
Aging Flower: Giving Back to Those Who Raised Us

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Abstract

Drawing on my lived experiences with caregiving for my aging grandma, the following short story explores what day-to-day life looks and feels like for youth in caregiving roles. Evoking bitter-sweet emotions, my words familiarize readers with the reality many young caregivers face. Stereotypical ideologies regarding caregiving for elders primarily focus on the physical aspects of providing care, and while I engage these aspects, such as managing my grandma's medication, I also emphasize the emotional burden that both aging elders and young caregivers face, highlighting the importance of establishing a healthy routine in which both parties have their needs met. Further, I not only examine the hardships of being a young caregiver, but the positivity and joy I try to find from my responsibilities. I subtly bring attention to small details when describing the relationship between my grandmother and me. The simplicity and sweetness in our bond, fills my life with wholeness in a way that makes caregiving meaningful. Even though caregiving as a young adult brings with it many challenges, especially when managing the twists and turns of life, I have found there is always light within the darkness, beauty within the aging flower.

Keywords

intergenerational, family, resilience, caregiving, youth, aging

“What did I eat for dinner again?” Nanima asks for the second time. “You did not eat anything, remember? Your stomach was off”, I reply. Conversations like this echo through our house daily. I try my best to stay calm, but I feel guilty to admit that, sometimes, I get really frustrated having to repeat myself over and over again. I know it’s not my grandmother’s fault, it is her dementia that is slowly taking her away from me. I insist she eat something, it’s almost time to take her evening medication. After much convincing, she finally agrees. Mom goes to heat up some leftover lentil and rice soup for her, while I begin tracking down her weekly-filled medicine container. Nanima always hides her container, so the house doesn’t look ‘messy’. Although this may seem like a smart idea, every night I am on the hunt for it because she can never remember where she put it. After a good five minutes of searching, I finally find the container, but to my disbelief, it is almost empty. I then realize it is Monday, or as I call it, “Medicine Monday”. I give Nanima her meds and I log onto my laptop to update the medical chart that I have created for her. I have made one for my mother as well, so it is easier for me to keep track of their meds.

Later in the night, Nanima, and mom are on the couch, enjoying an episode of the Indian show “Kaun Banega Crorepati”, while I try to finish an assignment. Since I’m usually at school or work during the day, I like to spend time with them in the evenings. Even if we’re doing different things, it is nice to be in their company. I make some progress until Nanima asks, “What did I have for dinner?” This brings up a whole conversation about what she did throughout the day and what we are doing tomorrow. Upset that she can’t remember, Nanima begins to cry. I settle down beside her, laying my head on her lap until she’s ready to go upstairs and get ready for bed.

To be completely honest, it does get chaotic doing my homework while sitting with them. Not only does Nanima have dementia, but she is also experiencing a significant loss of hearing. So, she not only consistently forgets that I am doing homework, but when she talks to me, I have to speak in her ear or write down what I want to say. Adding on, due to my mother’s mild cerebral palsy, I constantly have to repeat myself as they both have memory difficulties.

After Nanima goes to sleep, I take another break from school to refill both her and mom’s weekly medication containers. Nanima has one for morning and night; and another for breakfast and dinner, while mom has one for morning and dinner. I fill the three containers for the week, double-checking to make sure everything is correct. My final task is to make note of the medication that needs to be refilled so I can order them in the morning.

The next morning, I have a 9:30am class and I plan to leave the house at 7:30am so I can reach the campus on time. I get ready, packing Nanima and mom’s empty medication bottles in my bag to remind myself to call the pharmacy in-between classes. I head downstairs, Mom is awake and making breakfast for herself and Nanima, who is still asleep. I am usually quite lazy in the mornings, so I do not really eat anything. I make my way to her room to let her know I’m heading out. I hate waking her up, but she gets upset if I don’t say goodbye before I leave. “Don’t forget to message me when you reach” she says. Nanima always wants me to inform her when I arrive on campus, as she constantly worries about me. I leave the house with very mixed feelings. I am happy I got to see Nanima this morning, but I fear the worst when the two of them are home alone. We’ve had some hospital scares, so I can’t help the anxiety that forms when I think about every possible thing that could go wrong. It’s hard to keep my

mind off of it, so whenever I can, I message, call, or Facetime Nanima. Even though she is not able to hear me when I call or Facetime, just knowing they are okay gives me peace of mind.

I arrive home around 5:30pm. Seeing Nanima and mom always makes my day, no matter how stressed out I am about school. I open my bag to see that I've completely forgotten to order their medications. I set an alarm to remind myself to order them tomorrow, as I will probably forget again. Nanima and mom get dinner ready while I try to catch up on some exam prep. We eat dinner together as usual and I give Nanima her meds. They were both home all day, so after dinner, I decide to take them on a walk so that they can get out of the house for a bit. Nanima's arthritis means she can't walk much or very far, so we decide to take a break, settling down on a table at the local school park.

The sun is strong outside. I fold my arms on the metal table, feeling the sun's warmth touch my skin. It is a quiet evening, with not many people out. I gaze around and spot a beautiful garden; it looks like it has been painted by an artist. Each plant is placed ever so nicely. I stand up and walk towards the tulips, attracted by the radiant colours, when I notice a patch of aging flowers, petals made dry by the sun's rays. I caress a petal only to feel a crisp surface. Turning slowly on my heel, I see Nanima and mom, still resting peacefully on the bench. Then I look back at the flower; it's beautiful. Things can get difficult while taking care of them, but when I look at them, all I can see is my wonderful childhood, the warmth of the sun on my face. They made me who I am, and I am lucky to have them in my life, and I see the beauty behind the aging flower.

Dedication

I dedicate this story to my grandmother, my Nanima. She changed my world in ways I can't describe and was a purely selfless gem. She raised me as a daughter from the day I was born, and was my second mother. I am so lucky I had her as my mom for the past twenty years. *May you rest in peace Nanima. Say hi to Nanaji for us.*

Acknowledgments

I want to first say, sharing a part of my story to the world has not been an easy decision and I am extremely grateful to all who have supported me through my journey. This story was inspired by conversations with my closest friends, as they have always encouraged me to tell my story. I also want to express my gratitude towards my entire family - my aunts and uncles have always encouraged me to be who I am and have celebrated all my achievements. Additionally, this piece would not have been possible without my TA, Jade Crimson Rose DA Costa, who gave me the opportunity to publish my story with *New Sociology* after I submitted it for a course assignment. I thank them for this and for the constant support they provided throughout our course, SOCI 3660. Lastly, I want to thank my grandmother and mother for making me who I am. You both are so special, and I am so grateful to have you in my life.

Author Biography

Muskaan Khurana (she/her) is an undergraduate student of Sociology and Concurrent Education at York University. She chose to write this piece because of her experiences with being a caregiver from a young age. After she lost her grandfather at the age of 16, she took on the responsibility of providing care to her grandmother and disabled mother. Her goal with this piece is to allow others to understand the different aspects that go into caring for elders. Society may understand the difficulties of caregiving in general, but they lack insight into how it really affects youth. Muskaan believes that there are many youths who face similar situation as her, and she wants to use this platform to bring light to their realities. Due to her passion for caregiving, after Muskaan finishes her teacher's degree, she aspires to get her Masters in Social Work and give back to society as much as possible. Muskaan's personal experiences allow her to see and engage the world in a unique way and it plays a big role in how she perceives society.