

**Caregivers in the Back Seat**  
**Bringing Their Stories to the Front Seat**  
**A Caregiver Turned Uber Driver**

**Jeremy Miller**

For 25 years, I walked the halls of senior living communities as an activity director and social worker. I witnessed the quiet heroism of caregivers, both professional and family caregivers, who showed up day after day with compassion, grit, and grace. I saw the toll it took, the love that fueled it, and the loneliness that often accompanied it. I advocated, I listened, I celebrated lives well lived, and I held space for those nearing the end of theirs. Caregiving was never just a job. It was a calling, a rhythm of service that shaped my worldview.

Then, in 2024 and 2025, life took an unexpected turn. I found myself behind the wheel as an Uber driver, navigating the city streets of Orlando, Florida. What began as a practical pivot became something far more profound. My car, once just a means of transportation, became a sanctuary. The back seat became a sacred space where stories unfolded, tears were shed, and hearts were heard.

Caregivers climbed into my car, often weary and unseen, and began to share. Some were headed to early morning shifts. Others were returning home after long nights. Many did not know I had spent 25 years in senior living myself. Yet somehow, they sensed safety. They began to share their stories from the back seat, recounting tales of burnout, love, loss, and emotional exhaustion. These conversations fostered empathy and reminded caregivers they were understood.

And it was not just professional caregivers. Passengers who did not wear scrubs or name badges shared with me their experiences of caring for aging parents, spouses with dementia, neighbors who relied on them for groceries, and friends who needed companionship. The car became a confessional, a chapel, a place of connection. In the hum of the engine and the quiet between destinations, I bore witness to the sacred in the ordinary.

Moved by these encounters, I started to write down these stories from the back seat. It was my way of honoring these voices and bringing their stories to the front seat. I wanted to give voice to the invisible labor, the quiet grief, and the deep love that define caregiving. Sharing these stories can foster community and remind caregivers they are not alone in their journey.

A new season in my healthcare journey began when I shifted my focus toward mental health, a transition born from the stories I heard in the back seat. Time and again, caregivers shared not only the physical toll of their responsibilities but also the emotional weight they carried: anxiety, burnout, grief, and isolation. I realized that behind every act of care was a person quietly struggling to stay whole. These conversations opened my eyes to the urgent need for mental health support within the caregiving community. It was not just about helping others heal. It was about helping the healers find space to breathe, to be seen, and to recover. This realization deepened my commitment to advocate for the mental and emotional well being of caregivers. It

marked the beginning of a new chapter in my career, one rooted in compassion, understanding, and the belief that healing must include those who give care as much as those who receive it.

It is not just about caregiving. It is about humanity, resilience, and grace. It is about the people who show up even when no one is watching. It is about the healing that begins when someone finally says, "I see you."

If you are a caregiver or someone who has ever felt like you have been riding in the back seat of life, this is for you. You are not alone. Your story matters. Consider ways to support caregivers in your community through volunteering, advocacy, or simple acts of kindness. It is time to bring their stories to the front seat, inspiring greater understanding and meaningful action.

## **A Note About the Stories**

Every story in this book is true.

They are drawn from real-life encounters I have had while driving for Uber, moments shared in the back seat that left a lasting imprint on my heart. To honor the privacy of those who trusted me with their stories, I have changed names and adjusted identifying details. If you are a caregiver or someone with a story to share, I invite you to do so safely and anonymously, knowing your voice can help others feel seen and understood.

My intention in sharing these stories is to highlight the positive, heartfelt moments I have experienced as an Uber driver. Each account is meant to honor the humanity, resilience, and grace of the individuals who have ridden in my back seat, as well as the destinations that welcomed them. Whether it is a hospital, a church, a shopping outlet, an amusement park, a convention center, an airport, or a quiet home, these places are part of the journey, and I aim to reflect them with respect and appreciation. I do not seek to criticize, expose, or sensationalize. Instead, I hope to uplift and inspire, ensuring that both Uber and the destinations mentioned are seen in a light that fosters goodwill, dignity, and community.

## **And the Journey Continues**

I still drive part-time for Uber in and around Orlando, Florida. Caregivers continue to climb into my back seat, some weary, some hopeful, all carrying stories that deserve to be heard. With every ride, I am reminded that caregiving is not confined to hospitals or homes. It is everywhere. It is in the quiet conversations between strangers. It is in the courage to share. It is in the grace of being seen.

Thank you for riding along. The back seat may be where the stories begin, but together, we are bringing them to the front.

# Chapter 1

## A Ride with a Caregiver in Need of Support

A woman slipped into the back seat of my car, her shoulders carrying more than the weight of the Florida heat. As the door closed and I pulled away from the curb, I sensed it almost immediately. Her silence was not peaceful. It was the kind of silence that comes from carrying too much for too long. The kind that settles in when exhaustion becomes a constant companion and strength begins to feel like something you perform instead of something you possess.

"You doing okay back there?" I asked gently. I was not trying to pry or solve her problems. I wanted her to know that if she needed someone to listen, I was there.

She offered a tired smile. "I'm taking care of my mom. She has Alzheimer's. It's been one of those weeks."

She laughed softly, but there was no joy behind it. It was the sound of someone doing everything she could just to keep going.

As the miles passed, her story unfolded. Sleepless nights blurred into mornings. Doctor appointments filled the calendar. Medications, reminders, and routines are shaped every day. Beneath it all was the quiet heartbreak of watching someone she loved slowly drift away from the person she had always known. She was not looking for sympathy or asking for answers. She simply needed a place where, for a few minutes, she did not have to be the strong one.

"I feel like I'm failing," she finally admitted.

Her voice cracked, and tears filled her eyes. I looked at her in the rearview mirror and quietly replied, "You're not failing. You're tired. There's a difference."

Something shifted in that moment. There were no instant solutions, but I watched her shoulders relax just enough to tell me that someone had finally named what she had been carrying. Sometimes that is where healing begins.

For the rest of the ride, we talked as two people who understood that caregiving is both beautiful and incredibly hard. I shared lessons from my years in healthcare and from the many caregivers who have trusted me with their stories from the back seat. She listened closely, nodding as though each word gave her permission to breathe again.

Eventually, our conversation turned to self care. She smiled and shook her head. "I know I should," she said. "It just feels selfish."

I understood that feeling. Together, we reframed it. Taking twenty minutes to walk, pray, breathe, or simply sit in silence is not selfish. It is what allows caregivers to keep caring without losing themselves.

We also talked about building a circle of support. I told her about another caregiver who had started a simple group text with family members, friends, and neighbors. No one had to do everything, but everyone could do something. A meal. A phone call. A visit. A check in. Small acts of kindness become powerful when they remind a caregiver that they are not carrying the weight alone.

Our conversation moved to communication. I told her that expectations cannot stay trapped inside our heads. They have to be spoken. We talked about letting go of perfection and accepting that some days would feel overwhelming while others would feel like victories. Both kinds of days mattered.

Before long, she laughed again. This time it was genuine. For just a moment, the weight she had been carrying lifted enough for joy to find its way back into the conversation.

As our ride came to an end, we talked about staying curious. Instead of spending late nights scrolling through discouraging posts, she wanted to look for support groups, webinars, and resources that would help her become a healthier caregiver.

"I think I'm going to stop doom scrolling," she said with a smile. "I'm ready to start looking for something that actually helps."

When we arrived at her destination, nothing about her circumstances had changed. Her mother still had Alzheimer's. The responsibilities were still waiting, and tomorrow would still be hard. But she stepped out of the car looking just a little lighter because someone had listened. Before closing the door, she smiled and said, "Thank you. I needed this more than you know."

As I drove away, I thought about how many caregivers are quietly riding in the back seat of life. They keep showing up. They keep loving. They keep wondering if they are doing enough. If that sounds like you, let me leave you with the same reminder I shared with her. You are doing better than you think. You are tired. You are not failing. And you are never alone.

## **Reflection**

After she walked away, I sat quietly for a few moments and thought about how many caregivers never say the words, "I'm exhausted." How many carry guilt alongside grief? How many mistakes weariness for weakness when it is really evidence of how deeply they love?

Caregivers do not keep going because they are superhuman. They keep going because someone depends on them. Sometimes the most healing words are not advice or solutions. Sometimes they are simply, "This is hard. I see you. You are not alone."

## Questions to Sit With

Where in your life are you confusing exhaustion with failure? When was the last time you allowed someone to truly listen without feeling the need to fix you? Who could become part of your circle of support, even in small ways? What would letting go of perfection look like this week? If you are a caregiver, what is one simple act of self care you can give yourself today?

Sometimes healing begins with a single honest conversation. Sometimes it begins in the back seat of a car.

## Chapter 2

### A Moment of Magic, A Reminder of Grace

Living in Central Florida, I have the privilege of driving families from all over the world to and from Walt Disney World. Every day, I meet people who have saved for years to spend a few unforgettable days together. Their cars are filled with laughter, sleepy children, souvenirs, and stories from a day that they hope will become a lifelong memory.

One evening, I picked up a family returning to their resort after spending the day at the Magic Kingdom. Like so many families, they looked happily exhausted. Their daughter settled into the back seat while her parents smiled at each other, still talking about the memories they had made that day.

As we drove through the lights of Orlando, our conversation turned to work. The wife shared that she was a professional caregiver. She loved what she did, but she also understood something that many caregivers learn the hard way.

"If I don't take care of myself," she said, "I won't have anything left to give the people who depend on me."

There was no frustration in her voice. She wasn't complaining about her work. She simply spoke with the quiet wisdom that comes from someone who has learned through experience that caring for others begins with caring for yourself.

She explained that self care was not about escaping responsibility. It was about making sure she had the emotional, physical, and spiritual strength to continue showing up for the people who counted on her every day.

Her husband, who was sitting in the front seat beside me, smiled as he listened.

"I see how hard she works," he said. "She comes home tired. Sometimes she's completely exhausted. But she still gives everything she has."

He paused for a moment before looking back at his wife.

"That's why trips like this matter. This is her happy place. Honestly, it's mine too. When we come here, we reconnect. We slow down. We remember that we're more than our jobs."

His words stayed with me.

Caregivers often feel guilty when they step away from their responsibilities, as though taking time for themselves somehow means they care less. Yet sitting in my car was a family showing exactly the opposite. They understood that making room for joy wasn't selfish. It was necessary.

As we continued our drive, their young daughter quietly spoke from the back seat.

"I love my mommy," she said. "She works hard."

The car grew quiet.

No one rushed to respond because nothing needed to be added.

Children have a remarkable way of noticing what adults sometimes overlook. She didn't talk about her mother's career or the long hours she worked. She didn't mention sacrifices or responsibilities.

She simply saw love.

She saw someone who showed up every day.

She saw someone who made her feel safe.

As I listened, I realized I wasn't simply driving a family back to their resort. I was witnessing what caregiving looks like when it is supported by love, appreciation, and intentional moments of rest.

By the time we arrived, I realized this ride had reminded me of something I think every caregiver needs to hear.

Rest does not make you less devoted.

Joy does not make you less committed.

Taking time to restore yourself does not take away from the people you love. It gives you the strength to keep loving them well.

As they gathered their bags and walked toward the resort, I watched a family continue making memories together. I silently thanked God for allowing me to witness such a simple but meaningful reminder.

The most magical part of that evening wasn't inside the Magic Kingdom.

It was watching a family remind one another that caregivers need care too.

## **Reflection**

Long after I drove away, I found myself thinking about that family's conversation. Caregivers spend so much of their lives making sure everyone else has what they need that it can feel uncomfortable to ask what they need themselves. Rest often feels selfish. Joy can feel undeserved. Time away can feel like neglect.

But none of those things are true.

The healthiest caregivers are not the ones who never stop. They are the ones who understand that renewal is part of caregiving. Taking time to laugh, reconnect with family, enjoy a vacation, or simply breathe is not stepping away from the people you love. It is preparing yourself to return with a full heart.

That family reminded me that caregiving and joy are not opposites. They belong together. One sustains the other.

## **Questions to Sit With**

When was the last time you allowed yourself to enjoy a moment without feeling guilty? What activities help you feel refreshed and connected with yourself? Who encourages you to take care of yourself when life becomes overwhelming? What would it look like to schedule time for restoration before you reach the point of exhaustion?

Sometimes the greatest gift we give the people we love is returning to them rested, renewed, and ready to care once again.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Recognizing Caregiver Stress**

I picked up a mother and daughter for what appeared to be an ordinary ride through the busy streets of Orlando. They loaded their luggage into the trunk, climbed into the back seat, and

settled in for the short trip. At first, it seemed like any other ride, the kind that begins with casual conversation before everyone goes their separate ways. But within a few minutes, I realized I was listening to something much more meaningful.

Both women were nurses. As they talked, it was obvious they shared more than a profession. They shared an understanding that only comes from living through the same challenges every day. They finished each other's thoughts without trying. They understood the emotional weight of caregiving because they had both carried it for years.

The daughter spoke about the people she worked alongside. She explained how many of her coworkers were overwhelmed by stress. Long shifts, staffing shortages, emotional fatigue, and the constant responsibility of caring for others had become part of everyday life. She was not criticizing anyone. She spoke with genuine compassion because she knew how easy it was for even the most dedicated caregivers to become exhausted.

Her mother nodded as she listened. "People are doing the best they can," she said quietly. "But sometimes they're simply worn out. When that happens, the stress begins to show."

Her words immediately took me back to my own years in healthcare.

"I've seen the same thing," I said. "It isn't just nursing. It happens in every caregiving profession. Home health aides, certified nursing assistants, activity professionals, social workers, therapists, and family caregivers all carry an incredible emotional weight. Most people are doing everything they can with the energy they have left."

For a few moments, the car became quiet as we reflected on what had been said. I thought about the countless caregivers I have met over the years. They arrive at work carrying burdens no one else can see. They comfort people who are grieving while quietly managing their own stress. They continue showing up even when they are emotionally and physically exhausted. Too often, that exhaustion is mistaken for indifference or impatience when it is really the result of caring deeply for far too long without enough support.

Although our conversation lasted only a few minutes, it reminded all of us of an important truth. Caregivers need care too. We talked about how much difference simple acts of kindness can make. Family members, supervisors, coworkers, and even the people receiving care may never fully understand everything a caregiver experiences. Still, a little patience, a little grace, and a little encouragement can completely change the atmosphere where care takes place.

Understanding will not solve staffing shortages. It will not shorten long shifts or remove the emotional demands of caregiving. What it can do is remind caregivers that they are seen, appreciated, and valued. Sometimes that reminder is enough to help someone keep going one more day.

As we pulled up to their destination, I realized once again why I continue driving for Uber. These rides have become about much more than transportation. They are opportunities to listen. They

are opportunities to encourage. They are opportunities to remind caregivers that someone understands what they are carrying.

After they gathered their luggage and walked away, I sat quietly for a moment before accepting my next ride. I found myself thinking about how easily conversations like this can pass by unnoticed. We hurry through our days without realizing we have just brushed against someone carrying an invisible burden. Caregivers carry responsibilities that never appear on a résumé or a job description. They absorb stress, manage emotions, and continue showing up for others long after their own energy has been depleted. Sometimes the strongest people are simply those who have learned how to keep moving while carrying a weight no one else can see.

## **Reflection**

That conversation reminded me how invisible caregiving can be, even when it is happening right in front of us. It is easy to describe someone as impatient, burned out, or difficult without ever considering what they may have experienced before walking into the room. Caregiving does not end when a work shift is over. It follows people home. It shows up in their relationships, their conversations, and even in quiet moments when they finally have the opportunity to let their guard down.

While we cannot remove every burden caregivers carry, we can make their journey a little lighter. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is not advice or solutions. Sometimes it is simply choosing to listen with compassion and remembering that behind every caregiver is a person doing the very best they can.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who in your life may be carrying more than you realize? When someone seems impatient or distant, could exhaustion be the real story beneath the surface? If you are a caregiver, where do you feel unseen or misunderstood? How could offering a little more patience or grace change someone's day? What is one way you can remind a caregiver this week that they are appreciated?

Sometimes people do not need someone to fix their circumstances. They simply need someone willing to understand their journey.

# **Chapter 4**

## **The Unseen Caregivers**

One of the things I enjoy most about driving for Uber is discovering that caregivers come in many forms. Not every caregiver works in a hospital, nursing home, or doctor's office. Some care for others in ways that are easy to overlook, yet their influence lasts a lifetime. One afternoon, I picked up a man who coached youth soccer. As we made our way through Orlando, we talked

about his team. At first, the conversation sounded like what you would expect. He spoke about practices, games, tournaments, and helping young athletes improve their skills. But the longer we talked, the more I realized he was describing something much bigger than soccer.

He explained that coaching was never just about winning games. It was about helping young people become confident, caring adults. He paid attention to much more than how well they played. He noticed when a child seemed unusually quiet. He recognized when confidence was slipping or when something outside of soccer was weighing heavily on a player's heart. He wanted every child on his team to know there was at least one adult who genuinely cared about them, believed in them, and wanted them to succeed both on and off the field.

As he shared his experiences, it became clear that he understood something many people miss. Children do not leave their problems at home when they come to practice. School pressures, family struggles, friendships, and disappointments all show up on the field. They affect how children play, how they interact with teammates, and how they see themselves. He believed that one of his most important responsibilities was creating an environment where every child felt safe, valued, and encouraged.

