

# Family Caregiver Newsletter

Newsletter Date September 2013

## The Powerful Caregiver

*This column is named after the class “Powerful Tools for Caregivers,” a six-session workshop on helping caregiving families thrive (not just survive). It is offered in Racine County several times a year.*

### A Caregiver’s Journey

Leah was a 69-year-old caregiver to her husband Leonard, who had Parkinson’s Disease. Leah had several health problems which needed medical attention. An old ankle injury affected her mobility and problems with her back caused her a great deal of discomfort. She tried very hard to follow through with recommended exercises. However, as Leonard’s disease progressed and dementia developed, she found herself busy and vigilant every minute until she was too tired to care for herself. Still, at night she woke frequently and worried about what would happen next. Pain became her constant companion. When she reported her discomfort to her doctor, he said, “Of course you’re in pain! You aren’t doing your exercises.” Does he think I deserve to be miserable because I am “lazy”?, she wondered.

Leah saw an announcement in the newspaper for a Family Caregiver Support Group and decided to go. Immediately, she felt less alone, and more supported. She began receiving the Family Caregiver Newsletter and

saw that a class called “Powerful Tools for Caregivers” was being offered. The first time she started the class, she was unable to finish it because Leonard couldn’t stay by himself.

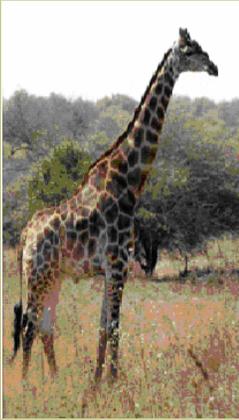


It is possible to grow wherever we are planted!

With the support of her newfound caregiver group, Leah enrolled Leonard in the Harmony Club social day respite program. She had many misgivings about leaving him there at first, but it turned out to be one of the best things that had happened to him. He was accepted as he was, people loved hearing about his life as an architect, and there were meaningful activities to fill his time. Leah, meanwhile, had up to six hours of time to rest, catch up on tasks, and meet her own social needs. She enrolled in another “Powerful Tools”

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Be Flexible!

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If you don't know  
where you are going,  
you will probably end  
up somewhere else.  
Laurence J. Peter

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class, and finished it feeling more capable of caring for herself and coping with the ever-present challenges.

With Leonard's needs increasing and her newfound belief in the importance of taking care of her own health, Leah enlisted the help of family members for caregiving tasks. Then her daughter became seriously ill. At a support group Leah expressed feelings of defeat and hopelessness, believing that she must go back to doing the whole caregiving job herself. Her friends at the group, however, gently encouraged her to get other help and pointed out how important her support would be to her daughter. She responded, "I never even thought of that."

Leah consulted the ADRC Community Resource Directory and hired a Personal Care Agency. At the next meeting, she reported that she was benefiting from the help and was spending quality time with her daughter. Her life seemed more in balance.

The day came when it was clear to Leah that medical procedures to prolong Leonard's life were not as important as the quality of his life every day. Again with encouragement at a support group, Leah contacted a hospice organization. The coordination of services and emotional support were invaluable. After several months, however, Leonard had a series of falls, and Leah was unable to help him. She realized that she needed to find a place where Leonard would have around-the-clock care. She and her granddaughter, a nursing student, visited and evaluated several facilities and chose one. This was a gut-wrenching decision for Leah, and she needed the support of Caregiver Support Specialists and her group. As it happened, Leonard passed away at

home, with Leah at his side, a few days before he would have moved.

After Leonard's death, Leah wept with sadness; felt angry for her loss; was at times paralyzed with depression; felt incredibly lonely; had a budding sense of relief and freedom; and suffered feelings of guilt and regret. The hospice agency offered a 6-week class on grieving. Leah took the class and offered a ride to a grieving acquaintance. The opportunity to tell her story, share feelings, and learn that her changing emotions were "normal" was comforting and empowering.

Leah enrolled in the class "Living Well with Chronic Conditions" offered by the ADRC. She learned effective ways to cope with her health problems by forming healthy habits and working as a partner with her medical team. She began seeing her doctors more regularly, even seeking second opinions when needed. She faithfully did the recommended exercises. She considered talking with or writing to the doctor who lacked compassion for an overwhelmed caregiver who was hurting.

Good, sensible nutrition led to the loss of some extra weight that stressful eating had added to the load on her back and sore ankle. She felt much better, but she didn't stop there! She also took the ADRC's fall prevention class "Stepping On" to make sure that her newfound health and strength were protected from the setback of a fall.

Nowadays, Leah volunteers at Harmony Club and helps to mail out Family Caregiver Newsletters. She does exercises regularly and is taking a yoga class with a friend. She is a caregiver in a successful "recovery." Looking back over her journey, she credits the class "Powerful Tools for Caregivers" with leading her to: set limits, ask for help (even though it was difficult),

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deal with emotions of caregiving, make difficult caregiving decisions, choose a positive attitude, make and follow through on action plans, and realized the value of being with others in similar situations.

