

Helping Family Caregivers—A Holiday Opportunity

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By Janet Edmunson M. Ed., author *Finding Meaning with Charles*

At the age of 49, my husband, Charles, faced the final stages of the neurological disease, Cortical Basal Ganglionic Degeneration (CBGD). We had agreed to have Hospice involved at this point as the disease had already stolen many of his abilities, including reading, writing, walking, talking and caring for himself. That's when we experienced the amazing kindness of strangers.

Hospice works with local churches to provide meals for their patients' households during special holidays. On one holiday, a kind couple with a shy ten-year-old daughter came to our door, dressed in their nice Sunday outfits. They were carrying two large shopping bags filled with everything from soup to dessert, as well as beverages and even a flower for the table. I introduced them to Charles while he sat motionless in his wheelchair. Even though the young girl seemed somewhat afraid, I thought it was wonderful that she was being given the chance to experience caregiving at such an early age. Their food provided a wonderful treat for Charles and me as I am such a pitiful cook and was totally strapped for time to prepare anything more elaborate than a warmed-up frozen meal.

We all have opportunities throughout our lives to help lighten the load of a family caregiver. November is National Family Caregiver Month—but the need is all year round. Many people feel inadequate, though, to help family caregivers. And sometimes, even when asked, the caregivers themselves will say they don't need help. But I encourage you not to believe their words. When my family offered to help Charles and me, I said that we were fine. I didn't realize how much I could use the help, until they started to arrive from all around the country—one cooking meals to fill our refrigerator, another giving the house a thorough cleaning and yet another doing household repairs. I never would have asked them to come, so I'm thankful they proactively took the initiative to help.

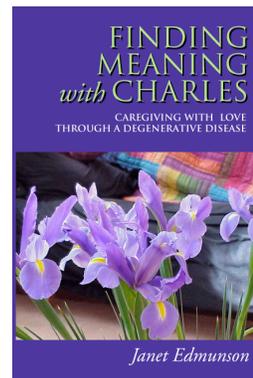
Can you think of a family caregiver for whom you might be able to provide support? If so, here are some ideas of the kinds of support you could offer, adapted from the National Family Caregivers Association.

- Offer a few hours of respite time to a family caregiver so this person can spend time with friends, go to a movie or simply relax. If you are worried about what you'll do while there, consider bringing a DVD to watch or a book, newspaper or magazine to read out loud to the patient.
- Send a card or bouquet of flowers to brighten the family caregiver's day.

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Order *Finding Meaning with Charles* by Janet Edmunson (ISBN# 0-9778133-0-4) at fine bookstores everywhere, or purchase at <http://www.janetedmunson.com> with Paypal.

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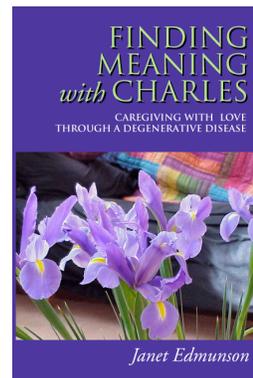


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- Help the family caregiver decorate their home for the holidays or offer to address envelopes for their holiday cards.
- Provide comic relief. Rent or buy a funny movie for them to view. Give them a book with comics or other funny quips.
- Give them a book on tape to enjoy at their leisure.
- Offer to prepare a meal in their home, or bring an already prepared meal to them.
- Do research on local social service agencies to help the family caregiver find new resources and educational information.
- Call once a week to check in and listen to their struggles or joys from the previous week.
- Offer to pick up items at the store, or do their family food shopping periodically.
- Do other errands, such as picking up prescriptions at the pharmacy or taking clothes to the dry cleaners for them.



I encourage caregivers reading this story to accept help when offered by others. Be ready with lists of things that you could have done if someone asks how they can help. Remember, others find fulfillment in helping. Allow them that opportunity and you'll receive the benefit too.

Caregiving Affirmation: Everyone derives fulfillment from providing support to a family caregiver.



--Janet Edmunson, M.Ed., wellness expert and author of *Finding Meaning with Charles: Caregiving with Love through a Degenerative Disease*, available at www.findingmeaningwithcharles.com or through your local bookstore.

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