After listening for several minutes, I smiled and said, "You know, you're a caregiver."

He laughed softly and looked surprised.

"I've never thought about it that way," he admitted.

His response stayed with me because I have met so many people who spend their lives caring for others without ever realizing that is exactly what they are doing. Coaches, teachers, mentors, youth leaders, neighbors, and friends often shape lives in ways that never appear on a résumé or receive public recognition. They may never help someone with medications or medical appointments, but they provide something just as valuable. They offer encouragement, guidance, stability, and hope during seasons when people need it most.

That conversation reminded me that caregiving is not always medical, and it is not always formal. Sometimes caregiving looks like showing up consistently. Sometimes it looks like listening without judgment. Sometimes it means believing in someone before they believe in themselves. Often it is simply being a steady presence in a world that can feel uncertain.

As our ride came to an end, I found myself thinking about the children on his team. Years from now, many of them will probably forget the scores of their games or the records of their seasons. They may not remember every practice or every tournament. What they are much more likely to remember is the coach who believed in them, encouraged them, noticed when they were struggling, and helped them feel like they mattered. Those are the moments that shape lives long after the final whistle.

I also thought about how many unseen caregivers surround us every day. They quietly influence lives without expecting recognition or applause. They help build confidence, create safe spaces,

and encourage people simply by showing up. Their work may never make headlines, but it changes lives in ways that cannot be measured.

That ride reminded me that caregiving is much bigger than a job title. It is a way of living. It is choosing to notice people, encourage them, and remind them they have value. Perhaps more of us are caregivers than we realize. Sometimes changing a life does not require doing something extraordinary. Sometimes it simply requires being present when someone needs us most.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about the people who quietly shaped my own life. Some were teachers. Some were coaches. Some were neighbors and church members. None of them probably thought of themselves as caregivers, yet each one invested time, encouragement, and compassion that helped shape the person I became.

Caregiving often hides in ordinary moments. It is found in patient conversations, encouraging words, and the willingness to simply be present. Many of the people making the greatest difference in someone else's life may never fully realize the impact they have had. That conversation reminded me that caregiving is rarely about doing something extraordinary. More often, it is about faithfully showing up for someone who needs to know they matter.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who quietly encouraged you when you were growing up? Who believed in you before you believed in yourself? Where are you already caring for others without thinking of yourself as a caregiver? Is there someone in your life today who simply needs your presence and encouragement? How might your everyday acts of kindness be shaping someone's future without you even realizing it?

Sometimes the greatest caregivers never realize how many lives they have touched. Their greatest gift is simply choosing to show up, one person at a time.

# Chapter 5

## Compassion Behind the Process

It was a warm afternoon when I picked him up. The Florida sun hung low in the sky, and everything seemed to move at a slower pace. He climbed into the back seat with a warm smile, but I noticed the tiredness in his eyes almost immediately. After many years of working with caregivers, I have learned to recognize that look. It is not simply physical fatigue. It is the quiet exhaustion that comes from carrying responsibility every day without ever truly setting it down.

Like many Uber rides, we began with casual conversation about the weather, traffic, and the beautiful afternoon. Before long, the conversation turned toward life. He shared that he was the primary caregiver for his wife, who had been living with a long term illness. As he described his daily routine, I could picture what his life looked like. He balanced work, managed the household, scheduled appointments, organized medications, and made sure his wife had everything she needed. Every day required planning. Every day required flexibility. Every day required love. Even though he spoke calmly, I could hear the weariness beneath his words.

"It never really stops," he said. "You're always thinking ahead. You're always planning for what's next."

Then he shared something that made me stop and think.

"Sometimes I feel like caregiving has become just another business."

I glanced at him in the rearview mirror, sensing there was much more behind those words.

He continued quietly. "Everywhere you turn there's another fee, another membership, another subscription, another form to complete, or another system to learn. I understand businesses have to survive, and I don't blame anyone for making a living. But caregiving isn't a business to me. It's personal. It's love. Somewhere along the way, it feels like we've forgotten that."

He paused before continuing.

"What I miss is compassion. I want to hear it in people's voices. I want to know they genuinely care about the people they're serving. That's what makes all the difference."

His words settled over the car, and for several moments neither of us spoke. It was not an uncomfortable silence. It was the kind of silence that follows honest truth. As I listened, I thought back to my own years in healthcare. I understood exactly what he meant. Hospitals, home care agencies, insurance companies, and medical practices all need systems to provide quality care. Those systems serve an important purpose. They help organize information, improve safety, and connect people with the services they need. But somewhere along the way, it is possible to become so focused on the process that we forget the person living inside it.

Behind every form is a family trying to make difficult decisions. Behind every phone call is a caregiver searching for answers. Behind every appointment is someone wondering what tomorrow will bring. Behind every signature is a person carrying more than most people will ever tell you. Compassion should never be separated from the process because it is compassion that reminds people they are more than another name on a schedule.

When we arrived at his destination, he gathered his belongings and paused before opening the door.

"Thanks for listening," he said with a smile. "Sometimes that's all a caregiver really needs."

I smiled and told him it had been my privilege.

As I watched him walk toward the building, I kept thinking about everything he had shared. His words reminded me that caregivers are often carrying much more than the illness of someone they love. They are navigating complicated systems, completing paperwork, making difficult decisions, and trying to remain emotionally strong while quietly carrying their own fears and exhaustion. They do all of this because someone they love depends on them.

That afternoon reminded me that the answer is not always another program, another service, or another process. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is compassion. Sometimes it is slowing down long enough to truly listen. Sometimes it is reminding a caregiver that before they are a customer, a client, or a case number, they are a person who deserves kindness, dignity, and understanding. That is the compassion behind the process.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how easily caregiving can become buried beneath paperwork, schedules, policies, and procedures. While those things are necessary, they should never become more important than the people they exist to serve. Caregivers rarely expect perfection. They simply want to know someone understands what they are carrying. Compassion does not eliminate paperwork or remove difficult decisions, but it changes how people experience them. A kind voice, a patient conversation, or someone willing to truly listen can remind a caregiver they are more than another appointment on the schedule. When compassion remains at the center of care, every process becomes a little more human.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Have you ever felt like a process became more important than the person? When was the last time someone listened to you without trying to solve your problem? If you are a caregiver, what do you need most right now: practical help, greater simplicity, or someone who truly understands? How can you bring more compassion into your own conversations this week? Who around you may simply need to know that someone genuinely cares?

Sometimes healing does not begin with a new solution. Sometimes it begins when compassion becomes part of the process.

## Chapter 6

### A Ride with Mary

Some days, driving for Uber is simply a job. It is miles and minutes, pickups and drop offs, highways and traffic lights blending together as the day quietly passes. Then there are days that remind me why I continue driving. Days when a simple ride becomes something much more meaningful. The day I drove my friend Mary was one of those days.

Unlike most of the stories in this book, Mary was not sitting in the back seat. She sat beside me in the front, and over the course of that drive, we shared a conversation I have never forgotten.

Mary is a devoted mother and caregiver whose life has been shaped by love, resilience, and responsibility. Not long before that day, she had been involved in a car accident that left her unable to drive. Losing that independence had been difficult enough, but life did not slow down because of it. Her son was in the hospital, and every day she wanted to be there with him. Getting to the hospital was no longer as simple as getting into her own car. Every trip required help from someone else, making an already stressful situation feel even heavier.

When I learned she needed a ride, I never hesitated. Caregivers like Mary spend so much of their lives helping everyone else that they rarely ask for anything themselves. I knew this was more than a trip across town. It was an opportunity to help her be where her heart already was.

Before we headed to the hospital, Mary needed to stop for an eye appointment in downtown Orlando. It reminded me that life rarely waits for caregivers. Medical appointments, family responsibilities, unexpected challenges, and everyday obligations all seem to arrive at the same time. There is rarely a perfect schedule. Most caregivers simply do the best they can with whatever the day brings.

While Mary was inside her appointment, I accepted a few nearby Uber rides. It made sense practically, but I found myself thinking about her throughout the afternoon. I knew she wasn't worried about getting to an appointment. Her heart was already waiting at her son's bedside.

When we resumed our drive, our conversation became much deeper than either of us expected. We talked about life's unexpected turns, the uncertainty that comes with loving someone who is hurting, and the quiet fears caregivers often carry without ever speaking them aloud. Neither of us tried to solve the other's problems. There was no advice to give and no easy answers to offer. Instead, we simply talked, listened, and shared the road together.

As I drove, I realized that some of the most meaningful moments in life do not happen when we finally arrive somewhere. They happen during the journey. They happen in conversations we never expected to have. They happen when two people create enough space for honesty, hope, and compassion to exist together.

I never asked Mary what happened after I dropped her off at the hospital. I do not know how her visit with her son went or what emotions she carried as she walked through those hospital doors. Some stories belong only to the people living them.

What I do know is that she thanked me for the ride, and I was grateful I had been able to help in a small way.

Mary reminded me that caregiving often looks like quiet faithfulness. It is showing up when life feels uncertain. It is continuing to love when the future feels unclear. It is accepting help when you need it, even when asking is difficult.

Driving for Uber has introduced me to many caregivers like Mary. Some ride in the back seat. Some sit beside me in the front. All of them carry stories that deserve to be heard. While I cannot change the circumstances they face, I can offer something every caregiver deserves: a safe place, a listening ear, and a reminder that they do not have to carry every burden alone.

Sometimes the greatest gift is not fixing someone's situation.

Sometimes it is simply making sure they do not travel through it by themselves.

## **Reflection**

After that day, I found myself thinking about how many caregivers are moving through life like Mary. They appear strong and capable on the outside while quietly carrying worry, responsibility, and heartache on the inside. Many continue giving to others without ever stopping to acknowledge the weight they are carrying themselves.

Not every caregiver sits in the back seat of my car. Some sit beside me. Some live next door. Some worship beside me on Sunday mornings. They are everywhere, quietly serving the people they love. More often than not, they are not looking for someone to solve their problems. They are simply hoping someone will slow down long enough to truly listen.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who in your life may be carrying more than they let others see? When was the last time you allowed someone to listen to your story without feeling the need to have all the answers? If you are a caregiver, where do you find moments of rest, even if they are brief? How might you offer someone else your presence this week instead of trying to solve their problems?

Sometimes caring for another person begins with something as simple as showing up, listening well, and walking beside them for a little while.

## Chapter 7

### A Shared Experience

I picked up a passenger who was heading to the airport after her vacation. Her suitcase was packed, her flight was waiting, and like so many travelers I meet, she was preparing to leave behind a few days of rest and return to the responsibilities waiting at home. As she settled into the back seat, I noticed something in her eyes that felt familiar. It was not the tiredness that comes from early flights or long days at the theme parks. It was something much deeper. It was the quiet exhaustion that settles into a person's spirit after carrying heavy burdens for a long time. It was a look I recognized because I had seen it throughout my years in healthcare, and if I was honest, I had seen it in my own reflection as well.

For the first several miles, she remained quiet as we made our way toward Orlando International Airport. I have learned not to rush silence. Sometimes people need a few moments before they are ready to talk. Sometimes they simply need to know they are in a place where they can speak honestly if they choose. Eventually she broke the silence by asking if I enjoyed driving for Uber. I smiled and told her that I did. Then she asked if I did anything else. I shared that before driving for Uber, I had spent twenty five years working in healthcare.

The change in her expression was immediate. Her shoulders relaxed, and it seemed as though an invisible wall quietly came down. She told me she was a nurse who worked in admissions and that this vacation had been something she desperately needed. Then her voice became quieter.

"But now I'm headed back to reality."

I gently asked what reality looked like for her.

She looked out the window for a moment before answering.

"It's hard," she said. "I feel broken."

I quietly repeated her words, giving her the space to continue.

"Broken?"

She nodded and began describing what life had been like since the COVID pandemic. She explained that something inside her had changed. She still showed up for work. She still cared for patients. She still gave everything she could each day. But she no longer felt like the same person

she had been before those years. The emotional weight of everything she had witnessed had never completely gone away.

As she spoke, I realized I understood exactly what she meant.

"I know that feeling," I told her.

I shared that I had also spent those difficult years working in healthcare. I remembered the isolation, the uncertainty, and the fear. I remembered watching residents decline without the comfort of their families nearby. I remembered coworkers who continued showing up every day despite carrying exhaustion, grief, and anxiety that few people could truly understand. I remembered going home after work emotionally drained, wondering how long any of us could keep doing what we were doing.

"The pandemic changed me too," I admitted.

For the rest of the drive, we talked less like a driver and a passenger and more like two caregivers who had survived the same storm. We talked about the emotional weight so many caregivers continue to carry long after the world has moved forward. We talked about grief that never had the opportunity to be processed because everyone was simply trying to survive one more shift. We talked about how easy it is to believe something is wrong with you when, in reality, you are responding normally to experiences that were anything but normal.

As the miles passed, I noticed something changing. Neither of us had solved the other's problems. Neither of us had offered easy answers. Yet somehow, we both seemed to breathe a little easier. There was comfort in knowing someone else understood without needing every detail explained.

When the airport came into view, she smiled for the first time since getting into my car.

"Thank you," she said. "I really needed this conversation."

As she gathered her luggage and walked toward the terminal, I found myself reflecting on everything she had shared. The pandemic affected each of us differently, but it also created an unspoken bond among caregivers. We recognize the tiredness in one another's eyes because many of us have carried it ourselves. We understand the grief that often goes unspoken because we have lived through it too.

That ride reminded me that one of the greatest gifts we can offer another caregiver is understanding. Caregivers spend so much of their lives helping others feel less alone that they sometimes forget they need that same gift themselves. She had described herself as broken, but I did not see someone who was broken. I saw someone who had walked through one of the most difficult seasons of her life, continued caring for others, and was still finding the courage to keep showing up. There is nothing broken about that. There is something deeply human about it.

## **Reflection**

After she disappeared into the airport, I sat quietly for a few moments before accepting my next ride. I thought about how many caregivers are still carrying the emotional weight of those difficult years. The world may have moved on, but healing often takes much longer than the headlines. Many caregivers returned to work, continued serving others, and quietly carried grief that few people ever recognized.

Perhaps broken is not the right word. Sometimes we are simply changed by experiences we never expected to face. Sometimes we are exhausted. Sometimes we are grieving the person we used to be. Healing often begins when we stop believing we have to carry those experiences alone and discover there are others who truly understand.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Have you ever mistaken exhaustion or grief for being broken? What experiences have changed you in ways you are still learning to understand? Who in your life truly understands your journey without needing every detail explained? When was the last time someone made you feel seen and understood? If you are a caregiver, how might you offer yourself the same compassion you so freely give to others?

Sometimes healing begins the moment we realize we are not walking the journey alone.

# **Chapter 8**

## **The Marathon of Service**

Some conversations stay with you long after the ride is over. This was one of them.

I picked up a retired police officer, and almost immediately we settled into an easy conversation. There was a calm confidence about him that only comes from years of experience. He had spent his career serving others, making difficult decisions, and carrying responsibilities that most people will never fully understand. As we drove through Orlando, he shared stories about his years in law enforcement, the communities he served, and the changes he witnessed throughout his career. Yet what captured my attention most was not the stories of emergencies or dangerous situations. It was his passion for mentoring young officers and preparing them for the reality of a life devoted to service.

He told me that whenever he trained new recruits, he always shared the same lesson.

"Policing isn't a sprint," he said. "It's a marathon."

He explained that many young officers begin their careers filled with enthusiasm and determination. The excitement of the job and the rush of adrenaline carry them through the early

years. Eventually, however, the adrenaline fades, and what remains is the emotional weight of serving people through difficult moments, often while carrying experiences that few others can truly understand.

"The real test comes after a few years," he said. "That's when the exhaustion begins."

As he spoke, I found myself thinking about caregivers. His words perfectly described law enforcement, but they also described nearly every caregiver I have ever known. Whether someone is caring for patients in a hospital, supporting a loved one at home, or helping people through difficult seasons of life, the journey begins with purpose. Most caregivers step into their role ready to give everything they have. They are motivated by compassion, commitment, and the desire to make a difference. Over time, however, that calling becomes less about enthusiasm and more about endurance.

I shared that thought with him.

"I think caregiving is a marathon too," I said.

He smiled.

"I've never thought about it that way," he replied. "But you're right."

For the rest of the ride, we talked about what happens when people dedicate their lives to serving others without taking time to care for themselves. Whether someone wears a police uniform, hospital scrubs, a teacher's badge, or simply spends every day caring for a spouse or parent, the challenges often look remarkably similar. People become so focused on helping others that they forget they have limits of their own. They push through exhaustion because someone else needs them. They ignore the warning signs because stopping feels impossible. Slowly, without realizing it, they begin running on empty.

We both agreed that service without support cannot last forever. Rest is not weakness. Asking for help is not failure. Caring for yourself is not selfish. Those are not signs of giving up. They are the habits that allow people to continue serving with compassion for years instead of burning out after only a short time.

As our conversation continued, I realized we were talking about much more than policing or caregiving. We were talking about living a life of faithful service without losing ourselves along the way. Endurance is not about pushing harder than everyone else. It is about learning when to slow down, when to receive help, and when to refill your own tank before there is nothing left to give.

