

COMPASSION AND GRATITUDE

For many of us who were and who are still caregivers, know how difficult and frustrating it can be. We all have stories to tell and mine is about how I came to understand compassion and gratitude as a caregiver. I never really thought about compassion and gratitude until I started to care for my father-in-law otherwise known as “grandpa.”

When I think back, I was really grateful that he could walk, feed himself, go to the toilet and bathe himself. All I had to do was prepare his meals, take him to his doctor’s appointments, take him riding when I would go on my deliveries and made sure that he stayed in good health.

At one of his doctor’s appointment, his doctor asked me what I would do if and when grandpa could no longer take care of himself and had to be bedridden. I had not thought that far in advance. It didn’t take too long when I got tested.

Grandpa got pneumonia and landed in the hospital. After a couple of weeks, he was moved to long term care to get physical therapy so that he could get stronger and do things for himself and go home. When he came home from long term care my hands were really full. I had a crash course in home health care. Once in a great while he would have his “accidents” and thank goodness for Depends. One evening my son and husband said that if he got really bad, we should think about putting him in a care home. At that time I told them that I would think about it and make some inquiries.

The following day, at work, I started to tell my friend about what was said and that’s when it hit me. I started crying and crying and realized that I could not put him in a care home. He was Glenn’s father. So I made the decision to keep him at home – after all – for me “out of sight, out of mind.”

As the years went by, I could see him slowly going down- hill. It wasn't all honky-dory, I had to deal with his dementia/Alzheimer. Have you ever heard of the "full moon syndrome"? Just couple of days before the moon turns full his personality would change. And let me tell you that he was always right on time. This change in personality happened way before I realize it was happening. We would have a lot of problems with grandpa and never realized it until one day my son said it's because of the full moon. Sure enough at the next full moon he would start yelling anytime of the day or night, he would get violent or he would say "I'm going to work" (I guess he thought he was still in his 50s). One day he told me that he was going home so I asked him where was home. He couldn't really tell me but started to walking to the door. I more or less knew where he wanted to go so I told him to get into the car and I would take him there. In his mind his home was the old Puhī Campat KCC. At the old Puhī Camp I went to where his old house use to be and when I asked him to find where his house was what he said broke my heart. He said "I don't know" and as I looked into his face I saw confusion. In his mind he could see where his house was now there was only a taro patch.

Other times he would get abusive and try to hit me. Regardless of all these happenings I was still very grateful that he was living. There were times when I really flew off the handle and that's when I started thinking "this is not the father that I know and loved. It's not his fault that he doesn't know what he is doing." After that I learned to have compassion. Every morning when I went in his room to wake him up I would put on a happy face and say "Good morning, grandpa" and he always said "good morning" with a smile. I did that because I didn't know whether I would find him alive or dead.

On Father's Day he fell down. Although he didn't have any broken bones, we helped to his bed and he never got up again to walk. No matter how hard I tried coaxing him to stand and walk he never took the effort.

In September he finally went to rest. If I had to live those years all over again, would I change anything? My answer is "no", because he was my teacher who taught me to have compassion for everyone and to be grateful for this life that I am living.