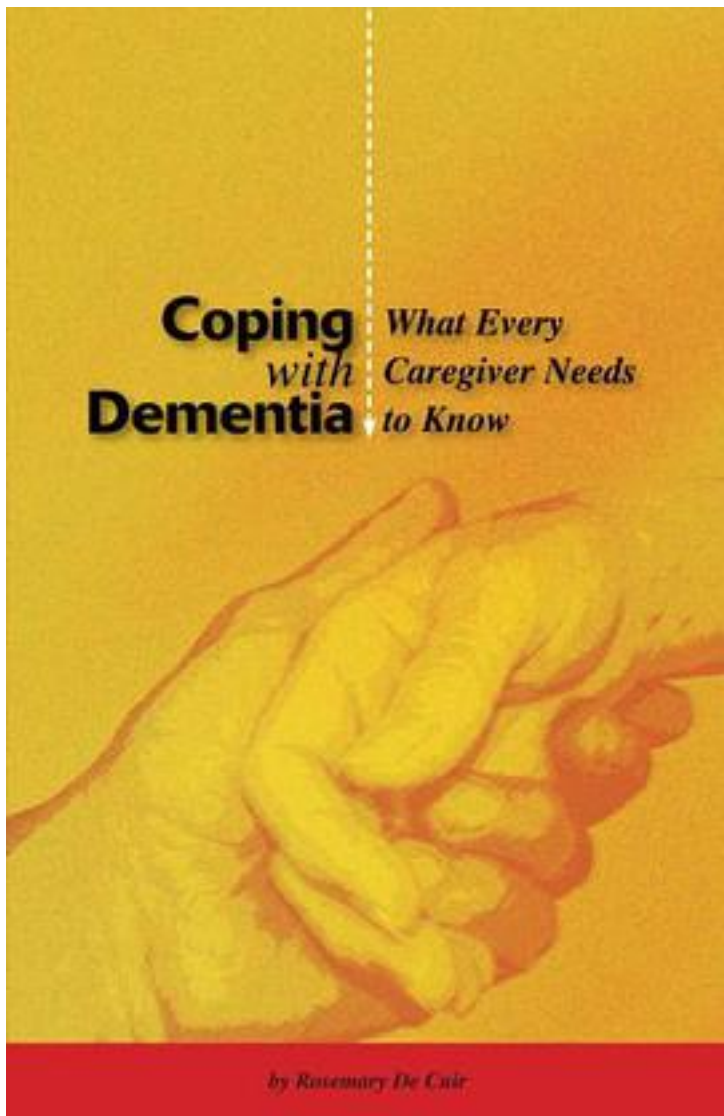


Coping with Dementia



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Once a person has clearly demonstrated that he is incapable of functioning independently in the home, it is time for the family to mobilize and work to help lessen the chances of accident, injury, or even death. It is equally important to begin to rebuild and establish a comfortable and meaningful life for your loved one. The prevailing view in today's society directly equates one worth with what he can produce. This is similar to the nature of the sales industry - it doesn't matter how stellar past performances were - only today's results count. Victims of dementia have no hope but to rely upon us to see them as whole persons and accept them as they are now. These are people who each have a story, a history, and a life that still has value, and it is up to us to honor their life by treating them with as much deference as they would have received in their prime. We each have been uniquely created, with our own blueprint. Most of us cherish our individuality and spend our lives working to leave our stamp on the world. Our American heritage and way of life especially cherishes the notion of independence and self-sufficiency. Perhaps this is why dementia is feared more than many diseases, because it mercilessly strips us of our ability to think and make decisions on our own. The subject of euthanasia and the usefulness of comatose patients have provoked torrents of controversy in our nation recently. If this topic can evoke such strong reactions, I predict a fiercer storm on the horizon as more elderly people are diagnosed with a condition that produces embarrassing and undesirable behaviors. Millions are afflicted and unlike those in comas, are more visible in society. In any case, we, as fellow citizens, must serve as proxy for those who cannot speak for themselves and our decisions must reflect that awareness. Dementia is a grim subject. The following pages contain much detailed and practical information, and you will have assignments to do and a great deal to organize. I have outlined the common challenges that many families face, along with suggestions and "must-knows" to help aid in achieving a successful outcome. If you are fortunate, your family will be in agreement from the onset and you can proceed relatively easily in getting the assistance you need. However, some families may face power struggles or denial and will need to find a middle ground from which to establish a common understanding in order to move things along. This book serves to help you identify and overcome interpersonal roadblocks that may be prohibiting you from helping your ailing loved one. It will also outline the various resources available and offer you guidance needed in order to continue to monitor your relative's care. It is my sincere desire to help prepare you well for this journey by sharing what I have learned and offered to families facing this difficult disease. My prayer is that in these pages you will be both educated and encouraged. Surely the noblest form of giving is when it is to those who cannot possibly repay the kindness. May God bless you for your willingness to give to the needy among us. RLD

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