When we arrived at his destination, he thanked me for the ride, but I was the one who felt grateful. His words reminded me that wisdom often comes from people who have spent decades learning lessons through experience. Whether someone wears a badge, cares for patients, supports a family member, teaches children, or quietly serves behind the scenes, lasting service is never measured by speed. It is measured by faithfulness.

As I drove away, I realized the retired officer had given me far more than an interesting conversation. He had reminded me that every life devoted to serving others is a marathon. The people who spend their days caring for others also deserve encouragement, support, and permission to rest. The goal is not simply to serve with passion at the beginning. The goal is to keep serving with compassion for the long journey.

That is the marathon of service.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I thought about how often we celebrate people for pushing through exhaustion without ever asking what it is costing them. We admire dedication, resilience, and commitment, yet we rarely encourage the habits that make those qualities sustainable. The strongest people are not always the ones who never stop. More often, they are the ones who understand when to rest, when to ask for help, and when to allow others to care for them.

Whether you are a caregiver, a first responder, a teacher, a pastor, or anyone whose life is devoted to serving others, your work is not a sprint. It is a marathon. Endurance is built through healthy rhythms, supportive relationships, and the wisdom to recognize that caring for yourself is an essential part of caring for others. When we permit ourselves to pause, we are not stepping away from our calling. We are preparing ourselves to continue living it well.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Are you treating your life like a sprint when it was meant to be a marathon? What signs of exhaustion have you been ignoring? Who helps refill your emotional and spiritual tank, and do they know how much you appreciate them? What would it look like to permit yourself to rest before you reach the point of burnout? How can caring for yourself today help you continue caring for others tomorrow?

The most meaningful lives are not measured by how fast we run. They are measured by how faithfully we continue showing up, one day at a time.

# **Chapter 9**

## **Grace in the Back Seat**

It was a late Saturday night, one of those evenings when the city feels both alive and a little gentler beneath the glow of streetlights. I was driving for Uber to earn a little extra income, making my way through Orlando as music drifted from restaurants, laughter spilled onto the sidewalks, and people enjoyed the final hours of their weekend. Nights like these often bring unexpected conversations, and I have learned to pay attention because you never know what story is about to climb into the back seat.

When I pulled up to a local venue, I heard the laughter before my passengers even reached the car. A married couple climbed into the back seat, smiling and leaning comfortably into one another. They had clearly enjoyed a fun evening together, and the warmth between them was easy to see. As we pulled away, our conversation began with the usual topics about work, life, and enjoying a night out. Before long, however, the discussion moved beyond small talk, as so many rides eventually do.

I mentioned that I worked in healthcare and also served through my church. The woman immediately became interested. She leaned forward slightly and said, "I grew up in church, but I don't go anymore."

There was something about the way she said it that caught my attention. It wasn't anger. It sounded more like disappointment mixed with sadness, as though she had quietly carried the feeling for a long time.

I gently asked, "Would you mind sharing why?"

She took a deep breath before answering.

"I always felt like I could never measure up. I was taught that drinking was a sin, and honestly, sometimes I enjoy a glass of wine. Taking care of my mother is stressful, and every time I did, I felt guilty. Eventually I just stopped going because I figured I wasn't living the way I was supposed to."

Her husband quietly reached over and held her hand.

"I've told her that's not who God is," he said. "But she still feels judged."

As I listened, I realized her story was one I had heard many times before. So many people have walked away from church, not because they stopped believing in God, but because they no longer believed they belonged.

I thought for a moment before responding.

"You know, when I read the Gospels, I see Jesus spending most of His time with people who believed they weren't good enough. He ate with tax collectors, sinners, and people the religious leaders wanted nothing to do with. He didn't wait for people to become perfect before welcoming them. He met them exactly where they were."

The car grew quiet.

"I've never thought about it like that," she said softly.

I smiled and continued.

"I don't believe church is a place for people who have everything together. It's a place where people come to grow. God's love doesn't begin after we've fixed ourselves. His grace meets us right where we are."

Then I added something that seemed especially important for her to hear.

"And caring for your mother is hard. Caregiving is emotionally exhausting. It's okay to take a break. It's okay to breathe. I believe God understands that better than anyone."

She smiled, and although she didn't say much, I could tell something about the conversation had settled into her heart.

When we pulled into their driveway, she looked at me through the rearview mirror.

"Maybe I'll give church another chance," she said quietly.

I smiled.

"I don't think God ever stopped waiting for you."

She nodded, thanked me for the ride, and she and her husband walked toward their front door. As I drove away, I found myself praying for her. I prayed for her caregiving journey, for her mother, and for the burdens she carried every day. I also prayed that she would rediscover a community where she experienced grace instead of judgment and love instead of shame.

That ride reminded me that God's presence is not limited to church buildings. He meets us in hospital rooms, kitchens, waiting rooms, and ordinary conversations. Sometimes He even meets us in the back seat of an Uber on a Saturday night.

Grace has never depended on having everything together.

Grace meets us in the middle of our imperfect lives and gently reminds us that we are loved.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how many people quietly drift away from church, not because they stopped believing in God, but because they no longer felt welcome. Caregivers already carry enough guilt, exhaustion, and self doubt without feeling as though they have to earn God's love as well. The Gospel has always been an invitation, not a reward for getting everything right. Grace was never meant to keep people out. It was always meant to welcome them home.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Have you ever walked away from a place because you felt judged instead of welcomed? How has your understanding of God's grace changed over the years? If you are a caregiver, where do guilt

and grace meet in your daily life? What would it look like to believe that God meets you exactly where you are today? How can you become someone who creates safe places where others experience grace instead of judgment?

Grace has never been about perfection. It has always been about God's presence walking beside us, even on the ordinary roads of life.

## Chapter 10

### A Holy Presence

I pulled up outside the convention center expecting another routine ride to the airport. I imagined it would be like so many others. Pick up the passengers, load the luggage, make a little conversation, and head toward the terminal. Most airport rides follow that familiar pattern. They are pleasant but often forgettable. This ride turned out to be anything but ordinary.

Standing at the curb were two nuns and a priest who had just finished attending a Catholic Higher Education conference. There was no rush in the way they approached the car. They weren't checking their watches or anxiously watching traffic. They simply waited with a calmness that immediately caught my attention. As they climbed into the back seat and settled in, I noticed something difficult to describe. The atmosphere inside the car seemed to change. Nothing dramatic happened. The conversation had not even begun. Yet there was a quiet sense of peace that filled the space. It was as though they carried with them a calm presence that made everyone around them slow down and breathe a little easier.

As we began talking, I quickly realized that what impressed me most was not their titles or their roles within the church. It was the way they carried themselves. They spoke with genuine warmth and humility. They listened as carefully as they spoke. There was nothing forced or rehearsed about them. They simply seemed to be people who had spent their lives learning how to care deeply for others.

Our conversation naturally turned toward their work in education and ministry. They shared stories about walking alongside college students as they navigated questions about faith, relationships, purpose, and the future. They talked about supporting families during difficult seasons and creating communities where people felt welcomed rather than judged. Again and again, I noticed that they spoke less about programs and accomplishments and more about people.

One of the things that stayed with me was how often they returned to what many people would consider small acts of kindness. They talked about encouraging someone who was struggling, visiting people who felt forgotten, choosing patience when frustration would have been easier, and listening without feeling the need to immediately offer answers. They believed those ordinary moments often became the most meaningful parts of their ministry. Seeds planted through simple conversations could grow into something life changing years later.

As I listened, I realized our conversation was becoming much more than a ride to the airport. I was the one driving, but in many ways I was also the one learning. They reminded me that lasting change rarely happens through dramatic speeches or grand gestures. More often, it grows quietly through consistency, compassion, and the willingness to simply be present with another person.

Their stories also reminded me that clergy are caregivers. Just like nurses, social workers, teachers, counselors, and family members, they spend their lives caring for people whose burdens are often invisible. Caregiving takes many different forms. Sometimes it wears scrubs. Sometimes it wears a police uniform. Sometimes it stands in a classroom. Sometimes it wears a habit or a priest's collar. No matter what it looks like on the outside, caregiving always begins with the decision to place another person's well being alongside your own.

What struck me most was that no one in the car preached a sermon. No Bible verses were quoted. No one tried to convince anyone of anything. Instead, they simply lived what they believed. Their kindness, humility, and attentiveness spoke more powerfully than any sermon could have.

By the time we arrived at the airport, I found myself feeling grateful for something I had not expected when I accepted the ride. I had been reminded that quiet faithfulness has tremendous power. The world often celebrates people who are loud, influential, or highly visible, yet many of the people making the greatest difference are serving quietly, one conversation and one relationship at a time.

As I watched them gather their luggage and walk toward the terminal, I realized that some rides leave you tired, while others leave you encouraged. This ride left me with a renewed appreciation for the quiet ways people care for one another every single day. It reminded me that kindness does not need to be loud to change a life. Sometimes the holiest moments are the quiet ones that happen when people simply choose to be fully present with each other.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how easily we overlook quiet goodness. We often assume that influence comes through recognition, leadership comes through visibility, and impact comes through doing something extraordinary. Yet the people who have shaped my life the most have rarely been the loudest people in the room. They were the ones who listened well, showed compassion consistently, and created spaces where others felt safe, valued, and loved.

Caregiving often happens in those quiet moments. It grows through faithful presence rather than public recognition. It reminds us that changing someone's life does not always require doing something remarkable. Sometimes it begins with simply slowing down long enough to let another person know they matter.

## **Questions to Sit With**

When have you experienced quiet kindness that stayed with you long after the moment had passed? Who in your life consistently offers encouragement without seeking recognition? How

do you define making a difference, and does that definition leave room for simple acts of compassion? If you are a caregiver, where are your quiet acts of faithfulness making a difference that you may never fully see? How can you choose presence over busyness this week as you care for the people around you?

Sometimes the most sacred moments are not the ones that draw attention to themselves. They are the quiet moments when love is lived one conversation, one act of kindness, and one person at a time.

## Chapter 11

### Caregiving in Plain Sight

One of the greatest lessons I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregivers are everywhere. They are not always found in hospitals, nursing homes, or doctor's offices. Sometimes they are standing in front of a classroom, coaching a youth sports team, serving in a church, or quietly caring for family members after everyone else has gone to bed. This ride reminded me just how often caregiving hides in plain sight.

I pulled into a quiet school parking lot for my next pickup. The buses had already left, the classrooms were dark, and the familiar energy of a busy school day had faded into silence. The workday appeared to be over, but I have learned that for many people who care for others, the work never really ends. Near the entrance stood a woman waiting patiently. She looked tired, but there was a quiet steadiness about her. It was not the kind of exhaustion that asks for sympathy. It was the look of someone who had spent the day giving her attention, her patience, and her heart to other people. After many years of working with caregivers, I have come to recognize that kind of tired.

As she climbed into the back seat, I greeted her and asked one of my favorite questions.

"How was your day?"

She smiled.

"Long," she said. "But good. I love being a teacher."

That simple answer opened the door to a much deeper conversation. I asked what she enjoyed most about teaching, and her face immediately brightened. She talked about her students as though each one mattered deeply to her. She described how every child entered her classroom carrying a different story. Some arrived excited to learn. Others carried worries from home that made it difficult to focus. She explained that teaching was about much more than lesson plans and

grades. It meant paying attention to children who suddenly became quiet, noticing when someone seemed discouraged, and helping every student feel safe enough to learn.

"I have a lot of kids to take care of every day," she said.

Her words immediately caught my attention.

"You know," I said with a smile, "you're a caregiver."

She laughed softly.

"I've honestly never thought about myself that way."

The more she talked, the more obvious it became. She wasn't simply teaching reading, math, or science. She was encouraging children who doubted themselves. She was comforting students who were hurting. She was helping young people discover confidence they did not know they possessed. Every day she was caring for hearts just as much as minds.

As our conversation continued, she shared how emotionally demanding teaching had become. Every day required patience, flexibility, creativity, and compassion. By the time she arrived home, she often felt completely drained. She told me that when she walked through the front door, she would smile at her family and say, "I just need ten minutes." Those ten minutes gave her space to breathe, reset, and prepare for what she called her second shift as a wife and mother. She shared that meditation and breathing exercises had become an important part of her routine because they helped her make that transition with greater peace and intention.

Then she quietly added something that changed the entire conversation.

"I'm also taking care of my mom," she said. "She has ALS."

Suddenly everything came into focus. She was not only caring for dozens of students each day. She was raising her children. She was supporting her husband. She was walking beside her mother through one of life's most difficult journeys. Every part of her life involved caring for someone else.

As she continued sharing, I realized she represented so many people I meet every day. Caregivers rarely carry only one responsibility. They move from one role to another without stopping. Teacher. Mother. Daughter. Wife. Caregiver. The titles change throughout the day, but the heart behind them remains the same. I mostly listened. She did not need advice. She simply needed someone willing to recognize everything she was carrying.

When we arrived at her destination, she thanked me for the ride, and I thanked her for sharing her story. As I drove away, I found myself thinking about how many caregivers quietly surround us every day without ever calling themselves caregivers. They teach in classrooms. They prepare meals at home. They sit beside hospital beds. They help aging parents. They encourage

neighbors, coworkers, and friends. Most of them never expect recognition. They simply keep showing up because someone needs them.

That conversation reminded me that caregiving often hides in plain sight. The people carrying the greatest responsibilities are often the ones who ask for the least attention. They quietly move from one act of compassion to the next, never realizing how deeply they are changing the lives around them. Perhaps that is the lesson this teacher gave me. Caregiving is much bigger than a profession. It is a way of living. Once you begin looking for it, you discover it everywhere.

## **Reflection**

After she stepped out of the car, I sat quietly for a moment before accepting my next ride. I thought about how many people finish one caregiving role only to begin another. Teachers become parents. Parents become caregivers for aging parents. Professionals come home to families who need them just as much as the people they served all day. The responsibilities change, but the heart of caregiving remains the same. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can offer caregivers is simply helping them recognize the importance of what they are already doing. Being seen does not remove the responsibility, but it reminds people that their quiet faithfulness matters. Sometimes recognition is exactly the encouragement a caregiver needs to continue showing up tomorrow.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where in your life are you caring for others without recognizing it? How many different roles do you move between each day, and when do you allow yourself time to rest? Who around you may be quietly carrying more responsibility than you realize? How can you acknowledge someone whose caregiving often goes unnoticed? If you are a caregiver, what would it mean to let yourself be seen, not only for what you do, but for the compassion you bring to the lives of others?

Caregiving often hides in plain sight. Once we begin looking for it, we discover it all around us in classrooms, homes, churches, workplaces, hospitals, and neighborhoods. It is found wherever someone quietly chooses to care for another person with patience, compassion, and love.

# **Chapter 12**

## **The Ride Home**

One quiet afternoon, I picked up an older gentleman from a doctor's office on the edge of town. The building itself was ordinary, with patients coming and going through the automatic doors as they moved from one appointment to the next. At first, I expected this to be another routine ride home. Before the trip was over, however, I realized this ride home would become one of those moments that stays with you long after the journey ends.

He walked slowly toward the car, moving carefully as though every step required thought and intention. When he settled into the back seat, he let out a small sigh. It was not the sigh of relief after a long day. It was the sound of someone who had learned to conserve his energy because every movement mattered. As I greeted him, I sensed almost immediately that he wanted to talk. There was a gentleness in his voice and a quiet eagerness for conversation that reminded me how deeply people long to be heard.

He mentioned that his doctor's appointment had been quite a distance from home, but he did not seem bothered by the long drive. "It's nice to get out," he said with a smile. Then, after a brief pause, he quietly added, "I don't drive anymore."

Those four words carried far more weight than they appeared to. Losing the ability to drive meant much more than losing transportation. It meant giving up independence. It meant relying on others for appointments, errands, and everyday routines that had once been simple. I could only imagine how much his world had gradually become smaller without him ever choosing for it to happen.

The ride home lasted nearly an hour, and we spent every minute talking. He shared stories about his younger years, the work he had enjoyed, the places he had traveled, and the routines that once filled his days. He talked honestly about his health, never complaining, simply accepting that life had changed. He shared his thoughts about how the world had evolved over the years, occasionally laughing at how different things had become. His stories flowed naturally, as though they had simply been waiting for someone willing to listen.

As I listened, I realized this ride home was about much more than getting him from one place to another. For that hour, he was not simply another patient returning from a medical appointment. He was not defined by his age or his health. He was a husband, a father, a worker, and a man with a lifetime of memories worth sharing. Most importantly, he was someone whose story still mattered.

As we turned onto his street, his face brightened.

"I can see my daughter," he said, pointing toward the house ahead.

I pulled into the driveway and stepped out to retrieve his walker from the trunk. As I handed it to him, his daughter came outside to greet us. The love between them was immediately obvious. She welcomed her father with warmth and kindness before turning to me.

"Thank you," she said sincerely. "Thank you for talking with him. He's often alone during the day. I wish I could spend more time with him, but I work full time."

Her words stayed with me. In that moment, I realized she was carrying her own burden as a caregiver. Like so many adult children, she was doing everything she could to balance work, family, and caring for someone she loved. She was doing her best, yet she still carried the quiet guilt that so many caregivers know so well, the feeling that no matter how much they do, it never feels like enough.

