

Opinion

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Caretakers of our seniors need some support too

To quote Alanis Morissette, “Life has a funny way of sneaking up on you.” The line is from her iconic song “Ironie” in which she mentions many unfortunate things, though none of which are really ironic (though maybe that’s the irony she was seeking). Regardless, that line came to me after reflecting on a documentary I just saw called “Wine, Women, and Dementia,” which was screened at The Ferguson Library Nov. 8. The screening was sponsored by SilverSource as a way of bringing caregivers together for a night of laughs, tears, and, for many of us, some wine.

The documentary got me thinking about how, just as my kids have launched into the adult world, their grandparents are taking their place from a caregiving standpoint. This reminds me of another quote by a character whose name is much closer to mine than Alanis’, “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.” This was delivered by Michael Corleone in “Godfather III” and is perhaps the only redeeming thing about that film. Criticisms aside, it summarizes how I sometimes feel knowing that my child-rearing duties are behind me but caretaking duties are most definitely not.

I’m part of the sandwich generation, which sounds appetizing enough, I mean, who doesn’t love a good sandwich? The reality is, though, we are a group of people tasked with helping to take care of those whose primary job was to take

care of us when we were younger. Talk about a role reversal! In reality it means that just as we are about to kick up our heels and rejoice that our kids are now independent adults, we have to focus some of that attention on the people who raised us. I’m not complaining, mind you, just making an observation.

Many of you who are aware of SilverSource likely recognize it as a resource for older adults. You know, that organization that helps seniors with affordable housing, transportation, food security, and obtaining reasonably priced medication, but part of its mission is also to help caregivers. That’s why they had the insight to hold a caregiver event to screen a touching, and surprisingly hilarious, documentary on caregiving to parents and spouses with dementia.

One of the big points of the documentary was how important it is for caregivers to have a support system to lean on when they are at their wits’ end and SilverSource put a fine point on that by not only getting them together for the screening, but also hosting roundtable discussions after the film where attendees could share their own experiences, which often involve feelings of isolation, financial stress, and the physical and emotional toll family caregivers shoulder for their loved ones and themselves. Each table was moderated by a trained facilitator from SilverSource who guided each discussion and helped everyone feel

heard and to provide extra support when needed.

This was a moving experience for me as my own mother, whose memory was so sharp to the point where could tackle the New York Times Sunday Crossword puzzle without breaking a sweat, falls into the roughly 14 percent of adults 71-plus in the United States who live with some form of dementia (NIH). Seeing so many other people in the same boat and being able to speak with them and hear their stories was a touching reminder that I (and my father and siblings), am not alone. We are fortunate though; while mom’s short-term memory is compromised, she still knows who we all are, is generally happy, particularly in social situations where a fine Chardonnay is involved, and is always quick to point out that my twin brother Jimmy and I were supposed to be a large baby girl (true story). That said, knowing SilverSource is there for us as a resource is more comforting than I can put into words and I am grateful for the organization’s mission to support not just the seniors in our community, but also the people who give care to them.

For more information on SilverSource, visit SilverSource.org and for more information on the documentary “Wine, Women, & Dementia,” visit winewomenanddementia.com.

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