

Reviews

Review of the audiocassette "Hardship Into Hope: The Rewards of Caregiving"

Produced by: Connie Goldman Productions

Caregiving for a disabled and dependent person is one of life's experiences that you can't fully understand until you've done it. As a caregiver for elderly parents (twice now), I know it can be stressful, confusing, depressing, exhausting, and frustrating. The 60-minute audiotape "Hardship Into Hope: The Rewards of Caregiving" tells a story that is almost completely different from what we usually read about overburdened caregivers. It focuses on the little joys and deep personal rewards that can be found in a sustained caregiving relationship.

Through personal interviews with 10 caregivers, and in one case, a former caregiver who is now a care receiver, host and producer Connie Goldman elicits people's reflections on what they have learned and how they have been fundamentally changed by being a caregiver. People such as former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, Dana Reeve (wife of actor Christopher Reeve, who suffered paralyzing spinal cord injuries), and several less well-known but equally articulate and valiant people talk about taking care of friends, spouses, and parents (including in-laws) with varying conditions and diseases (including Alzheimer's disease). They all share the feeling that caregiving contributes to personal growth, that there is much to be learned from the experience and from the person being cared for, and that the opportunity to be a caregiver should be cherished as a singular blessing, despite its arduous demands.

One main theme of the tape is that caregivers are critically important and underappreciated in society. Each speaker uses a respectful tone that dignifies the most mundane of activities. Several of those interviewed suggest that the hands-on care of bathing and dressing a loved one can be both humbling and spiritual. Some explained that a caregiver's perception of time slows down, allowing appreciation of the little steps in routine activities, the environment, and the other unexpected rewards of life in the slow lane. Others remind the listener that caregiving ultimately gives priceless time with loved ones, often in their final months.

From my own perspective, the impact of these interviews (collectively) can be very powerful, especially to a caregiver. Those interviewed were at the same time humble and heroic. They provided splendid models of people who coped with life's hardships by acknowledging *all* of the

experience, and by using wisdom and maturity to recognize the gifts of time, intimacy, simplicity, and love that can come to the caregiver of one who is frail or dying. This *is* a most inspirational tape! Ironically, however, the cassette actually evoked a mixed reaction in me, in that I had recently placed my Dad in a nursing home. My lingering reaction to the tape is a sense of guilt and envy, even loss, at having chosen to miss the opportunity of providing hands-on care myself. I would therefore *not* recommend this tape for someone who has chosen formal care rather than family care for a loved one, or for someone who is depleted from caregiving and needs respite more than inspiration or reconciliation.

I believe this tape would be very useful to an Extension educator doing caregiver education -- as background and as a trigger for discussion in a group of caregivers. There are some segments, two to five minutes long that could be excerpted for playing aloud to the group. I also believe that Extension educators could loan the tape to appropriate individuals for listening at home. Because caregiving is an intensely individual and sometimes lonely experience, the people on the tape might provide ideas, warm company, and validation on a difficult day. It is important to mention, however, that all the people interviewed for this program are well-educated, with a rather sophisticated vocabulary, abstract ideas, and the luxury of self-examination. The whole tape would therefore be most appropriate for college-educated listeners. On the other hand, the messages are universal and transcend social class, so parts of the tape, played selectively, would be helpful to a wide range of caregivers.

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Price: \$10.00 plus \$3.00 postage (discounts for quantity orders)

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