy work.*

Being a nurses' aide means caring, sharing, loving and understanding. To always be there with open hands, to assist in every way you can. Communicating with your patient is important so they know they are still loved and not abandoned during this time of illness.

You must understand that your patients are people just like you are and not just a number. They may be old and contracted and maybe can't see or hear, but they, too, are made of flesh and blood and have feelings.

Just remember one thing, my fellow classmates, as one day this was said to me: "As you care for your patients, take a look at your hands and think to yourself, these are the kind of hands I want to take care of me, if ever I should be as helpless and alone."

These people did not choose to be where they are, but you, the nurses' aide, have the choice to be where you are.

This is not just a job; this is a very fulfilling and rewarding commitment. It takes a very special person to be a nurses' aide, and I feel I am one of them.

—Written for recently certified nursing assistants by  
Debbie Salerno, a CNA at Mountainview Care Center,  
Scranton, Pennsylvania

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TODAY: *Be there with open hands.*

Author Helen M. Luke writes:

No, the sickness of our society is not due to the threat of the bomb, the ineptitude or corruption of the Establishment, to wars or to the machinations of Communists or Capitalists. These evils are effects, not causes; they have always existed and are no worse because of the enormous scale on which they now operate.

Our sickness is fundamentally due to the breakdown of the symbolic life which all the great religions have existed to maintain, so that we are left with eyes that see not and ears that hear not beyond the literal facts and voice of our environment. We hear only the dark news of the broadcaster and our inner ear is deaf to the song of angels.

The dark news of the broadcasters can be heard 24 hours a day, with international atrocities and tragedies repeated on the hour. But where do we go to hear the Song of Angels?

Where do children go to see good works being done in their community? Where can cynics see that people really are good at heart? Where do frail elders depend on the kindness of strangers?

All roads lead to you. Where two or more caregivers are gathered, we can hear the Song of Angels. But too often caregivers shy away from singing, convinced their lives are not worthy of song: "I'm nobody special; I don't have anything to share."

How wrong you are. In truth, your songs are music for our hearts, the healing balm that can cure what ails us. For the sake of our national soul, please, break your silence. All life will be treasured, and peace will comfort the planet, when the caregivers of the world tell their precious love stories.

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TODAY: *Sing the song of angels.*

(Reprinted with the permission of Parabola Books, New York, [www.parabola.org](http://www.parabola.org), from *Dark Wood to White Rose* by Helen Luke. Copyright © 1989. Appeared in Introduction, p. XIV).

While we're busy worrying we'll be late for work or that the rent check will bounce, our hearts stay on task, beating thousands of times daily and pumping five million gallons of blood in a lifetime.

That is, unless the arteries become blocked with fat and cause a heart attack, a leading killer in the U.S.

Blocked arteries routinely lead to bypass surgery, where the surgeon sews a new piece of blood vessel to bridge over or bypass the blockage. If the surgeon repairs three of the arteries it is called a triple bypass; four arteries, a quadruple bypass. The blood vessel used to create the bypass is taken from the chest or the leg.

Coronary artery bypass surgery provides detours around the partially or completely blocked arteries to improve a person's quality of life. Of course blockages and heart attacks can be prevented by not smoking, avoiding salt, maintaining a low-cholesterol diet, controlling blood pressure and getting regular exercise.

The routine and popular nature of heart bypass surgery is a metaphor for American life. Rather than acknowledging the precious quality of our lives, and the proper care and feeding we all deserve, Americans simply detour their hearts. If only we would live as we were designed to live! As a muscle and reservoir of love, the heart is the true keeper of the Divine Spark. It surely deserves the tenderest loving care.

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TODAY: *Care for your heart.*

So, since January 15 you've been thinking about letting go. But how?

Thomas Keating, a Cistercian priest, suggests practicing contemplative prayer:

When you practice contemplative prayer on a regular basis, your natural resources for psychic health begin to revive and you see the false value systems that are damaging your life. The emotional programs of early childhood that are buried in your unconscious begin to emerge into clear and stark awareness....expelling chunks of emotional junk. The principle discipline of contemplative prayer is letting go.

