The Gifts You Bring

by Doug Manning

Your Gift of Peace

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Your Gift of Peace

Most books are written one slow agonizing word at a time, but every author dreams of having a book idea capture them so deeply that the entire book is born in a moment. In 1982, after speaking at a grief conference, a nursing home administrator and a director of nurses who were in attendance asked me if I had ever written anything for people whose loved ones had become residents in a nursing home. I said that I had not, but that I was currently involved in making that decision for my mother-in-law. They said, "If they feel guilty, there is no way for us to please them." Bells went off in my head and a book was born. *When Love Gets Tough, The Nursing Home Decision* came to life on the spot. It took me two weeks to write it and two months to publish it.

Suddenly so much of what I was feeling made sense. The problem was guilt. I knew a nursing home was the only answer and that we had no choice in the matter, and yet the guilt was almost overwhelming. I felt as if a giant pall was hanging over my life and that I had somehow failed miserably. I almost felt unclean and unworthy. Those simple words made it all clear. Not only was guilt the problem, but in the same burst of inspiration I could see some of the reasons for the guilt that seems to automatically accompany long term

care decisions.

Cultural Guilt

Some of the guilt we feel is cultural. This is especially true in the case of aging parents. Humans are the only animals God ever made that do not know how to get rid of their children. Other animals run them off, kick them out of the nest or eat their young, but we humans parent them until the day we die. The hardest thing about being a parent is knowing how to quit being one.

Recently, a woman said her mother, who is past eighty, was injured in a car wreck. When she entered the emergency room where her mother lay bleeding on a gurney her mother opened one eye and said, "When are you going to do something about that hair?" We can't seem to stop being parents.

The problem is that if the parenting does not progress to an adult-to-adult relationship sooner or later the only communication between them will be guilt based. The parents continue to try to direct their child's life, but they have lost the position and power to do so. Hinting, pouting, or whining are the only methods left for them to use. All of these create guilt. I urge people to build adult relationships with their parents even if it means conflict. I also urge parents to turn their children loose. They are grown. The parenting job is over.

There is also cultural guilt between spouses. A husband never gets past the need to care for his wife. We are fixers and we don't know how to stop. A wife also is culturally patterned

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