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A Moment with Madelyn - Survival Tips for Caregivers

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Madelyn Kubin was a Kansas farm woman who overpowered her own failing health to care for her husband after he suffered a debilitating stroke. She chronicled her experience through writing letters to her daughter. The following caregiver survival tip is based on an excerpt from a letter in the book, *Letters from Madelyn, Chronicles of a Caregiver*.

Learn Something New

As a caregiver, you may be physically confined much of the time, but no one can put restrictions on where or how far your mind can go. Embrace the process of learning. Reading to expand your mind, developing a new skill, or even performing a routine task in a different way can be invigorating.

Madelyn wrote:

"I read that we have little root-like things called dendrites in our brain. The article stated that people can grow new dendrites to replace some that are lost from a stroke – or even old age. The secret is to develop some new habits. It seems that one good way is to exercise, develop a new hobby or to get very interested in something different – something a person enjoys. My flowers are my new hobby. This morning as I was struggling with the hose connectors and trying to get all the plants watered, I couldn't help but wonder if learning how to screw in hoses would help grow new dendrites!

Kidding aside, it's actually very exciting to realize that if a person has a good mind there is no age limit to continue learning and growing. The days aren't long enough for me to master all the things I'm interested in, and there are probably not enough years left to do everything I want to do."

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If there is something you've always wanted to know, or something you've always wanted to do, try visiting the resource desk at your local library. You will find how-to videos and educational materials on everything from gourmet cooking to belly dancing to fly-fishing and woodcarving. The Internet can also be a tremendous resource for information, education, entertainment, and social interaction.

Your brain will feel like it's had a vacation when you give it that little boost of energy and excitement that comes from learning something new.

Elaine K. Sanchez is a Caregiver Survivalist, author, and speaker whose passion is helping people get prepared to take over the care of family elders and cope with the emotional stress of caregiving. Visit her website at www.EKSanchez.com