

Role Reversal



Parenting Your Elderly Parent

by Bonnie Collins

The following testimony was shared by Bonnie Collins during a seminar at Calvary on May 20, 2001.

My parents have always been very independent and strong-willed, active and precious people. A year ago, my mom fell on ice and hurt her shoulder. I took her to the hospital where they told her she had a bruised shoulder. I noticed from that time on that she did not have the spunk that she normally had, but the doctor said everything was OK. So, in May of last year, she started having trouble with her back. We later learned that she had broken it in February, and it had healed incorrectly on its own, which was causing a lot of painful problems.

In May of 2000, we began a roller coaster year. My mom spent about 6 months in and out of the hospital in the area where she lived. The doctors could never diagnose what was wrong with her. Because she was in so much pain, she

decided she just wouldn't eat because it was so much trouble to prepare it and take care of herself. She began losing a lot of weight. She lost 50 pounds and went from a size 16 to a size 8. Because of difficulties like this and her back pain, my husband, Gary, and I moved everything to Forsyth Hospital, where she could receive better care.

In six months' time, everything reversed. Gary and I became responsible for my parents because I'm the only child living. We've had to make decisions, and I wasn't prepared because they were always so strong.

Once mom was released from the hospital, there was criteria for her to return to her own home. This was a major change in their lives. My dad asked me, 'Bonnie, what are you going to do with us?' I told him that our focus was to get mom stabilized before she was ready to go home. My dad did OK with this even though it was totally

different; my mom had always taken care of things. I had to deal with helping him know how to be helpful to her and for her to accept it because she is very independent.

When she finally came home, she was doing fairly well until she fell and broke her hip. So, it started all over again except it was much worse because she was still healing from her broken back. We rushed her back to Winston-Salem for emergency surgery. She had 9 weeks of recuperation, and in that period, my father lived with us, which was a great experience except that making so many big decisions became a burden for me. In fact, I became consumed with it. Gary said to me 'This is part of our life, but you cannot lose your identity and be consumed with this...Life has to go on.' So, I turned to the scriptures. You know, if you can't fix it, go to God.

During a quiet time one morning, the Lord took me

to a familiar scripture: 'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me but you must do it with all your heart' [Jeremiah 29:11-13]. Once the Lord gave me that scripture, I released my parents to the Father as I have done many times with my children. It was difficult for me because I'm a fixer. As mothers, we're automatically nurturers. I thought "here's this precious couple who love each other; they have sound minds, but their bodies don't work as quick as their minds." So, once I released them to the Father, He gave me a calmness and resources. He has also given my parents major protection because I cannot be there every moment.

One thing that helped me over this year is keeping a journal of my mom's

recovery. She had different emotions during this transition; it was overwhelming to her and the family. I journaled to help me with my hurt feelings and the things I was experiencing. Our family grew together through this journal. The therapy end of it came when at times I could read them some of my journal and scripture. The writing helped me with my stress, and it helped them to see what I was going through.

Throughout this time, I kept my family updated on what was happening with mom, and most importantly I kept my dad informed. He asked me a second time, 'Bonnie, what are you going to do with us?' I reassured him that I didn't want to put them into a nursing home but that I could not promise that this would never happen. 'But, I'll tell you, as long as you all can cope, we'll make adjustments for you to stay at home, but that will involve some changes.'

We have since hired a carekeeper, who helps with various house duties. She makes sure they get the correct medications and nutrition, which is important to us.

I am learning many things as my role as a daughter changes. We are in this together—my parents, me, my husband, our family, and most of all...my Heavenly Father."

© 2001 **Bonnie Collins** is long-time member of Calvary Baptist Church. She and her husband, Gary, have two adult children, Andy & David.