**Spotlight: The Power of Objectivity In Dementia Caregiving**

Recently I caught a replay of the 2015 movie *Spotlight*. The Academy Award-winning film recounts how in the early 2000’s *The Boston Globe* exposed the Catholic Church child sexual abuse scandal. Like most people who were raised Catholic, I was shocked and heartbroken.

Child sexual abuse was going on long before this story broke. So what brought it to light? During the year 2001, Marty Baron became *The Boston Globe’s* new editor-in-chief. He was Jewish. He was from Miami. And I believe he’s why the story ultimately was told.

Baron had the objectivity to see the facts in a way that most Catholic Bostonian reporters could not. And isn’t that how it is with so much in life? Often it takes a fresh perspective to shed light on a problem.

Frequently caregivers lack objectivity when caring for their loved ones who have Alzheimer’s disease or other dementia diagnoses. Why? Many people caregiving for those with dementia spend endless hours with their loved ones. They don’t see friends as often as they once did. Social activities disappear. Leaves of absence are taken from jobs. Hobbies are forgotten. Frequently nutrition, sleep, and exercise go out the window. This isolation and lack of self-care often contribute to a lack of objectivity about what is best for themselves and their loved ones who have dementia.

Who are the Marty Barons who will shine a spotlight on your dementia caregiving journey?

1. Family and friends. When a family member or friend who truly loves you says, “You don’t look good” or “I’m worried about you” this should be a wake-up call. If multiple people who love you tell you this, it’s an urgent call to action. This likely means your self-care has diminished to a level where both you and your loved one with dementia are at risk. This means it’s time to allow others in the family/friend network to support your caregiving efforts with their money, energy and time. Or it might even be time to explore outside resources like respite, home care or even senior living.
2. Healthcare professionals. When a healthcare professional with expertise in dementia tells you that the way you are communicating with your loved one is ineffective or harmful, it’s time to adjust your approach. Are you arguing with your mom who thinks it’s winter when 4th of July is around the corner? Are you constantly reminding her that she’s “home” and she becomes upset because she doesn’t recognize her house? Do you try to reason with her when she asks for your dad who died years ago? When trusted healthcare providers suggest “joining her world,” a therapeutic “fib” or redirecting mom, give their suggestions a try.
3. Support group members and others who have been dementia caregivers. Objective perspectives are often found by those who have been there and done that. Support groups are filled with people who have made the same mistakes you are making. Some of them will smile knowingly and gently persuade you to hire a home care aide or take that vacation. Others will give you tough love and tell you to get over yourself because you can’t do it all.

While in the throes of dementia caregiving, it’s hard to take the long view. Be open to the spotlights of objectivity shone on your situation so you can take better care of your loved one and yourself.

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