I smiled and told her it had truly been my pleasure.

As I drove away, I found myself thinking about what caregiving really looks like. We often picture caregiving as helping with medications, preparing meals, or driving someone to appointments. Those things certainly matter, but sometimes caregiving is something much simpler. Sometimes it is giving someone your attention. Sometimes it is listening to stories they have carried for years. Sometimes it is making sure another person does not spend an entire day feeling invisible.

Her gratitude was not simply for the ride. It was for the conversation. She was grateful that, for one hour, her father had someone to laugh with, remember with, and simply enjoy being himself. That ride home became far more than transportation. It became companionship. It became connection. It became an unexpected act of caregiving.

That afternoon reminded me that there are countless caregivers quietly doing everything they can for the people they love. They cannot always be present because work, responsibilities, and life demand so much of them. Yet sometimes someone else can step into that space for a little while and offer something just as meaningful. Sometimes an hour of genuine conversation becomes an unexpected gift. Sometimes being fully present is one of the greatest acts of caregiving we can offer.

## **Reflection**

After that ride home, I kept thinking about how loneliness often hides in plain sight, especially among older adults whose worlds have quietly become smaller over time. I also thought about the caregivers who love them deeply while carrying the constant feeling that they should somehow be doing more. The truth is that caregiving is not measured only by the tasks we complete. It is also measured by the moments of connection we create. A conversation cannot cure illness, but it can ease loneliness. Listening cannot solve every problem, but it can remind someone they still matter. Sometimes the smallest acts of kindness become the moments people remember the longest.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who in your life may be experiencing quiet loneliness? When was the last time you slowed down enough to truly listen to someone's story? If you are a caregiver, where are you carrying guilt for things that are beyond your control? How might simply being present change the way you think about caring for someone? What small act of connection could you offer another person this week?

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another person is not our advice or our solutions. Sometimes it is our time, our attention, and the simple reminder that they are not alone. Sometimes the most meaningful care begins with something as ordinary as the ride home.

# Chapter 13

## Carrying the Weight

One of the hardest things about being a caregiver is that the weight does not stay behind when the shift ends. It follows you home. It rides beside you in the car. It sits with you at the dinner table. It even comes along on vacation. This ride reminded me that while caregivers may step away from work for a few days, they rarely stop carrying the emotional weight of caring for others.

It was early morning as I merged onto Interstate 4 after completing several rides. The sun was just beginning to rise, painting the Orlando skyline with soft shades of gold and orange. The city was waking up for another busy day. Families were heading toward the theme parks, employees were making their morning commute, and visitors were looking forward to creating memories that would last long after their vacations ended.

My next pickup was a mother and her two daughters who were headed to Disney's Animal Kingdom. As they walked toward the car, I could tell this trip meant more than just a day at the park. The daughters climbed into the back seat first, smiling and chatting about the rides they wanted to experience. They held backpacks filled with snacks, souvenirs they hoped to buy, and the excitement that only children can bring to the beginning of a vacation day. Their mother followed, settling into her seat with a deep sigh.

It was not a sigh of frustration or impatience. It was the kind of sigh that comes from carrying too much for too long. It sounded like months of emotional exhaustion escaping for just a moment. Later I would learn that she worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant, and in that instant, her hope was simple. She wanted a day where she could simply be a mom.

For the first several minutes, the car remained quiet. I welcomed the silence. I had been driving since early that morning, and the steady rhythm of the tires on the highway, mixed with the occasional laughter from the girls in the back seat, created a peaceful start to the ride.

Then her phone rang.

She glanced at the screen before answering. It was someone from work. I could hear enough of the conversation to understand what had happened. Someone had accidentally called to ask if she could come in for a shift. She calmly explained that she was on vacation. When she ended the call, she let out another deep sigh. This one felt even heavier than the first.

I looked in the rearview mirror and noticed her quietly shaking her head.

Then she softly said something that seemed meant more for herself than for anyone else.

"I'm burned out."

Those three words filled the car.

She had no idea how deeply they resonated with me. I spent twenty five years working in healthcare. I worked alongside Certified Nursing Assistants, nurses, activity professionals, social workers, and countless caregivers who quietly carried more than anyone realized. I watched compassionate people continue giving even after they had very little left to give. Burnout was never simply physical. It was emotional, mental, and spiritual.

After a few moments she looked toward the front seat and asked, "Have you ever been on vacation and had work call you?"

I smiled.

"More than once," I said. "I spent many years working in senior living. I understand."

That was all she needed to hear.

For the rest of the ride, she shared her story. She talked about long shifts, short staffing, and the emotional responsibility that comes with caring for people every day. She described going home exhausted and still wanting to be fully present for her daughters. She admitted feeling guilty whenever she needed rest, as though taking care of herself somehow meant she was letting someone else down.

I did not interrupt. I did not offer solutions. I simply listened.

As she talked, I noticed her shoulders begin to relax. Her voice became calmer. Her breathing slowed. She was not simply talking about work. She was setting down the weight she had been carrying for far too long.

For those few miles, the car became more than transportation. It became a place where she no longer had to be the caregiver. She did not have to be the strong one. She did not have to solve anyone else's problems. She could simply be herself.

As we approached the entrance to Disney's Animal Kingdom, her daughters became excited again. They pointed toward the park, talking about the animals they wanted to see and the adventures waiting for them inside. Their excitement was contagious.

Their mother looked out the window and smiled.

This time, the smile reached her eyes.

Before getting out of the car, she looked at me and quietly said, "Thank you. I really needed this."

I smiled and wished them a wonderful day together.

As I drove away, I found myself thinking about how many caregivers carry the weight of their work wherever they go. They carry responsibility. They carry grief. They carry guilt. They carry the pressure to always be available and always be strong. Even on vacation, that weight does not simply disappear.

That ride reminded me that caregivers do not always need someone to fix what they are carrying. Sometimes they simply need someone willing to help carry it for a few moments. Sometimes being heard is enough to make the load feel a little lighter.

For a few miles on Interstate 4, heading toward a day filled with laughter, adventure, and family memories, one caregiver was finally able to set the weight down, if only for a little while.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how many caregivers carry invisible burdens into places that were meant to bring them joy. Vacations, holidays, birthdays, and family gatherings do not automatically erase burnout. The responsibilities may pause for a few days, but the emotional weight often remains. Many caregivers struggle to fully rest because they never feel they have permission to stop carrying what has become so familiar.

Perhaps that is why listening matters so much. While it cannot remove the weight completely, it reminds caregivers they do not have to carry it alone. Sometimes the first step toward healing is simply having a safe place to admit, "I'm burned out," and knowing someone understands.

## **Questions to Sit With**

What weight have you been carrying that no one else can see? Have you been taking your worries with you into places that were meant to bring you joy? If you are a caregiver, what makes it difficult to truly rest? Who in your life helps lighten your load simply by listening? What would it look like to set down your burdens, even for a few moments this week?

Caregivers spend much of their lives carrying the weight of others. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer is helping them remember that they were never meant to carry it all by themselves.

# **Chapter 14**

## **Quiet Strength**

Some of the strongest caregivers I have ever met are not the loudest people in the room. They rarely ask for recognition or attention. Instead, they quietly carry responsibilities that most people never see. They keep showing up day after day, loving deeply, giving generously, and putting one foot in front of the other even when they are exhausted. This ride reminded me that quiet strength is often the greatest strength of all.

I pulled up to a modest apartment complex for my next Uber Health ride. The buildings were simple and familiar, the kind of place where countless stories unfold quietly behind closed doors. A woman stepped outside holding her young son's hand. He moved carefully, taking in everything around him with quiet curiosity. There was a gentleness about him as he watched the world, noticing details that many people might overlook. His mother stayed close, guiding him with patient, practiced movements that reflected a rhythm they had likely repeated hundreds of times.

She opened the back door, helped him climb inside, carefully fastened his seat belt, and settled into the seat beside him. Every movement reflected thoughtfulness. Nothing was hurried. Nothing was distracted. It was obvious that caring for her son was woven into every part of her day. We were headed to a therapy center across town, and because the ride had been arranged through Uber Health, I knew there was probably more to the story than simply getting from one place to another.

For the first several minutes, the ride was quiet. Her son looked out the window, occasionally humming softly to himself. The gentle sound filled the car with a sense of calm. His mother sat beside him with her hands folded in her lap. She looked tired, but there was also a quiet steadiness about her. It was not the kind of strength that draws attention to itself. It was the steady strength of someone who simply keeps showing up because someone they love depends on them.

After a while, I asked, "How's your day going?"

She smiled.

"Busy," she said. "Always busy."

Little by little, she began sharing her story. Her son had been diagnosed with autism two years earlier, and since then, life had changed in ways she never could have imagined. Her days revolved around therapy appointments, paperwork, phone calls, school meetings, and advocating for the services her son needed. Every outing required planning. Every schedule depended on flexibility. She was raising him on her own while working part time and trying to stretch every dollar, every hour, and every ounce of energy as far as it could go.

"I love him more than anything," she said quietly. "But some days I feel like I'm running on fumes."

Her honesty filled the car. She talked about the guilt that followed her everywhere, the feeling that no matter how much she did, it never seemed like enough. She described friendships that had slowly faded as life became more complicated. She admitted that adult conversations had become rare and that even simple errands often felt overwhelming because she was constantly thinking ahead, preparing for whatever unexpected challenge might come next.

Then she quietly said something that stayed with me.

"I don't get many breaks."

She paused for a moment and looked around the car.

"But this ride... this quiet moment... it helps."

I simply listened. She did not need someone to solve her problems. She needed someone willing to hear them. As she continued talking, I noticed her shoulders relax just a little. Her voice became softer. Her son leaned gently against her, and without even thinking about it, she reached over and stroked his hair. It was such a small gesture, but it spoke volumes. In that simple movement I saw patience, tenderness, and unconditional love. It reminded me that some of the greatest expressions of caregiving happen quietly, without anyone else ever noticing.

As we pulled into the therapy center parking lot, she looked out the window before turning back toward me.

"Thank you for listening," she said. "I don't get that very often."

I smiled.

"It was my privilege."

She gathered her son's backpack, helped him out of the car, and together they walked toward the entrance. I watched for a moment before accepting my next ride.

As I drove away, I kept thinking about the quiet strength she carried. The world often celebrates dramatic acts of courage, yet some of the strongest people I have ever met are parents like her. They wake up every morning, face uncertainty with determination, advocate tirelessly for their children, and continue loving without expecting recognition. They rarely hear applause. Most people never see everything they carry. Yet they keep showing up because love keeps calling them forward.

That ride reminded me that caregiving is not always loud. More often, it is found in early morning appointments, endless paperwork, reassuring touches, patient conversations, and the decision to keep showing up one more day. Quiet strength may not attract attention, but it changes lives every single day.

## **Reflection**

After they disappeared into the therapy center, I thought about how many caregivers quietly carry responsibilities that few people ever see. They become advocates, teachers, nurses, counselors, and protectors, often all before lunchtime. Their days are filled with decisions, appointments, and constant vigilance, yet much of what they do goes unnoticed. Love keeps them moving, even when they are exhausted. Perhaps that is what quiet strength really is. It is not pretending everything is easy. It is choosing to keep loving, keep hoping, and keep showing up even when no one is watching. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer these caregivers is not another solution. Sometimes it is simply giving them a place to breathe and someone willing to listen.

## Questions to Sit With

Where in your life are you showing quiet strength without realizing it? When was the last time you allowed yourself a moment to simply breathe? If you are a caregiver, who creates a safe place where you can share your story without feeling judged? How can you become that safe place for someone else who may be quietly running on empty? What small act of kindness could remind another caregiver that they are seen today?

Some of the strongest people we will ever meet rarely call attention to themselves. They simply keep showing up with love, one ordinary day at a time. That is quiet strength.

## Chapter 15

### The Second Shift

One of the things I have come to realize while driving for Uber is that you cannot tell who is a caregiver by looking at them. Some wear scrubs. Others wear business suits. Many look like they have everything together. Yet behind polished appearances are people quietly carrying responsibilities that few others ever see. This ride reminded me that for many caregivers, the workday never truly ends. It simply changes.

My next passenger stepped into the back seat dressed in professional business attire. Her blazer was neatly pressed, her laptop bag rested comfortably on her shoulder, and she carried herself with confidence. At first glance, she looked like someone who had everything under control. Before we even pulled away from the curb, however, her phone buzzed twice. She glanced at the screen, silenced the notifications, and slowly exhaled. It was the kind of sigh that spoke of more than a busy morning.

We were headed to a client meeting across town. For the first few minutes, she looked quietly out the window as traffic moved around us. I could almost see her mind racing through everything waiting for her that day.

After a few minutes, I asked, "Busy morning?"

She smiled, although it felt more like an acknowledgment than amusement.

"Always," she replied. "But it isn't just work."

She began talking about her career. She worked as a senior manager for a technology company, leading teams, managing deadlines, solving problems, and making decisions that affected many people. From the outside, her life appeared successful. She had built a respected career and carried significant responsibility.

Then her voice softened.

"I'm also caring for my dad," she said. "He has Parkinson's."

Suddenly, the conversation changed.

She described mornings that began long before most people were awake. Before answering emails or joining meetings, she was helping her father with breakfast, medications, and preparing him for the day. During lunch breaks, she checked on him, coordinated appointments, returned calls from doctors, and managed paperwork. After work, while many coworkers headed home to relax, she stepped into what she called her second shift. Evenings were filled with helping her father, organizing medications, researching resources, and making plans for whatever tomorrow might bring.

"It feels like I'm living two lives," she said. "Corporate during the day. Caregiver at night."

Her words captured something I have heard from many caregivers. They carry one full time responsibility while quietly carrying another that few people ever recognize.

She talked about the guilt that seemed to follow her everywhere. While she sat in meetings, she worried about her father. When she was with him, she wondered what was happening at work. It felt as though neither part of her life ever received her complete attention, even though she was giving everything she had.

"I love my dad," she said. "I'm just so tired."

I listened.

She did not need advice.

She did not need solutions.

She simply needed someone who understood that caring for another person changes every part of your life.

As she continued talking, I noticed the tension slowly leave her shoulders. Sometimes speaking the truth out loud makes the burden feel just a little lighter.

As we approached her office, she watched people hurrying along the sidewalks.

"I don't talk about this very much," she admitted. "The people I work with see the meetings and the deadlines. They don't see everything that happens before I get there or after I leave."

I told her I understood. During my years working in senior living, I had met countless family caregivers living similar lives. They quietly balanced careers, marriages, children, finances, and aging parents without expecting recognition. Most people never realized how much they carried because they became experts at making it look effortless.

She smiled.

"Thank you for listening," she said. "It really helped."

She stepped out of the car, adjusted her blazer, picked up her laptop bag, and walked confidently toward another busy workday. Watching her disappear into the crowd, I found myself wondering how many people I pass every day who are quietly living two lives. They arrive at work prepared for meetings while carrying concern for a parent. They answer emails while wondering if someone remembered to take their medication. They smile through presentations while quietly worrying about what awaits them when the workday ends.

That ride reminded me that caregiving often hides behind competence. Some of the strongest caregivers never appear overwhelmed because they have learned to carry their responsibilities with remarkable grace. Yet even the strongest people need places where they can set the weight down for a few moments.

Perhaps that is what these rides become. A quiet place between responsibilities. A space where someone can simply breathe. A few uninterrupted minutes where they do not have to perform, explain, or pretend everything is fine.

Sometimes that is enough.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another caregiver is simply a place to exhale before the second shift begins.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how many caregivers quietly balance careers with caring for someone they love. They often appear successful, organized, and dependable, yet beneath that confidence is a person carrying responsibilities that most people never see. Caregiving rarely replaces the rest of life. More often, it is added on top of everything else. Perhaps that is why moments of quiet matter so much. They remind caregivers that they do not have to carry every burden alone and that being heard can be just as meaningful as being helped.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who in your life may be quietly living a second shift that few people know about? If you are balancing work and caregiving, where do you find moments to breathe? What assumptions do you make when someone appears to have everything together? How can you become a safe place where another caregiver feels comfortable sharing what they are carrying? What small act of kindness could help lighten someone's invisible load today?

Some of the heaviest burdens are carried by people who never ask anyone to notice. Sometimes the greatest act of care is simply giving them a place to breathe before they begin their second shift.

# Chapter 16

## A Place to Breathe

Some people care for others with medicine. Some care through meals, conversations, or helping hands. Others care by creating a place where people can simply set down the weight they have been carrying for far too long. This ride reminded me that sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another person is a safe place to breathe.

One evening, I picked up a woman who was on her way to teach a yoga class across town. She climbed into the back seat carrying a rolled yoga mat under one arm and a well worn tote bag that held everything she needed for the evening. There was a calmness about her that was hard to describe. She did not seem hurried, even though she had somewhere to be. She carried herself with a quiet sense of peace that seemed to slow the pace of everything around her.

For the first few minutes, we rode in comfortable silence. She looked out the window as the city passed by, almost as though she was preparing herself for the people she would soon be welcoming into her class. Then she smiled and quietly said, "I love teaching this class. It's different from any class I've ever taught."