Eastern and Western religious traditions include the practice of contemplative prayer, sometimes referred to as meditation. Seeking quiet, we can begin to pay attention to our inner life, to that singular voice within.

At a workshop hosted by Zen Buddhist priest Norman Fisher of the San Francisco Zen Center, we discussed meditation as an antidote to consumerism. "Consumerism is the further evolution of capitalism," Fisher told us. We have become confused about what we need and want, the necessities versus the extras. Without spending time in contemplative prayer, we remain on the surface, settling for activities that cater to sensual pleasures, which do not last.

By simply pausing and withdrawing from the daily circus, we can regain our sense of balance and purpose, rejoicing in the blessing that comes from being poor in spirit.

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TODAY: *Take time to contemplate.*

(Reprinted from *Open Mind, Open Heart, The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* by Thomas Keating. Copyright © 1998. The Continuum International Publishing Group. Reprinted with permission from the publisher.)

Caregivers are underpaid because the citizens of the United States of America haven't recognized the value of care. We're talking about priorities. And to think our nation's present priorities are what they should be is a naïve mistake.

Priorities evolve over generations because courageous people speak up, and speak up, and speak up.

In 1909, the U.S. Bureau of Animal Husbandry, within the Department of Agriculture, had a staff of more than 1,000 and a budget of \$1.25 million.

Far more money was spent each year on animal research than on research into the problems of early childhood—and as a result, the mortality rate of young animals was lower than that of young children.

President Herbert Hoover believed providing public relief to the poor was not the job of the federal government.

Hoover's attitude was exemplified in 1930, when he approved a congressional appropriation of \$45 million to feed stricken livestock of Arkansas farmers but opposed an additional \$25 million to feed starving farmers and their families.

Fortunately, compassionate and vocal citizens rallied, organized and lobbied for federal aid to the poor.

Today, united voices are needed to call for a national reverence for life, and particularly the life of the very young and very old. These vulnerable populations deserve our utmost respect and resources, as do those who are devoted to providing them vital care.

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TODAY: *Speak up for your priorities.*

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Society looks to religiously sponsored nonprofit institutions, such as hospitals and nursing homes, to model the highest standard of employer-employee relations.

The National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice offers a code of conduct booklet to help union leadership and healthcare management understand one another, communicate respectfully and build healthy working relationships.

The 10-page booklet, *Guidelines for Unions and Management of Religiously Sponsored Health Care Institutions*, was developed in the midst of great change and tension in the healthcare industry.

“There is an increase in religion-labor organizing efforts in the healthcare industry to secure a voice, living wages, better benefits, job security, respect, and fairness in the workplace,” said Bishop Jesse DeWitt, retired from the United Methodist Church and president of the National Interfaith Committee’s board.

“Our hope is that this document will be widely used as a tool for reflection, dialogue and relationship building,” said Sister Barbara Pfarr, SSND, Religious Employer Project Coordinator for the Interfaith Committee. “We believe these rules of engagement are a concrete contribution towards finding solutions to a longstanding problem.”

The Chicago-based National Interfaith Committee educates, organizes, and mobilizes the religious community in the U.S. on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for workers, especially low-wage workers.

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TODAY: *Foster healthy working relationships.*

Preparing for holiday visitors, I decided it was time to clean the drawers and cupboard under the sink in our guest bathroom. I use the bathroom when we don't have company, leaving my husband the other upstairs bath, what I call "the boys' bathroom."

Pawing through leaking, dried-out or otherwise useless tubes and vials of cosmetics and hair care potions, I can't believe what I have accumulated. How many half-empty masks, facial scrubs and apricot peels have I tried? There are at least as many astringents, all promising clearer, cleaner skin and smaller pores. The truth is, I got my Grandpa Timothy Purcell's big pores, and nothing shrinks them. But I keep buying whatever is new, expecting a miracle.