Courage, caregiver resources in this community, flexibility, faith, and resilience have seen her through. Now she is a help and resource to others.

### Lesson from Leah's story:

- Studies have shown that the stress hormone cortisol remains elevated in the body for up to three years

after caregiving is over. It's so very important for caregivers to be kind to themselves, caring tenderly to their own body, mind, and spirit, during the caregiving years and beyond! That means YOU, now and always.

*Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over it became a butterfly.*

- Proverb



## Community Resources

This column highlights some of the many resources in our community. For more, see the Community Resource Directory available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) 262-833-8777 or [www.adrc.racineco.com](http://www.adrc.racineco.com).

### Grief support

Here are no cost options for this fall:  
St Paul the Apostle Church Racine  
Tuesdays 9/24 to 11/12 5:30 to 7:00 pm.  
Registration Required 262-886-0530

Hospice Alliance Kenosha— Thursdays for 6 sessions beginning 9/5 for 10:30 am to 12 noon. Call 262-652-4482, ext 1211 for Julie or ext 294 for Mary.

Check the local newspaper for grief support groups. Other resources include contacting the Hospice agency or funeral home of your choice to see if they have grief resources.

### Harmony Club

Held at different sites throughout Racine County, Harmony Club is a unique social day program that provides quality care as well as companionship, socialization and activities for older adults. While the care recipient is at Harmony Club, the caregiver can benefit from up to 6 hours of personal

time to meet their own needs. Call 262-898-8900 or check online at: <http://lincolnlutheran.com/learn-about/harmony-club-senior-program>.

### Stepping On

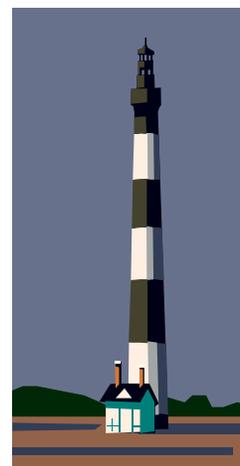
Next class begins September 12th and meets for 7 weeks, 1pm to 3 pm. Contact Ruth at 262-833-8762.

### Living Well

The next class is tentatively scheduled for November. Check back in next month's newsletter, or on the ADRC website at: [http://www.adrc.racineco.com/site/456/senior\\_services.aspx](http://www.adrc.racineco.com/site/456/senior_services.aspx).

**Alzheimer's Association** classes for those living with dementia and their caregivers: None are currently scheduled in Racine County. For future classes or those held in surrounding counties call: 800-272-3900 or visit: [www.alz.org/sewi](http://www.alz.org/sewi).

*May I have...  
Serenity to  
accept the things  
I cannot change,  
Courage to  
change the things  
I can, and  
Wisdom to know  
the difference.*



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**Events for Family  
Caregivers**

**Taking Care of You: Powerful Tools for Caregivers** Held 6 Tuesdays, September 10th thru October 15th, 1-3 pm at Trinity United Methodist Church, 3825 Erie St., Racine (See accompanying flyer). Call 262-833-8764 to register.

**Caregiver Event for Body, Mind and Spirit: "Letting In the Light: Facing the hard stuff with hope, faith, and love"** Saturday, October 26th, 9am - 4 pm, Marquette Memorial Union 1442 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee. Registration: 414-220-8600 or online at: [www.interfaithmilw.org/caregiver\\_conference](http://www.interfaithmilw.org/caregiver_conference)

Racine County Annual Caregiver Conference: **"Believe in Yourself"** Wednesday, November 13th, 9:30 am – 2:30 pm. Veteran's Terrace at Echo Park, Burlington. (Flyer is forthcoming.) Call 262-833-8761 to register.

**Support Groups for Family Caregivers**

**First Thursday 10:30 am-12 Noon**  
**Alzheimer's Association Group**

**Sept 5th**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Lincoln Lutheran Office Bldg, 2000 Domanik Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor.

**First Friday 12 Noon-1pm**

**"Caregiver Connection" Telephone Group**

**Sept 6th**

Call 262-833-8762 to pre-register

**Second Tuesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**Sept 10th**

Yorkville United Methodist Church  
17645 Old Yorkville Rd. (3 Miles West of I-94, Just N. of Highway 20)

**Second Saturday 10:30 am-12 Noon**

**Sept 14th**

Atonement Lutheran Church  
2915 Wright Ave.

Park and enter in back of building (on South side).

**Third Wednesday 1:30-3:00 pm**

**Sept 18th**

Burlington Senior Center, Eppers Room,  
209 N. Main St.

**Third Thursday 6:00-7:30 pm**

**Sept 19th**

**Alzheimer's Association Group**

For Families Dealing with Alzheimer's and other Dementias  
Atonement Lutheran Church, 2915 Wright Ave.  
Park and enter in back of building (on South side)