Naturally, I asked what made it different.

She explained that several years earlier she had begun offering yoga classes specifically for caregivers. She had noticed that many of the people attending her regular classes were carrying much more than physical tension. They were caring for aging parents, supporting spouses through illness, raising children with special needs, or working in healthcare. Their bodies carried exhaustion, but so did their hearts.

"They come in carrying so much," she said. "Grief. Guilt. Fatigue. Sometimes even resentment. Most of them have nowhere to set it down."

She described how every class begins the same way. There is no pressure to perform. There are no mirrors. There is no competition. Before anyone moves, they simply breathe. They spend a few quiet moments arriving exactly as they are. There are no expectations, no pretending, and no pressure to be strong.

"There isn't any performance in that room," she said. "For one hour, they don't have to take care of anyone else. They simply get to be themselves."

As she spoke, I realized she was describing something much deeper than yoga. She was describing refuge. She shared that she had watched caregivers quietly cry during class, not because something sad had happened that day, but because it was the first time in weeks, months,

or even years that they had finally felt safe enough to let go. She remembered one woman saying it was the only hour all week when she did not feel responsible for another person. Another told her she had forgotten what it felt like to simply notice her own breathing.

I found myself listening closely. She was not teaching people how to become more flexible. She was helping people become lighter.

Then she said something I will never forget.

"I'm not a therapist," she said. "I just hold space. Sometimes that's enough."

Those words stayed with me. I told her that after spending twenty five years working in healthcare, I understood exactly what she meant. I had watched stress settle into people's shoulders, their posture, and even the way they breathed. Caregiving has a way of living inside the body long after the work itself is finished. Sometimes healing begins long before circumstances change. Sometimes it begins the moment someone finally feels safe enough to stop carrying everything alone.

She nodded thoughtfully.

"I think that's what caregivers need most," she said. "A place where they can simply breathe."

As we arrived at the studio, she gathered her mat and stepped out of the car with the same quiet confidence she had carried when she climbed in. In just a few moments, she would welcome another room full of caregivers. She would not solve every problem they were facing. She would not erase their grief or remove their responsibilities. She would simply offer them a place to breathe.

As I drove away, I realized that was exactly what I hoped my Uber became from time to time. A place where people could catch their breath. A place where they did not have to pretend they were okay. A place where someone would simply listen. That ride reminded me that healing is not always found in advice, treatment, or perfectly chosen words. Sometimes healing begins in the quiet moments when another person creates enough safety for us to finally exhale.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how few places caregivers have where they can truly set down what they are carrying. Most spend their days solving problems, making decisions, and caring for everyone around them. Rarely does anyone ask what they need. Rarely are they given permission to simply stop. Perhaps that is why places of quiet restoration matter so much. Healing often begins when we realize we do not have to hold everything by ourselves.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where in your life do you feel safe enough to simply breathe? If you are a caregiver, when was the last time you allowed yourself to rest without feeling guilty? Who creates space where you can simply be yourself without needing to explain or perform? How can you become that kind of safe place for someone else this week? What would it look like to build small moments of restoration into your everyday life?

Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another person is not advice or answers. Sometimes it is simply creating a place where they can breathe again.

## **Chapter 17**

# **Behind Every Emergency**

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that every profession carries stories home at the end of the day. Some people carry briefcases. Others carry toolboxes or backpacks. Caregivers and first responders often carry something much heavier. They carry the people they met, the moments they witnessed, and the emotions they could not simply leave behind. This ride reminded me that behind almost every emergency is someone quietly trying to hold everything together.

I pulled up to a quiet residential street to pick up my next passenger. The neighborhood was peaceful, the kind of calm that settles in after a long day. A man stepped into the back seat wearing a navy blue EMT uniform with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder. He looked tired in a way that had little to do with physical exhaustion. His eyes reflected someone who had spent the day walking into other people's hardest moments. As we pulled away, I asked if he was heading home after work. He nodded and said, "Long shift. Lots of calls today."

I have learned not to rush conversations like this. People who spend their lives caring for others often need a little time before deciding how much they want to share. After a few quiet minutes, I asked, "Do you ever get used to it?" He looked out the window for several moments before answering. "No," he said. "You just learn how to carry it." That simple sentence stayed with me for the rest of the ride.

As we continued driving, he began sharing stories from his work. They were not the dramatic rescues people often imagine when they think about emergency medical services. Instead, they were stories about ordinary families living through extraordinary circumstances. He told me about an older man who had fallen and remained on the floor for hours before someone found him. He spoke about a woman living with dementia who called emergency services, not because she was injured, but because she was frightened and alone. He described arriving at homes where exhausted sons and daughters stood in the doorway, overwhelmed by responsibilities they had never expected to carry.

"I see caregivers in crisis every day," he said. "People want to do the right thing, but they're overwhelmed. They're afraid of making the wrong decision, and most of them don't know where

to turn." He explained that many of the calls they respond to are not really medical emergencies. "They're emotional emergencies," he said. "The moment you walk into the house, you can feel it. The exhaustion. The fear. The guilt. It's everywhere."

He told me about checking a patient's vital signs while standing beside a husband who quietly broke down in tears. He remembered adult children apologizing because they believed they had somehow failed their parents. Time after time, he found himself caring not only for the patient, but also for the caregiver standing beside them. "They're not just worried about the person they're caring for," he said. "They're worried they're not doing enough."

As he shared these stories, I simply listened. I realized he was not talking about emergencies. He was talking about people. He was honoring the quiet courage of family caregivers whose names would never appear in a newspaper or receive public recognition. Then he said something I will never forget. "They're heroes," he said quietly. "Nobody sees them because they don't wear uniforms. They just keep showing up every day."

When we arrived at his destination, he gathered his bag and smiled. "Thanks for the ride," he said. "It's nice talking with someone who understands." As I watched him walk toward his home, I thought about everything he would carry with him after that shift. The calls would end, but the stories would remain. I also thought about the caregivers he had met that day. Many of them would wake up the next morning and continue caring for someone they loved, carrying the same worries they had the day before.

That ride reminded me that first responders witness something most of us never see. They do not simply respond to medical emergencies. They walk into homes where love has become exhausting, where caregivers are trying their best, and where families are desperately hoping they are doing enough. Behind almost every emergency is a caregiver who has been carrying more than anyone realizes.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how closely caregiving and emergency response are connected. First responders often arrive at the moment when caregivers have reached the end of what they can carry alone. They witness fear, uncertainty, exhaustion, and love all in the same room, and then they carry those moments with them long after the ambulance leaves. Perhaps that is why compassion matters so much. Behind every emergency call is a family doing the best they can. Behind every caregiver is someone who needs reassurance as much as direction. Sometimes people do not need to hear that they should have done more. They need to hear that they are not alone and that asking for help is not a sign of failure.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who sees the burdens you are carrying? If you are a caregiver, when did you realize you could not do everything alone? What difficult experiences are you still carrying with you today? Where

do you find a safe place to set those burdens down? How can you encourage someone who may be quietly approaching their own breaking point before the next emergency arrives?

Behind every emergency is a story. More often than not, it is the story of someone who loved deeply, carried faithfully, and simply needed someone to remind them they did not have to carry it alone.

## Chapter 18

### Planning for Joy

One of the things caregiving has taught me is that many of life's most beautiful moments do not happen by accident. Behind moments that appear effortless are hours of planning, preparation, flexibility, and love. Caregivers often do an incredible amount of unseen work so the people they love can experience moments of joy that others might take for granted. This ride reminded me that sometimes love looks like careful preparation long before the moment ever arrives.

I pulled up to a resort near Walt Disney World, where families filled the sidewalks with strollers, backpacks, and the excitement that always surrounds a Disney vacation. My next passengers were a father and his young daughter. She stayed close beside him, holding tightly to a well loved plush toy while wearing noise canceling headphones that helped soften the sounds of the busy world around her. He carefully helped her into the back seat, made sure her seat belt was secure, and settled beside her. Every movement reflected patience and experience. Nothing was rushed. Everything communicated safety. We were headed to the Magic Kingdom.

For the first several minutes, the ride was quiet. His daughter looked out the window, softly humming as palm trees, buses, and Disney signs passed by. Her father remained attentive, calmly watching both the road ahead and his daughter beside him. There was a peaceful alertness about him that I recognized. It was the look of someone who was always paying attention and always thinking a few steps ahead. After a while, I asked, "Big day ahead?" He smiled and said, "We've been planning this for months."

That simple sentence opened the door to his story. He explained that his daughter was on the autism spectrum and that this vacation had been carefully designed long before they packed their suitcases. He had researched sensory friendly locations throughout the parks, identified quiet places where they could take breaks, studied ride wait times, watched videos together, and created visual schedules so she would know what to expect throughout each day. "It's not really a vacation," he said with a smile. "It's more like a mission."

He laughed softly before continuing. "She does best when she knows what's coming next. The more prepared she feels, the more she can enjoy herself." He described reading social stories together before the trip, practicing different situations at home, and carrying a laminated schedule everywhere they went. Every detail had been planned with one purpose in mind. He wanted his

daughter to feel safe enough to experience joy. "I want her to have fun," he said. "But I'm always watching. I'm always paying attention in case she starts feeling overwhelmed."

Then his voice became quieter. "Last night we watched the fireworks." He paused and smiled. "She smiled." For just a moment, neither of us said anything. "That smile made all the planning worth it," he said. I could hear the emotion in his voice. It was not simply about fireworks or Disney. It was about watching someone he loved experience a moment he had worked so hard to make possible.

He went on to explain that people often do not understand what goes into moments like that. They see a family enjoying the parks, but they do not see the preparation behind the experience. They do not see the hours of research, the backup plans, the emotional energy, or the constant awareness required throughout the day. "They only see the moment," he said. "They don't see everything it took to get there."

As we drove through Disney property, his daughter suddenly pointed toward Cinderella Castle rising in the distance. She whispered something only her father could hear. He leaned closer and smiled. "Yes," he said gently. "We're almost there."

When we arrived, I helped unload their bags. Before walking away, he looked at me and quietly said something that stayed with me long after the ride had ended. "She's my world. This trip is for her. But it's also for me. It reminds me that joy is still possible."

I watched the two of them walk toward the entrance together. One small hand held tightly to a favorite plush toy. The other rested securely in her father's hand. As I drove away, I thought about how many caregivers quietly spend their lives planning for someone else's happiness. Their work often goes unnoticed because when everything goes well, it simply looks effortless. Yet behind those moments are countless acts of love that no one else ever sees.

That ride reminded me that caregiving is not always about responding to a crisis. Sometimes it is about creating opportunities for joy. Sometimes it is about patiently building a path that allows someone else to experience wonder, confidence, and happiness. Sometimes love looks like planning for a smile that lasts only a few seconds. And sometimes, those few seconds make every bit of the preparation worthwhile.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I thought about how often caregivers do extraordinary work that no one ever notices. The most meaningful moments are frequently supported by hours of unseen preparation. Love often looks like planning ahead, remaining flexible, and creating environments where another person can flourish. Caregiving is not always about solving problems. Sometimes it is about making joy possible. The greatest acts of love are often invisible because they happen long before anyone sees the result.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where in your life are you quietly preparing the way for someone else to succeed? What unseen work do you do that few people recognize? When was the last time a small moment of joy reminded you why your efforts matter? How can you celebrate the preparation that goes into your caregiving instead of only focusing on the results? What opportunities can you intentionally create for someone you love to experience joy this week?

Some of the greatest acts of love are never noticed because they happen long before the beautiful moment arrives. Caregivers know that joy often begins with careful preparation.

## Chapter 19

### Learning to Breathe

One of the greatest challenges caregivers face is not learning how to care for others. It is remembering how to care for themselves. After carrying the emotional weight of other people's lives for so long, many caregivers forget what it feels like to simply pause. This ride reminded me that sometimes the bravest thing a caregiver can do is give themselves permission to breathe again.

My next passenger stepped out of the hotel lobby alone. She was dressed comfortably and carried a small backpack that looked more practical than anything meant for vacation. There was nothing hurried about her movements, yet her eyes reflected someone who had been carrying a great deal for a very long time. She smiled warmly as she climbed into the back seat, and after exchanging greetings, we began our drive toward Disney Springs.

For the first several minutes, the ride was quiet. She looked out the window as the morning sunlight reflected off the lakes and palm trees. Finally, she spoke. "This is my first vacation in years." There was something in the way she said those words that made me realize this trip meant much more than getting away. It felt like permission.

She shared that she had worked as a hospice nurse for the past eight years. Every day she walked alongside patients and families during life's final chapter. She held hands, eased pain, comforted grieving spouses and children, and witnessed moments that most people never experience. She had learned how to be calm when others were overwhelmed and how to bring peace into rooms filled with uncertainty. "It's sacred work," she said quietly. "But it's heavy."

She explained that every day brought another goodbye. She had learned to compartmentalize her emotions so she could finish one visit and continue caring for the next family. It became part of the job. She believed she was managing well until she realized the grief had quietly followed her home. "It catches up with you," she said. "You don't even realize how much you're carrying until you finally stop."

She described waking during the night thinking about patients who had died months earlier. She remembered conversations, final words, grateful smiles, and families whose faces she would never forget. "I don't think people realize how much grief caregivers absorb," she said. "We don't just witness it. We carry it."

I listened quietly as she spoke. She was not asking for advice. She was simply giving voice to something she had carried silently for years. Sometimes speaking the weight out loud is the first step toward putting it down.

Then she smiled. "This trip is a gift to myself," she said. "I needed to step away from work and remember what joy feels like." She laughed softly before adding, "I didn't come for the rides. I came to breathe."

She told me she planned to spend the day walking through Disney Springs, sitting beside the water, drinking coffee, listening to music, and allowing herself to slow down. She hoped to buy something small for herself, not because she needed it, but simply because it would bring her joy. "I want to feel light again," she said. "Even if it's only for today."

As we arrived at Disney Springs, families were beginning to fill the walkways. Music floated through the air, and the smell of fresh coffee drifted from nearby cafés. For a few precious hours, no one would be asking her to solve a problem or ease someone's pain. No one needed her strength. Before stepping out of the car, she smiled and said, "Thank you for the quiet. It's nice not having to be strong for someone else." I smiled back and told her it was my privilege.

As I watched her walk toward the waterfront, I realized she was not simply beginning a vacation. She was practicing something many caregivers struggle to do. She was allowing herself to rest without guilt. That ride reminded me that caregiving is not only about what we give. It is also about what we carry. Love, grief, compassion, and responsibility all leave their mark. If we never set those things down, eventually they become too heavy to carry. Sometimes healing does not begin with doing more. Sometimes it begins with learning to breathe again.

## **Reflection**

After she disappeared into the morning crowd, I thought about how many caregivers quietly carry grief that no one else can see. They continue showing up with compassion while their own hearts slowly grow heavier. Hospice caregivers witness loss every day, but every caregiver experiences moments that leave lasting impressions. Rest is not an escape from caring. It is what allows caregivers to continue caring without losing themselves in the process. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is give ourselves permission to stop carrying everything for a little while.

## **Questions to Sit With**

What emotional weight have you been carrying that no one else knows about? When was the last time you gave yourself permission to rest without feeling guilty? What helps you feel lighter

when life becomes emotionally heavy? Where do you go when you need to simply breathe? How might caring for yourself strengthen your ability to care for others?

Caregivers spend much of their lives helping others find peace. Sometimes the next step in their own journey is learning to receive that same gift for themselves.

## Chapter 20

### Growing Up Too Soon

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregiving does not wait until life feels convenient. It does not wait until someone finishes college, starts a career, or feels ready for the responsibility. Sometimes caregiving arrives unexpectedly and quietly changes the course of a person's life. This ride reminded me that some of the strongest caregivers are still discovering who they are while caring for someone they love.

Late one afternoon, I pulled up to a housing complex near Walt Disney World. The sun was beginning to settle lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the parking lot. A young man walked toward my car wearing a graphic tee shirt, comfortable sneakers, and a backpack slung casually over one shoulder. He climbed into the back seat with the relaxed energy of a college student enjoying a break from classes. We were headed to EPCOT.

As we pulled away, he told me he was meeting friends for an evening of food, music, and fireworks after finishing midterm exams. We talked about school, his major, and the relief that comes after completing a challenging week of tests. He laughed easily, and for a few minutes he sounded like every other college student looking forward to a night with friends. Then his voice became quieter.

"I almost didn't come," he said.

I glanced into the rearview mirror.

"I take care of my grandfather."

In that moment, the conversation changed.

He explained that after his grandfather suffered a stroke the previous year, he had moved into their home. The man who had once taught him how to ride a bicycle, attended his ball games, and fixed almost anything around the house now depended on him for meals, medications, and help moving safely from room to room.

"It's strange," he said. "I used to be the kid. Now I'm the one making sure he's okay."

He described the balancing act of college classes, part time work, and caregiving. Doctor appointments were scheduled around lectures. Homework often began only after his grandfather was comfortably settled for the evening. Time with friends required careful planning because someone always needed to be home.

"My friends don't really understand," he admitted. "They think I'm just busy. They don't realize there's a lot more going on."

There was no resentment in his voice. Only honesty.