Have I been so insecure over the past 15 years that I really believed well-being could be found in a magic bottle? What was I thinking? I have an equally crowded and untouched shelf of diet books, recipes and weight-loss plans. More instant remedies.

Beyond the neediness and lack of self-confidence these purchases reveal, I see how I have wasted money that could have made a difference in someone else's life. Even lipstick is at least \$5. How many children could I feed and clothe with my hair-conditioning budget?

What do you buy that you don't need? To feel and look truly beautiful, we need to listen to that insecure girl inside, and remind her she is loved. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

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TODAY: *Listen to the insecure one inside.*

I save the fortunes from fortune cookies and tape them on my radio: Sell your ideas—they are totally acceptable. Meeting adversity well is the source of your strength. You are going to have a very comfortable old age. Stop searching forever; happiness is just next to you. Many receive advice, only the wise profit from it. Love or fame, you'll be able to handle either or both. Long life is in store for you.

Call me silly, but my cookie fortunes are a source of great inspiration and hope.

I am fascinated by the Chinese culture, particularly the delicate art. Our culture is embryonic in comparison. In fact, the Chinese calendar is the longest chronological record in history, dating from 2600 BC. The Chinese see time in 60-year segments of five 12-year cycles. Thus, the year 2001 and 1989 are both the Year of the Snake.

The Chinese Lunar Calendar names each of the 12 years after an animal. Legend has it that the Lord Buddha summoned all the animals to come to him before he departed from earth. Only 12 came to bid him farewell and as a reward he named a year after each one in the order they arrived. The Chinese believe the animal ruling the year in which a person is born has a profound influence on personality, saying: "This is the animal that hides in your heart." (I'm a Dragon!)

Because the lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, the beginning of the year can fall anywhere between late January and the middle of February. Families and friends visit one another during the first two weeks of the New Year, and enjoy a variety of lucky foods. Among the luckiest are peanuts, called Zao, said to promote longevity.

Why not stop at the grocery store on the way to work today and pick up a bag of peanuts in the shell? Put a bowl in the break room and wish everyone Happy New Year and a long life!

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TODAY: *Wish everyone a long life.*

George Washington Carver was a genius inventor who lived from 1864 to 1943.

Born a slave, he devoted much of his life to teaching and research at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. We know him for his in-depth study of the peanut and what it could produce. Carver believed peanuts could meet almost every need. His life work included developing—from peanuts—flour, meal, bird food, milk, a sauce comparable to soy sauce, cheese, a coffee-like drink, ink and more.

We know less of Carver the man, and that is our loss. A spiritual, humble and frugal man who had no children of his own, he was forever dispensing advice to students, whom he loved as family.

This is from a letter dated January 9, 1922 from Carver to a member of the Tuskegee senior class.

Possession of these eight cardinal virtues constitutes a lady or a gentleman:

Be clean both inside and out.

Who neither looks up to the rich nor down on the poor.

Who loses, if need be, without squealing.

Who wins without bragging.

Who is always considerate of women, children and old people.

Who is too brave to lie.

Who is too generous to cheat.

Who takes his share of the world and lets other people have theirs.

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TODAY: *Practice Carver's eight virtues.*

(Reprinted from *George Washington Carver: In His Own Words*. Edited by Gary R. Kremer, by permission of the University of Missouri Press. Copyright © 1987 by the Curators of the University of Missouri.)

Experience is always our best teacher, though some experiences aren't pleasant.

Such is often the case for families who have a relative needing long-term care. Usually a fall or some other incident sends a loved one to the hospital. Pressured by a reduction in Medicare funds, the hospital works to get the patient discharged as soon as possible. In my mother-in-law Frances' case last fall, the hospital sent her home at three in the morning with sky-rocketing blood pressure. I was outraged by this decision, particularly since she lives alone.

For those individuals who go directly from the hospital to the nursing home, discharge can be just as irrational. Based on payment rules, hospitals try to move patients early in the day, so the money received for providing care doesn't have to be spent on the patient. What a sick incentive. (pun intended!)

To the frightened soul who wants to go home, there is an expectation that the hospital and nursing home and home health personnel and physician are all talking to one another, that they all look at the same records—a most logical expectation, but rarely what happens.

Each provider group is privately operated and owned, with separate rules, budgets and staff. After a patient completes a successful stay in a nursing home for rehabilitation following a stroke, she is discharged home. Wouldn't it make sense to have the physical and occupational and speech therapists who treat her in the nursing home follow her home? Wouldn't it be nice to have those who help her relearn how to walk up stairs and open a jar actually see her master these tasks? In Vermont, such a logical follow-through by medical professionals is illegal, because nursing homes cannot be licensed to provide even limited home health services. So the patient must begin again with a new group of therapists, and, yes, be fully reevaluated (with Medicare billed). Most patients are confused and upset by these rules—anxiety they surely don't need.

Such rules protect provider turf but do little to promote continuity of care. Until medicine in America is truly designed and operated with patients at the center of decisions, such inefficient foolishness will continue. A pity.

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TODAY: *Ease your patients' transfer anxiety.*

For more than 15 years, I have been the guardian of one or two of the elderly Coburn sisters. First I had younger sister Florence as my ward. Florence asked me to find her sister, Julia, who in turn asked if I would be her guardian. Florence died in 1998, so it's just Julia and me now.

Last autumn, Julia began to fall and became more confused. She needed nursing home care. Like all families, I had hoped Julia could avoid this day, and have her years end peacefully where she had been living. Her move was further complicated by my trip to Ireland. Thanks to the incredible attentions of Tina Donahue of the Central Vermont Council on Aging and Betty Blouin of Project Independence of Barre, Vermont, Julia's move to Union House Nursing Home was smooth. Returning to the states, I spent time with Julia, meeting her new roommate and caregivers.

We were so blessed! Not only were Julia and roommate Jean compatible, but Julia loved her nursing assistants, particularly Tausha. A tiny, sweet mother of four daughters, Tausha loved Julia from day one, and the feeling was obviously mutual. I was thrilled to see them together, touching each other's arms, little kisses passed. Thank you, God, for this wonderful arrangement.

With Christmas coming, I wanted to do something for this single mother, the light of Julia's life. Could I buy some presents for her children? Clothing? Food? How about a meal out and a movie?

"Oh, no," Tausha told me. "We can't take anything like that. I wouldn't feel right. I already get paid."

I had to respect her wishes, though I longed to personally acknowledge the care she provided Julia. My little compromise was to have Julia hand out gifts to staff members, including some cozy flannel pajamas to Tausha.

But oh, how I wanted to give Tausha the moon!

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TODAY: *Realize how much families appreciate you.*

Today is my son Elliot's birthday. On this day in 1980 I became a mom, and began a wonderful adventure with this very cool person. After 27 hours of labor, my doctor decided to sit me on a birthing chair and let gravity help this boy find his way out.

The chair seat was horseshoe-shaped. A mirror was placed on the floor. I continued to push and looked into the mirror. Suddenly, a little face with black shiny eyes stared back at me. He looked like he was peaking through a hole in the fence!

"Take my glasses. I don't want to see anymore or I'll just stare and forget to push," I said.

I was a lucky mother, being the first to see my baby's face. The laws of physics usually prohibit this!

My face was the first of millions Elliot will see in his lifetime. I sometimes wonder, "Who will be the last?"

Mothers throughout time and round the world have wondered the same thing. We all hope and pray that final face is a loving and tender one, a kind set of eyes and hands providing comfort and reassurance. Every human being deserves such a grace-filled goodbye.

Yours may well be the last face, the last voice in a patient's precious life. Your name could be the last on his lips.

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TODAY: *Give grace-filled goodbyes.*