He talked about watching someone he admired slowly lose independence. He described the strange mixture of gratitude and grief that accompanies caregiving. He felt honored to care for his grandfather, yet there were days when the responsibility felt overwhelming.

"I don't regret it," he said. "But some days I just want to be a college kid."

I let the silence settle for a few moments. He was not complaining. He was simply naming a reality that many young caregivers quietly live every day.

He explained that his aunt had come to stay with his grandfather for the weekend so he could spend time with friends.

"I almost stayed home anyway," he admitted. "That's become my first reaction."

Then he smiled.

"But I realized I needed this."

As we approached EPCOT, the entrance came into view. Music drifted through the air, families filled the walkways, and the excitement of the evening seemed to lift his spirits.

"I'm really glad I came," he said.

I smiled because I understood. After spending twenty five years working in senior living, I had met many young caregivers whose responsibilities arrived much earlier than expected. They often carried burdens their classmates never imagined. Their maturity was admired, but the sacrifices behind it were rarely seen.

As I watched him walk toward his friends, I found myself thinking about how many young people quietly carry responsibilities that no one around them recognizes. They attend classes, complete assignments, work part time jobs, and somehow make room for caregiving in between. They rarely ask for recognition. They simply do what needs to be done because someone they love depends on them.

That ride reminded me that caregiving does not belong to one generation. Love has no age requirement. Sometimes the people carrying the greatest responsibilities are still discovering who

they are. They are learning that caring for someone else does not mean giving up every part of themselves. Moments of joy still matter. Friendships still matter. Laughter still matters. Sometimes the strongest thing a caregiver can do is accept an invitation, spend a few hours with friends, and remember that caring for themselves is part of caring well for someone else.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about the young caregivers whose stories are rarely told. Many quietly balance school, work, friendships, and caregiving responsibilities that most of their peers never experience. They grow up faster than they expected, carrying burdens that shape their lives in profound ways. Yet they continue showing up with remarkable love and resilience. Caregiving does not erase youth. It simply asks young people to carry responsibilities many never anticipated. Moments of joy are not distractions from caregiving. They are often what make caregiving sustainable.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Have responsibilities ever entered your life sooner than you expected? Where are you balancing your own dreams with the needs of someone you love? When was the last time you allowed yourself to enjoy life without feeling guilty? Who in your life might be quietly carrying caregiving responsibilities that no one else recognizes? How can you encourage someone who is learning to balance both responsibility and joy?

Sometimes caregiving asks us to grow up sooner than we planned. Even then, it is important to remember that caring for others does not mean losing yourself. Sometimes the greatest act of strength is allowing yourself to keep growing while continuing to love well.

# **Chapter 21**

## **The Layers We Carry**

One of the things caregiving teaches us is that it rarely replaces the rest of our lives. Instead, it quietly becomes another layer. People continue going to work, raising families, attending conferences, meeting deadlines, and serving others while carrying the needs of someone they love. Most people never see those invisible layers. This ride reminded me that caregiving often becomes woven into every role we already have.

Late one afternoon, I pulled up to the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. The sun was beginning its slow descent, casting long shadows across the pavement as people streamed out of the building with conference bags slung over their shoulders and name badges still hanging around their necks. My next passenger was a woman in her early fifties carrying a canvas tote

filled with notebooks, handouts, and materials from the conference she had just attended. She climbed into the back seat with a warm but tired smile, the kind of smile that tells you someone is doing their best even when they are running low.

As we pulled away from the convention center, I asked how the conference had gone. She smiled softly and said, "It was good, but honestly, my mind was somewhere else most of the day." That simple answer opened the conversation.

She shared that she was a high school teacher who genuinely loved her students. She enjoyed finding creative ways to help them learn and believed every student deserved someone who believed in them. Teaching had always been her calling, but over the past several years another calling had quietly become part of her life. She had become the primary caregiver for both of her aging parents. Her father struggled with mobility, and her mother was beginning to show the early signs of dementia.

"I came here hoping to learn new things," she said, gently patting the conference bag on her lap. "But I realized what I really needed was a chance to breathe."

She described what most of her days looked like. Her mornings began by helping her parents get dressed, preparing breakfast, organizing medications, and making sure they were comfortable before leaving for school. She spent the day teaching teenagers, grading assignments, answering questions, encouraging students, and helping them prepare for their futures. When school ended, another shift began as she returned home to prepare dinner, coordinate doctor appointments, manage medications, and care for her parents throughout the evening before sitting down to grade papers late into the night.

"I feel like I'm always on," she said. "There really isn't an off switch."

She admitted that she almost skipped the conference because she felt guilty leaving home, even though her sister had volunteered to stay with their parents for the weekend.

"I kept checking my phone between sessions," she said. "Even while I was sitting in the presentations, I was wondering how things were going at home."

Then she shared something that deeply moved me.

"Caregiving has actually made me a better teacher."

She explained that she notices struggling students differently now. She recognizes the quiet exhaustion in teenagers who are helping care for younger siblings or grandparents. She sees students whose attention drifts because they are carrying responsibilities most adults never realize they have.

"I understand them in a different way now," she said. "Sometimes they're carrying more than anyone knows."

As she spoke, I could hear both the strength and the fatigue in her voice. She loved teaching. She loved her parents. She never complained about either role. She was simply honest about what it felt like to carry them both.

As we approached her hotel, she looked out the window and quietly said something that stayed with me.

"I wish caregivers had more places where we could just talk. We're everywhere, but we're so quiet about it."

I understood exactly what she meant.

After spending twenty five years working in healthcare and now driving thousands of Uber riders, I have learned that caregivers are everywhere. They sit in classrooms, offices, hospitals, restaurants, churches, airports, and conference halls. Most people never recognize them because caregiving is only one layer of who they are.

When we arrived at her hotel, she gathered her conference materials, thanked me for listening, and walked toward the entrance. As I drove away, I found myself thinking about how many people I pass every day who are carrying responsibilities no one else can see. That ride reminded me that caregiving does not usually become someone's entire identity. Instead, it quietly becomes part of every other identity they already have. It travels with them to work, to conferences, to family gatherings, and even on short rides across town. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer another person is simply creating enough space for them to say out loud, "This is a lot."

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how many caregivers quietly move through life carrying invisible responsibilities. They continue doing their jobs, supporting their families, and serving their communities while also caring for someone they love. Most people never see those extra layers because caregivers rarely talk about them. They simply keep showing up. Sometimes the greatest relief is not having someone solve the problem. Sometimes it is simply having someone recognize the weight they have been carrying all along.

## **Questions to Sit With**

What invisible responsibilities are you carrying right now? Where have you quietly added caregiving to an already full life? Who around you might be carrying more than you realize? When was the last time someone truly asked how you were doing and gave you space to answer honestly? How might you become a safe place where another caregiver can simply tell their story?

Caregiving rarely replaces the rest of life. More often, it becomes another layer woven quietly into everything we do. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer one another is simply recognizing those unseen layers and reminding each other that we do not have to carry them alone.

# Chapter 22

## I See You

One of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is helping them feel seen. Caregivers spend so much of their lives focusing on everyone else that they often become invisible themselves. They quietly show up day after day, carrying responsibilities that few people notice. This ride reminded me that sometimes the most healing words a caregiver can hear are simply, "I see you."

It was midmorning when I pulled up to the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando. The sidewalks were alive with movement as healthcare professionals, nonprofit leaders, family caregivers, and volunteers streamed out of the building. Name badges swayed as people walked, conversations filled the open air, and conference bags were packed with resources waiting to be shared. There was a unique energy in the crowd, a mixture of hope and heaviness that often surrounds people whose lives revolve around caring for others. My next passenger was a retired social worker in her late sixties. She walked with quiet confidence, the kind that comes from years of serving others with compassion and consistency. A volunteer badge rested against her shirt, and she carried a canvas tote filled with brochures, handwritten notes, and resource materials. She climbed into the back seat with a warm smile and said, "I forgot how exhausting these conferences can be."

As we pulled away, I asked how the conference had gone. She smiled and laughed softly. "It's beautiful chaos," she said. "So many people carrying so many stories." That simple observation opened the conversation. She told me she had spent more than thirty years working as a social worker with families facing some of life's hardest moments. She had walked alongside parents raising children with disabilities, spouses caring for loved ones with terminal illnesses, adult children navigating dementia, and neighbors who unexpectedly found themselves caring for someone they loved. She spoke about caregiving with deep respect. "Caregiving is love in motion," she said. "But it's also exhausting in ways people aren't prepared for."

She explained that over the years she noticed a pattern. Most caregivers came looking for resources, but underneath their questions was something much deeper. "They're really looking for permission," she said. "Permission to be tired. Permission to be frustrated. Permission to grieve before the loss has even happened." She paused for a moment before continuing. "They ask for help, but what they really need is someone to tell them they're not wrong for feeling what they're feeling."

Although she had retired from social work, she continued volunteering at caregiver conferences because she knew how much those conversations mattered. She handed out brochures and shared community resources, but she believed the most important part of her work happened after the papers were put away. "Sometimes," she said quietly, "I just look at someone and tell them, 'You're doing enough.'" She smiled gently before adding, "And they cry." She explained that it wasn't because she had solved their problems. It was because no one had said those words to them in a very long time.

Earlier that morning, a young woman caring for her father with ALS had stopped by her table. "She didn't really want another brochure," she said. "She wanted someone to look at her and say, 'I see you.'" As she shared that story, I thought about how often I had seen the very same thing during my years in senior living. Caregivers rarely expected someone else to fix everything. More often, they simply wanted someone to recognize the weight they had been carrying.

Then she shared something that made the conversation even more personal. After decades of helping caregivers, she eventually became one herself when her own mother was diagnosed with cancer. "That's when I realized something," she said quietly. "It's different when it's your own. All the training in the world can't prepare you for loving someone through that." Her words stayed with me. Professional experience had taught her many things, but caregiving had taught her something even deeper. Compassion grows differently when the person needing care is someone you love.

As we approached her hotel, she looked out the window and smiled. "I may be retired," she said, "but I'll never stop showing up for caregivers." I watched her gather her bag and walk toward the entrance, still carrying resources, still carrying compassion, and still making room for people who needed someone to believe in them. As I drove away, I realized that caregiving never really retires. For many people, it becomes part of who they are. They continue showing up, listening, encouraging, and reminding others they are not alone. Sometimes the greatest support does not come from someone who has every answer. Sometimes it comes from someone who has walked the same road and simply chooses to walk beside you.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how deeply caregivers long to be seen. Information is important, but validation often heals first. Caregivers need someone who will recognize their effort, acknowledge their exhaustion, and remind them they are not failing. They need someone willing to stand beside them without judgment or unrealistic expectations. Sometimes the most meaningful encouragement is simply hearing another person say, "I see what you're carrying, and you're doing better than you think."

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who has helped you feel truly seen during your caregiving journey? When was the last time someone reminded you that you were doing enough? What words do you most need to hear right now? How might your own caregiving experiences help someone else feel less alone? Who in your life could benefit from hearing the simple words, "I see you"?

Caregivers spend so much of their lives making sure others feel seen, safe, and valued. Sometimes the greatest act of kindness is returning that gift and reminding them that they matter too.

# Chapter 23

## Building a Path to Joy

One of the beautiful things about caregiving is that love often begins long before anyone else notices. Behind moments that appear effortless are hours of planning, adapting, and preparing. Caregivers quietly remove obstacles so someone they love can experience joy. This ride reminded me that some of the greatest expressions of love happen long before the smiles ever appear.

The morning air was filled with excitement as families gathered outside their resorts, coffee cups in hand, children already wearing Mickey ears, and parents balancing backpacks, strollers, and maps for the day ahead. There was an energy that only Disney mornings seem to create. My next passengers were a mother and her young son, who used a wheelchair. She guided him toward the car with calm confidence, every movement reflecting years of experience and unconditional love. I stepped out to help fold the wheelchair and carefully placed it in the trunk before they settled into the back seat. Her son quietly held a well loved Goofy plush close to his chest, while his mother thanked me with a warm but tired smile. We were headed to the Magic Kingdom.

For the first few minutes, the ride was peaceful. Her son softly hummed as he looked out the window, taking in everything around him. His mother rested her hand gently on his arm, a simple gesture filled with reassurance and love. After a few miles, she quietly said, "This trip took months to plan."

She explained that her son had cerebral palsy and that every vacation required careful preparation. Transportation had to be accessible. Hotel rooms had to meet his needs. They researched attractions, rest areas, meal options, and Disney's accessibility services. Every detail mattered because every detail helped create an experience where her son could simply enjoy being a child.

"It's not just about having fun," she said. "It's about making sure he feels included."

She talked honestly about the emotional side of caregiving. Crowds often noticed the wheelchair before they noticed her son. Curious stares had become something she expected, even though they still hurt.

"I'm not looking for sympathy," she said. "I just want him to experience the same magic every other child gets to experience."

She smiled as she told me about the notebook she carried everywhere.

"I have a binder in my backpack," she laughed. "It's color coded."

Inside were reservation confirmations, accessibility information, backup plans, schedules, emergency contacts, and everything she might need if the day did not unfold exactly as planned.

As she talked, I realized something many people never see. Visitors walking through the park would notice a happy family enjoying Disney together. They would never see the months of preparation that made those moments possible.

Then she told me about Goofy.

"He doesn't say very much," she explained. "But one day he saw Goofy on television, pointed at the screen, and smiled. That's when I knew we had to bring him here."

As we approached the entrance to the Magic Kingdom, her son suddenly pointed excitedly toward a sign with Goofy on it. His face lit up with pure joy. His mother looked at him, and tears quietly filled her eyes.

"This," she whispered, "is worth every bit of planning."

I helped unload the wheelchair, and she carefully settled her son into it before placing the Goofy plush back into his hands. Before leaving, she turned toward me and smiled.

"Thank you for listening," she said. "Most people don't ask."

I watched them head toward the entrance together. One hand gently guided the wheelchair while the other held onto hope that this day would become a memory they would both treasure forever.

As I drove away, I thought about how much unseen work caregivers do every day. Most people only witness the joyful moments. They rarely see the planning, the sacrifices, the constant problem solving, or the emotional energy required to make those moments possible.

That ride reminded me that caregiving is about much more than appointments, medications, or daily routines. Sometimes caregiving looks like building a path toward joy. It looks like removing obstacles, preparing for challenges, and making space for someone you love to experience wonder. Sometimes the greatest gift a caregiver gives is creating moments that allow another person to simply smile.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how often caregivers create beautiful experiences that others never fully appreciate. Behind every joyful moment are countless unseen decisions, careful preparations, and loving sacrifices. Caregivers rarely seek recognition for those efforts. They simply keep planning, adapting, and showing up because someone they love deserves every opportunity to experience joy. Sometimes the most extraordinary acts of love happen quietly, long before anyone notices.

## Questions to Sit With

What unseen work do you do to make life easier for someone you love? When have you invested time and energy so another person could experience joy? What moments remind you that your preparation is worthwhile? Who has quietly removed obstacles from your path so you could flourish? How can you recognize and celebrate the unseen work caregivers do every day?

Caregiving is not always about helping someone through difficult moments. Sometimes it is about building a path that leads to laughter, wonder, and joy. Those moments may last only a little while, but the love that created them lasts much longer.

## Chapter 24

### When the Shift Never Ends

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregiving rarely ends when the workday is over. For many caregivers, the shift simply changes locations. They leave one place where people depend on them only to arrive somewhere else where someone else is waiting. This ride reminded me that some of the most dedicated caregivers never really clock out. They simply keep loving the people who need them.

I pulled up to the side entrance of a hospital just as the sun was beginning to settle below the horizon. The building glowed in the soft light of early evening, the kind of light that marks the transition between one part of the day and the next. My next passenger stepped outside wearing wrinkled scrubs with her hair pulled back into a loose bun. Her shoulders sagged beneath a weight that had nothing to do with what she was carrying. She moved like someone who had already given everything she had and somehow kept finding more to give. She climbed into the back seat, closed the door, and released a long, slow breath. It was the kind of breath that escapes only when someone finally has permission to stop for a moment. I greeted her quietly and began the drive toward her apartment across town.

For the first several minutes, neither of us spoke. She watched the city pass by as daylight slowly faded into evening. The silence did not feel awkward. It felt necessary, as though the day itself had finally given her permission to rest. Eventually she spoke. "Twelve hours," she said quietly. "I don't even know how I'm still standing."

She worked as an oncology nurse. Her day had started before sunrise with patient rounds, medications, difficult conversations, and countless moments of offering comfort to people whose lives had changed forever. She talked about helping families make impossible decisions, sitting beside frightened patients, answering questions no one ever wants to ask, and becoming a steady presence in rooms filled with uncertainty. "You learn how to hold other people's grief," she said. "You just don't always know where to put your own."

Earlier that day she had sat beside a patient's wife as they made the decision to begin hospice care. She had held the hand of a young man preparing for his first chemotherapy treatment and reassured family members who were desperately searching for hope. "I don't cry at work," she admitted. "Sometimes I cry in the parking lot." Her words lingered in the quiet of the car.

Then she shared something that revealed an even deeper layer of her story. "My mom lives with me," she said. "She has dementia." When her hospital shift ended, another caregiving shift began. She went home to prepare dinner, organize medications, help her mother through the confusion that often came in the evening, and provide the same patience and reassurance she had been offering patients throughout the day. "I go from nurse to daughter to caregiver," she said. "There isn't really a break between them."

She smiled gently as she spoke about her mother. "I love her more than anything." Then she quietly added words many caregivers are afraid to say out loud. "But sometimes I just want to sit quietly and not have anyone need me for a little while." There was no resentment in her voice. There was only honesty.

I listened without interrupting. She was not asking for advice or searching for solutions. She simply needed a place where she could stop carrying everything by herself for a few minutes. As she spoke, I noticed her breathing slow and her shoulders begin to relax. Sometimes being heard is its own kind of healing.

When we reached her apartment, she gathered her bag and smiled. "Thank you," she said. "I needed that." As I watched her walk toward her front door, I realized she was not going home to rest. She was simply beginning another part of her day.

That ride stayed with me long after it ended. It reminded me that caregiving does not always end when a shift is over. It follows people home. It fills kitchens, living rooms, and quiet evenings. It becomes part of daily routines and nighttime prayers. Caregiving is not simply something people do. For many, it becomes part of who they are. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer a caregiver is not advice or another solution. Sometimes it is simply creating a quiet place where they can breathe, speak honestly, and set down the weight they have been carrying, even if only for a few minutes. Because when the shift never truly ends, even a few moments of peace can become a gift that helps someone keep going.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I thought about how many caregivers quietly move from one responsibility to the next without ever giving themselves permission to rest. Professional caregivers often return home only to continue caring for someone they love. The location changes, but the emotional investment remains the same. Caregiving is rarely divided into neat shifts. It becomes woven into everyday life. That is why moments of quiet, rest, and being heard are not luxuries. They are necessities that help caregivers continue showing up with compassion.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where does your caregiving day actually end? When was the last time you gave yourself permission to rest without feeling guilty? What emotions have you been carrying that need a safe place to be released? Who creates space for you when you are the one everyone depends on? What would it look like to allow yourself a few quiet moments simply to breathe?

Caregiving may never completely clock out, but neither should hope. Every caregiver deserves moments of rest, people who truly listen, and reminders that they do not have to carry every burden alone.

## Chapter 25

### The Healing Power of Staying

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregiving often changes us in ways we never expect. Sometimes it asks us to let go of the roles we have always known and embrace something entirely different. This ride reminded me that healing is not always about finding answers. Sometimes it is about choosing to stay beside someone you love.

It was a warm afternoon when I pulled up to the hospital's main entrance. Nurses wheeled patients outside for a few moments of fresh air, families gathered near benches with cups of coffee, and the steady rhythm of hospital life continued around us. Hospitals always seem to exist somewhere between hope and uncertainty. You can almost feel both at the same time.

My next passenger approached slowly. He was tall, silver haired, and neatly dressed in pressed khakis and a button down shirt. In one hand he carried a small tote bag. In the other was a simple bouquet of fresh flowers. Nothing about him felt hurried. Every step seemed thoughtful and intentional. He settled into the back seat, thanked me quietly, and we began the twenty minute drive to his home. For several minutes he simply watched the hospital disappear through the window. Finally, he broke the silence.

"I used to walk those halls every day," he said. "Now I sit beside her bed."

He explained that he was a retired physician. For decades the hospital had been his second home. He knew every hallway, every routine, and every challenge that came with caring for patients. He had guided families through frightening moments, delivered difficult news, and spent years helping people navigate illness with confidence and compassion. Throughout his career, he had been the person everyone turned to for answers.

Now he found himself in a very different role.

His wife had recently undergone surgery after years of living with a chronic illness. He had spent the afternoon beside her bed helping her eat, adjusting her pillows, and reading from her favorite book of poetry.

"She has always loved poetry," he said with a gentle smile. "Even now it still brings her peace."

He admitted that being on the other side of caregiving had changed him in ways he never expected. For the first time in his life, he understood what it felt like to wait instead of decide, to hope instead of diagnose, and to sit with uncertainty instead of trying to solve it.

"I have never felt this helpless," he said quietly. "Medicine teaches you how to fix things. It teaches you to act. But love teaches you how to stay."

His words settled gently into the quiet of the car.

He reflected on how caregiving had completely reshaped his understanding of healing. Throughout his career, he believed healing came through treatments, procedures, and carefully designed plans. Now he saw something different.

"I used to think healing was about knowing what to do," he said. "Now I think it is also about simply being there."

He spoke about his wife with deep gratitude. She had stood beside him through long nights during residency, difficult losses, and the emotional weight that came with caring for patients. When work became overwhelming, she had been the one who listened without judgment and reminded him who he was beyond the white coat.

"She carried me through so many years," he said softly. Looking down at the bouquet resting in his lap, he smiled and added, "Now it is my turn."

The rest of the ride unfolded naturally. Neither of us felt the need to fill every moment with conversation. His words were not filled with fear or despair. They reflected devotion. This was not a man focused on what he could no longer control. This was a husband choosing to remain faithfully beside the woman he loved.

When we arrived at his home, he gathered his belongings carefully and picked up the bouquet as though it were something precious.

"Thank you," he said before stepping out of the car. "Sometimes it helps just to think out loud."

I watched him walk toward his front door, flowers in hand, and sat there for a few extra moments after he disappeared inside.

That ride stayed with me.

It reminded me that caregiving reaches every profession and every season of life. Eventually, many of us discover that the knowledge and skills we once depended upon are no longer enough. What people need most is our presence. They need someone willing to sit beside them, hold their hand, and walk with them through uncertainty. Sometimes healing comes through medicine. Sometimes healing comes through simply staying.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how caregiving changes our understanding of what it means to help someone. We often believe healing is found in answers, solutions, and knowing exactly what to do. Yet some of the most meaningful moments happen when there are no answers left to give. They happen when someone chooses to remain present through uncertainty, heartache, and hope. Caregiving reminds us that our presence can become one of the greatest gifts we offer another person. Love is not always measured by what we can fix. More often, it is measured by our willingness to stay.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where in your life are you being invited to stay instead of trying to fix something? Who has remained beside you during life's hardest seasons? How has caregiving changed the way you understand love? What quiet act of presence could you offer someone this week? How might simply showing up become the greatest gift you give? When have you discovered that your presence mattered more than your words?

Sometimes the greatest healing is not found in having all the answers. Sometimes it begins with the simple decision to stay.

# **Chapter 26**

## **An Unwavering Presence**

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregivers come in many forms. Some wear scrubs. Some care for aging parents or spouses. Some are friends who quietly show up when they are needed most. And sometimes, caregiving comes on four legs with gentle eyes, a calm spirit, and an unwavering heart. This ride reminded me that the greatest caregivers are not always the ones who speak the most. Often, they are the ones who never leave our side.

I accepted an Uber Pet ride, something I had done many times before. Usually it meant someone traveling with a family pet, a dog excited for an outing, or a cat safely tucked inside a carrier. This ride felt different from the moment I arrived. Standing at the curb was a woman beside a beautiful golden retriever wearing a vest that read, "Service Animal. Do Not Pet." The dog sat

quietly at her side, alert but completely at peace. His attention never wandered. While people walked by and cars passed on the street, his eyes remained fixed on her. Before I even opened the door, I could tell this was much more than a pet. This was a trusted companion.

She smiled warmly as I greeted them. "This is Max," she said, gently resting her hand on his back. "He's my lifeline." She climbed into the back seat, and Max followed without hesitation, settling beside her and gently resting his head across her lap. As we pulled away, she did not begin with small talk or directions. Instead, she began sharing her story, almost as though she had been carrying it quietly for a long time and simply needed a safe place to set it down.

She told me she was a veteran living with post traumatic stress and mobility challenges. Every day presented obstacles that most people never noticed. Crowded places could quickly become overwhelming. Anxiety could appear without warning. Simple tasks that many of us take for granted often required careful planning and tremendous effort. Then she smiled and looked down at Max. "He knows before I do," she said softly.

She explained that Max sensed rising anxiety before it became a panic attack. He retrieved items whenever bending became difficult. He guided her through busy public places when the world became too loud and gently created space whenever crowds closed in around her. "He's more than a service dog," she said. "He's my peace." As I glanced into the rearview mirror, I noticed Max watching her with complete attention. His eyes rarely left her face. There was something beautiful about the trust between them. It was more than training. It was a relationship built through faithfulness, patience, and unconditional care.

As we continued driving, she shared story after story about the difference Max had made in her life. He gently woke her from nightmares by nudging her arm with his nose. He stood between her and strangers whenever he sensed she was becoming overwhelmed. After she fainted in her bathroom one day, Max refused to leave her side until help arrived. Every story pointed to the same truth. He was always there. His quiet presence gave her the courage to keep moving forward.

"I used to feel invisible," she admitted. "Like everyone else was moving through life while I was just trying to survive." She paused for a moment as her fingers gently brushed through Max's fur. "But when people see Max, they slow down. They ask questions. They make space for us. He helps me feel like I'm part of the world again."

As we drove beneath rows of oak trees, I found myself thinking about caregiving in a completely different way. We often imagine caregivers as people providing medical care, solving problems, or managing difficult situations. Max reminded me that caregiving is also about presence. It is about paying attention. It is about staying close enough that someone never has to face life alone.

When we arrived at a therapy center tucked behind a line of trees, she gathered her belongings before opening the door. "Thank you," she said with a warm smile. "Some drivers don't want to take service animals. But this ride matters. Every safe ride helps me keep moving forward." Max gave a gentle bark, almost as if he understood every word she had spoken. I watched them walk toward the building together, perfectly in step. They were not simply a woman and her service

dog. They were partners moving through life together with trust, courage, and unwavering devotion.

After they disappeared inside, I sat quietly for a few moments. That ride reminded me that caregiving comes in many forms. Sometimes it is expressed through comforting words. Sometimes it is shown through acts of service. Sometimes it quietly walks beside someone without asking for recognition or applause. Max never expected praise. He simply stayed. His faithful presence reminded me that healing often begins when we know we are not facing life alone. Whether that caregiver walks on two legs or four, the gift is the same. An unwavering presence has the power to change a life.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how powerful simple presence can be. Max was not trying to solve every problem or remove every obstacle from her life. He offered something equally valuable. He remained attentive, dependable, and faithful every single day. His quiet devotion reminded me that some of the greatest caregivers are those who simply refuse to leave our side. We all need people, and sometimes faithful companions, who help us feel safe enough to keep moving forward. Their presence reminds us that we are seen, valued, and never truly alone.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who provides an unwavering presence in your life? Who helps you feel grounded when life becomes overwhelming? How can you become a steady presence for someone who needs encouragement today? When has someone simply staying beside you made all the difference? What would change if we recognized that caregiving is often less about fixing problems and more about faithfully walking beside another person?

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another person is not having all the answers. Sometimes it is simply choosing to stay beside them, one step at a time.

## **Chapter 27**

### **Ministry Beyond the Pulpit**

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that ministry does not always happen inside the walls of a church. Sometimes it happens in hospitals. Sometimes it happens around kitchen tables. Sometimes it happens in nursing homes, classrooms, and neighborhoods. And sometimes, it happens in the back seat of a car. This ride reminded me that caregiving and ministry often share the same heart. Both are rooted in compassion, presence, and a willingness to walk beside someone else.

I accepted a ride request from the Orange County Convention Center during one of those weeks when Orlando feels especially alive. Hotel lobbies were filled with people wearing name badges and conference lanyards. Escalators buzzed with conversation as thousands of attendees moved from one session to another. It was obvious a large church conference was taking place, although I never learned which denomination was gathering. What I noticed first was not where these two men came from, but the joy they carried with them.

They climbed into the back seat dressed casually in comfortable clothes. One wore a ball cap, while the other carried a backpack filled with brochures and conference materials. Neither looked like the stereotypical image of a pastor, yet there was something unmistakably warm about them. Their kindness filled the car almost immediately. They greeted me with genuine smiles and talked excitedly about spending a few hours visiting the Orlando Premium Outlets before returning to the conference.

As we pulled away, one of them asked a question I hear often.

"So what do you do when you're not driving for Uber?"

I smiled.

"I spent about twenty five years working in senior living as a social worker and activity director. I've been a caregiver most of my life."

They nodded with immediate understanding.

Then I added, "And I'm also a preacher's kid."

Both pastors laughed.

"Well," one of them said with a grin, "that explains a lot."

The conversation flowed naturally after that. They shared stories about their churches, one serving in Georgia and the other in North Carolina. They described congregations that felt more like extended families than organizations. Places where people cared for one another long after Sunday worship ended.

"We preach on Sundays," one of them said, "but most of our ministry happens Monday through Saturday."

The other nodded.

"Just last month I helped a woman move out of an abusive home. The week before that I spent several hours sitting with a widow who simply needed someone to listen. Ministry isn't just about preaching. It's about showing up."

His words resonated deeply with me.

I shared how my years in senior living had taught me many of the same lessons. Caregiving is rarely about having all the answers. More often it is about listening without trying to fix someone, offering encouragement without rushing the conversation, and being willing to stay present when life becomes difficult. Whether someone is working in healthcare, serving in a church, or simply caring for a neighbor, the heart of the work remains the same.

One of the pastors smiled.

"It sounds like you're still in ministry," he said. "You just have a different pulpit."

Those words stayed with me.

As we continued toward the outlets, the conversation became lighter. They joked about finding gifts for their wives without spending too much money, compared notes about their favorite restaurants, and laughed together like lifelong friends enjoying a rare afternoon away from responsibility. It reminded me that caregivers and pastors also need moments of joy. They need opportunities to laugh, recharge, and simply enjoy each other's company.

When we arrived, one of the pastors paused before stepping out of the car.

"Thank you," he said warmly.

I knew he was thanking me for more than the ride.

After they disappeared into the crowd, I remained parked for another minute, reflecting on the conversation we had shared. That ride reminded me that ministry is not limited to sermons, sanctuaries, or Sunday mornings. It happens wherever people choose compassion over convenience, presence over performance, and love over recognition.

That afternoon, the back seat held two pastors and a preacher's kid. We came from different backgrounds and served in different ways, but we shared the same calling. Care for people. Listen well. Show up faithfully. Love others where they are.

I realized that day that ministry is not defined by a title. It is revealed by the way we care for people every day.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how often we separate ministry from ordinary life. We tend to picture ministry taking place in churches, while caregiving happens somewhere else. Yet both are expressions of the same calling. Both invite us to notice people who are hurting, offer compassion without judgment, and remind others they are not alone. Many caregivers never think of themselves as ministers, yet every act of kindness, every listening ear, and every quiet moment of presence becomes a sacred expression of love.

## Questions to Sit With

Where does your ministry take place each day? In what ordinary spaces are you quietly caring for others? Who has shown you compassion outside the walls of a church? How might your work, your relationships, or your daily routines become opportunities to serve someone else? What would change if you began to see your everyday acts of caregiving as part of a greater calling?

Sometimes ministry is preached from a pulpit. Sometimes it is lived out in hospital rooms, neighborhoods, and everyday conversations. And sometimes, it begins with a simple ride and two people willing to listen.

## Chapter 28

### The Gift of Laughter

One of the things I have learned while driving for Uber is that caregivers carry far more than most people ever see. They carry responsibility, grief, uncertainty, and emotional exhaustion. Yet every once in a while, I meet someone who reminds me that one of the greatest gifts we can offer another caregiver is permission to laugh. This ride reminded me that laughter is more than entertainment. Sometimes it is healing.

I pulled up to a medical office complex and watched as a woman slowly made her way toward my car. She moved with the kind of careful pace that suggested she was carrying far more than a purse or a work bag. Over the years, I have learned to recognize that posture. It is the posture of someone carrying invisible weight. When she climbed into the back seat, she released a long sigh. It was not dramatic or loud. It was simply honest. As we pulled away, I caught her eyes in the rearview mirror. They looked tired, but somewhere behind that exhaustion I could see someone searching for a little joy.

I asked where she worked, and she smiled wearily.

"I work with people living with dementia," she said. "I love my residents, but today has been one of those days."

She described wandering residents, moments of confusion, difficult conversations with families, and the emotional roller coaster that comes with caring for people whose memories are slowly disappearing. She spoke with deep affection for the people she served, but her voice carried the weight of someone who had been giving everything she had.

Then she smiled and said something that made me laugh.

"Honestly," she said, "today I just need a break and a good laugh."

I smiled back.

"Well," I said, "you climbed into the right car. I spent years working in senior living myself."

Her face immediately relaxed.

Without missing a beat, I asked, "Why did the chicken cross the playground?"

She looked puzzled.

"I don't know. Why?"

"To get to the other slide."

There was a brief moment of silence before she burst into laughter. Not the polite kind people sometimes offer to be courteous, but a genuine laugh that seemed to come from somewhere deep inside. She laughed until tears formed in her eyes.

"That is so terrible," she said between laughs. "But it is exactly what I needed."

For the rest of the ride, the laughter continued. We traded stories that only people who have worked in caregiving truly understand. She shared stories about residents whose unique personalities still brought smiles every day. I shared memories from my years in senior living, moments when humor had helped everyone make it through difficult days. We laughed about coffee being its own food group for caregivers, about break room conversations, and about the unexpected moments that somehow become the stories we remember years later.

What struck me most was how quickly the atmosphere changed. Nothing about her job had changed. The challenges waiting for her tomorrow were still there. But for a few miles, she was no longer carrying those burdens by herself. She was simply another caregiver laughing with someone who understood.

As we pulled into the parking lot of a local diner, she smiled in a way that was completely different from when she had entered the car. Her shoulders had relaxed. Her eyes sparkled with renewed energy.

"Thank you," she said. "I really needed that."

I watched her walk toward the restaurant and realized she looked lighter than when I had picked her up.

That ride stayed with me because it reminded me that laughter is not the opposite of compassion. It often grows alongside it. Caregivers spend so much time holding difficult emotions that they sometimes forget they are allowed to experience joy. Yet laughter has a remarkable way of helping us breathe again. It reminds us that even in the middle of hard days, hope is still alive.

Sometimes the greatest gift we can give another caregiver is not advice, solutions, or even words of encouragement.

Sometimes it is simply helping them laugh again.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I found myself thinking about how often laughter becomes a lifeline for caregivers. The work itself is serious, but that does not mean every moment has to be heavy. Humor creates space for tired hearts to rest, even if only for a few minutes. It helps release tension, strengthens relationships, and reminds caregivers that they are still human beneath all the responsibilities they carry. Choosing joy does not diminish the importance of caregiving. It gives caregivers the strength to continue showing up with compassion.

## **Questions to Sit With**

When was the last time you laughed without feeling guilty? What moments of humor have helped you through difficult seasons? Who in your life helps you smile when the weight feels especially heavy? How can you make room for more joy in your own caregiving journey? What small moment of laughter might become exactly the medicine someone around you needs today?

Caregiving is serious work, but that does not mean joy has to disappear. Sometimes healing begins with something as simple as sharing a laugh with someone who understands.

# **Chapter 29**

## **Walking with Dignity**

One of the things I have come to appreciate while driving for Uber is that some of the most meaningful moments happen quietly. They are found in the way someone offers an arm for support, folds a walker without being asked, or patiently describes the next step so another person can move forward with confidence. These moments rarely draw attention to themselves, yet they reveal the heart of caregiving. This ride reminded me that caring for someone is often less about accomplishing a task and more about protecting their dignity.

I accepted an Uber Health ride and pulled up to the side entrance of a local medical clinic. Waiting outside was a woman standing beside her assistant. She wore a light sweater despite the warm Florida morning, and a walker rested securely in front of her. Her posture was steady and confident, but I noticed that her eyes never searched for the car. They didn't need to. She was blind.

Her assistant gently guided her toward the vehicle, describing each step along the way. Together they folded the walker with practiced ease before helping her into the back seat. Once she was settled, she turned slightly toward the sound of my voice.

"Thank you for picking me up," she said. "I don't know how I'd get around sometimes without people willing to help."

Her voice was soft, but it carried remarkable strength. There was honesty in her words, but there was no self pity.

"I'm honored to be part of your day," I replied.

As we began driving, her assistant explained they were on the way to a follow up appointment after a recent medical procedure. During the ride, the woman shared that she had gradually lost her vision over several years. It hadn't happened overnight. Instead, it was like watching daylight slowly fade until the room eventually became dark.

"I used to drive everywhere," she said. "Running errands, visiting friends, going to appointments. Losing that independence was one of the hardest adjustments I've ever made."

She admitted that asking for help didn't come easily.

"I fought it for a long time," she said. "I thought accepting help meant I was giving up part of who I was. Eventually I realized something important. Accepting help doesn't mean I've lost my independence. It means I've learned how to adapt."

Her assistant smiled.

"She's one of the most independent people I know," they said. "She still insists on picking out her own clothes every morning, and if something gets moved in her kitchen, she'll tell you exactly where it belongs."

The woman laughed.

"I may not see it," she said, "but I know where everything is."

The conversation became lighter after that. She told me about listening to audiobooks with her morning coffee, enjoying old radio programs, and learning to experience the world through sounds, textures, and memory.

"I don't see the world the way I used to," she said, "but I still experience it every single day."

As we neared the medical center, she became quiet for a few moments before speaking again.

"You know," she said, "rides like this remind me that I'm not alone. They remind me there are still kind people in the world."

When we arrived, I stepped out to unfold her walker while her assistant carefully guided her toward the entrance, describing each step along the way. Before they entered the building, she turned toward my voice one last time.

"Thank you," she said. "You made today easier."

I watched as they slowly disappeared through the doors, moving forward one careful step at a time.

I sat in the parking lot for a few extra moments, reflecting on what I had just witnessed. That ride wasn't simply about transportation. It was about dignity. It reminded me that caregiving isn't measured only by the tasks we complete. It is measured by the respect we show, the patience we offer, and the way we help people continue living with confidence, even when life has changed dramatically.

That day I didn't simply drive someone to a medical appointment. I witnessed courage. I witnessed resilience. And I was reminded that some of the most beautiful expressions of caregiving happen quietly, one compassionate act at a time.

## **Reflection**

After that ride, I kept thinking about how easily we associate independence with doing everything by ourselves. The truth is that independence often changes throughout our lives. Sometimes it means accepting assistance while continuing to make our own choices and live with purpose. Caregiving is not about taking someone's independence away. At its best, it protects dignity while helping people continue living as fully as possible. Every person who offers a steady hand, a listening ear, or a safe ride becomes part of that journey. Those small moments may seem ordinary, but they can remind someone that they are valued, respected, and never walking alone.

## **Questions to Sit With**

When have you needed to accept help, and what did that experience teach you? How do you protect the dignity of those you care for each day? Who has quietly helped you continue moving forward during a difficult season? What simple act of kindness could remind someone today that they are seen, respected, and not alone? How might slowing down allow you to recognize the quiet acts of caregiving happening around you every day?

Sometimes the greatest gift we offer another person is not solving their challenges. Sometimes it is simply walking beside them with dignity, compassion, and grace.

# **Chapter 30**

## **When Kindness Becomes Culture**

One of the unexpected blessings of driving for Uber is that I get to witness acts of kindness in places most people would never think to look. Sometimes those moments happen in the back seat of my car. Other times they happen while I'm simply taking a break. This chapter isn't about caregiving in a hospital or a home. It's about what happens when compassion becomes part of a workplace culture, proving that caring for people can happen anywhere.

One afternoon, after several hours of driving, I pulled into a Publix grocery store to take a short break. It had been one of those long days when the miles begin to blur together and my body reminded me that it needed food, rest, and a few quiet moments before continuing. I wasn't in a hurry. I simply wanted to stretch my legs, grab a snack, and recharge before heading back onto the road. As I walked through the store, I noticed an older woman moving slowly through the aisles with the help of a walker. Beside her walked a Publix employee who stayed perfectly in step with her. She wasn't rushing ahead or trying to hurry the woman along. Instead, she patiently listened as the woman pointed to items on the shelves, read labels aloud when asked, carefully placed groceries into the cart, and waited while decisions were made. There was no frustration in her voice and no sign that she felt inconvenienced. There was only patience, kindness, and respect.

I found myself standing quietly a short distance away, simply watching. It was one of those moments that reminded me how beautiful ordinary compassion can be. After they finished shopping, I introduced myself to the employee and asked about what I had just witnessed. She smiled and explained that the woman came to the store every week. After noticing how difficult shopping had become for her, she offered to help. What surprised me even more was what happened next. Rather than seeing it as a distraction from her work, Publix management embraced the idea. They arranged for the woman to shop on the days this employee was working so she could consistently receive assistance. Kindness wasn't squeezed into the workday whenever someone happened to have a free minute. It became part of the schedule.

Then the employee shared something I have never forgotten. "Two things are happening here," she said. "She's getting help, and her cart is getting full. If she didn't have help, it wouldn't be." Her words stayed with me because they reached far beyond groceries. This wasn't simply about helping someone reach items on a shelf. It was about preserving dignity. It was about allowing someone to make their own choices instead of settling for only what they could reach. It was about making sure a customer continued to experience independence, even while needing assistance.

A few days later, I picked up another Publix employee during an Uber ride along International Drive. As we talked, I shared the story I had witnessed inside the store. She smiled immediately. "I'm not surprised," she said. "Publix really encourages us to help people." There was no scripted response or corporate slogan. What I heard was genuine pride. She believed in the culture she worked in because she experienced it every day.

As we continued talking, I found myself thinking about caregiving. So much of caregiving is made easier—or harder—by the environments we create. When organizations make room for compassion, caregivers are able to care more fully. When employees are trusted to slow down, notice people, and respond with empathy, everyone benefits. That experience reminded me that

compassion doesn't have to be separate from business. In fact, some of the healthiest workplaces understand that caring for people is good for everyone.

As I drove away that day, I realized I hadn't simply witnessed excellent customer service. I had witnessed a culture where kindness was expected. When kindness becomes part of a culture, dignity grows, relationships deepen, and ordinary moments become opportunities to remind someone they matter.

## **Reflection**

After those two experiences, I kept thinking about how organizations shape the way people care for one another. Individual acts of kindness are wonderful, but they become even more powerful when leaders encourage them instead of rushing past them. Caregiving is not limited to hospitals, churches, or homes. It can happen in grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and workplaces whenever people choose to value another person's dignity. Compassion is rarely found in policies alone. It grows when people are permitted to slow down, notice others, and respond with kindness. The strongest cultures are built not only on excellence, but on humanity.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Where have you witnessed kindness becoming part of a culture instead of just a single moment? How does it change your experience when someone helps you with dignity rather than rushing you along? If you lead others, how are you creating space for compassion in your workplace or community? What small change could make it easier for people around you to care well for one another? How might slowing down help you notice acts of kindness that often go unseen?

Sometimes, the greatest organizations are not remembered for what they sell. They are remembered for how they make people feel.

# **Chapter 31**

## **God's Answer Through a Friend**

Not every story about caregiving happens in the back seat of an Uber. Some happen in places where people gather to worship, encourage one another, and share life together. This story took place at Edge United Methodist Church in Groveland, Florida, during our Café service. It's an informal gathering where people sit around tables instead of pews, enjoy coffee together, and share conversations that often become just as meaningful as the sermon itself. It has become a place where people are welcomed just as they are, where relationships matter, and where God's presence is often experienced through the care people show one another.

That morning began like so many others. People greeted friends, poured cups of coffee, and settled into their seats. The room carried its familiar warmth as quiet conversations filled the

space. Then one woman began to share a story that immediately changed the atmosphere. She remained seated at her table as she spoke. She didn't stand in front of the room or seek attention. She simply shared honestly from where she was, and her words invited all of us to listen more closely.

She told us that she had struggled the night before because she didn't know how she was going to get to church. Transportation had become difficult, and asking for help was something she tried hard to avoid. Like so many people, she preferred to solve problems on her own. The thought of asking someone for a ride made her uncomfortable. She had considered calling an Uber, but what she longed for most wasn't simply transportation. She wanted reassurance that she belonged, that her presence mattered, and that she wasn't facing the challenge alone. So she did what many of us do when we reach the end of our own resources. She prayed. She asked God to make a way for her to be at church that morning—not just to provide a ride, but to remind her that she was loved, remembered, and part of a caring community.

Not long afterward, her phone rang. It was a friend from our Café service asking a simple question: "Do you need a ride to church?" As she shared the story, her voice caught with emotion. She paused for a moment before quietly saying, "I hadn't told anyone. I had only prayed." The room became still. It wasn't an uncomfortable silence. It was the kind of silence that comes when people recognize they are witnessing something sacred. We weren't simply hearing about transportation. We were watching what happens when God works through ordinary people who are willing to notice, reach out, and care.

That moment reminded me that caregiving often looks very ordinary. It may be a meal delivered to a neighbor, a phone call made at just the right time, a visit to someone who feels forgotten, or a ride to church. These simple acts rarely attract attention, yet they carry extraordinary meaning because they remind people they are not alone. I believe God often answers prayers this way. Not with dramatic miracles, but through compassionate people who listen to a quiet nudge and choose to act. A simple phone call became an answer to prayer because someone was willing to care.

As I listened that morning, I realized the ride itself wasn't the miracle. The miracle was that someone noticed. Someone called. Someone made room for another person to belong. That day, our church wasn't simply a place where people gathered to worship. It became a place where caregiving was lived. It reminded me that God's love is often experienced through the hands, voices, and hearts of ordinary people who quietly show up for one another.

## **Reflection**

What stayed with me wasn't simply that a prayer had been answered. It was how that prayer was answered. God chose to work through friendship, compassion, and community. The woman found the courage to admit her need, and another person responded without ever knowing they were becoming part of God's answer. Caregiving often works the same way. It isn't always dramatic or public. More often, it appears in small acts of kindness that preserve dignity, strengthen connection, and remind people they are never alone. Sometimes receiving care requires as much courage as offering it, and healthy communities create space for both.

## Questions to Sit With

Where have you struggled to ask for help, even when you needed it? When has someone else's kindness reminded you that you were not alone? Have you ever felt prompted to reach out to someone, and what happened when you did? What kind of community are you helping to create for the people around you? How might God be inviting you to become the answer to someone else's quiet prayer today?

Sometimes the holiest moments don't happen from a stage or behind a pulpit. Sometimes they happen around a table, through a simple prayer, and with a phone call that gently says, "You don't have to get there alone."

## Chapter 32

### Caregivers in Plain Sight

One of the greatest lessons I learned while driving for Uber is that caregiving isn't defined by a job title. It isn't limited to hospitals, nursing homes, or doctors' offices. Sometimes caregiving happens quietly, without recognition, in ordinary moments that most people never stop to notice.

Not every ride I gave was filled with meaningful conversations or emotional stories. Many passengers simply climbed into the back seat, confirmed their destination, and spent the ride checking emails, scrolling through social media, or preparing for the day ahead. Some were quiet. Some were distracted. Some barely spoke beyond saying "Good morning" or "Thank you" when the ride was over. And that was perfectly okay. Even on those ordinary rides, I came to realize that I was still caring for people. I wasn't administering medications or leading support groups. I wasn't solving problems or offering counseling. Instead, I was providing something just as important. I was offering a safe ride, a dependable presence, and a few moments of calm between one responsibility and the next. I adjusted the temperature when the day was hot, chose smoother routes when traffic became stressful, and made sure every passenger arrived safely. Most of them never noticed those small decisions. They simply experienced a ride that felt comfortable and uneventful. But I noticed. Over time, I realized that caregiving often looks exactly like that. It isn't always dramatic or emotional. Sometimes it simply means showing up consistently, paying attention, and making life a little easier for someone else.

Eventually life changed, and so did my work. Today I serve as an Activity Specialist in a residential mental health program. Every day I help people reconnect with themselves through

activities, movement, creativity, conversation, and community. It is deeply meaningful work, and it feels like coming home to a career that has always been about caring for people. Although I no longer drive Uber as often, I still enjoy getting behind the wheel from time to time. Driving remains part of my story because caregiving doesn't disappear when we change jobs. It simply finds new ways to express itself.

One of my favorite parts of my current job is the view from my office window. Throughout the day, I watch Uber drivers arrive with outpatient consumers who are coming for appointments. I see vehicles pull into the driveway. I watch drivers patiently step out, unfold walkers, open doors, offer steady arms, and wait until each person safely reaches the entrance. Every time I watch, I find myself smiling because those drivers may think they're simply completing another ride, but I see something more. I see caregivers. They may never call themselves that. They may not realize the role they are playing in someone's life. Yet they are helping people reach medical care, counseling appointments, recovery programs, and opportunities for healing. They are creating moments of dignity, safety, and connection for people who need them.

Having experienced both sides of that journey, I understand just how important those moments are. I've been the Uber driver helping someone arrive safely, and now I'm the person welcoming them when they get here. I've watched transportation become the bridge between isolation and hope. I've seen how one dependable ride can help someone take the next step toward healing. As I sit in my office watching those cars come and go, I feel something unexpected. I feel grateful. I feel proud. I feel reminded that caregiving is much bigger than any profession. It is a posture. It is a way of moving through the world with kindness, attentiveness, and compassion.

Whether I'm leading an activity group inside the building or watching an Uber driver patiently help someone through the front doors, I see the same thing. People caring for people. Sometimes they recognize it. Sometimes they don't. But I see it. Every time I do, I am reminded that kindness is all around us. It waits at the curb, rides in the driver's seat, walks through clinic doors, and quietly changes lives without asking for recognition.

## **Reflection**

This chapter reminded me that caregiving is often hidden in plain sight. Many people spend their days making life easier for others without ever thinking of themselves as caregivers. A safe ride. A patient conversation. A helping hand. A few extra moments of kindness. These ordinary acts become extraordinary when they help someone feel seen, valued, and respected. We don't have to work in healthcare to change someone's day. Sometimes we simply have to notice the person in front of us and choose to care.

## **Questions to Sit With**

Who are the caregivers in your everyday life that often go unnoticed? How do your ordinary routines become opportunities to care for someone else? When have you experienced kindness from someone who was simply doing their job? What small act of compassion could you offer

today without expecting recognition? How might your view of the world change if you began looking for caregivers in plain sight?

The world is filled with caregivers. Many of them don't even realize they are one. But every day, through simple acts of kindness, they help someone else keep moving forward.