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FAMILIES

Cindy Zuilhof is a wife, daughter, mother, and a member of the Sandwich Generation - a growing group of people who are caring for their children along with their own aging parents





Carla Carrico works with residents at Cinco Ranch Alzheimer's Special Care Center

The Sandwich Generation

How Katy Families Care for Aging Parents and Growing Kids at the Same Time

Written by Stacy Giddings Photography by Suzanne Box



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Cindy Zuilhof is a wife, daughter, mother, and a member of the Sandwich Generation - a growing group of people who are caring for their children along with their own aging parents. As a result, many women in this group find themselves doing a juggling act in order to accommodate the needs of others. For Zuilhof, the act of juggling the needs of her three teenage daughters and her 82-year-old father with Alzheimer's disease comes naturally. "I was called to be a caregiver," states Zuilhof. "It comes easy and fills a need for me to care for others." Zuilhof also acknowledges that the role of caregiver isn't a natural fit on everyone.

The Juggling Act

According to Carla Carrico, Administrator at Cinco Ranch Alzheimer's Special Care Center, women in the Sandwich Generation have been doing a juggling act for so long that they may think they've got things under control. But balancing the needs of your children and aging parents is very challenging: when you give to one, you feel like you're neglecting the other.

Evolving Gender Roles

Carrico suggests that part of what causes women so much stress is that they're trying to fulfill the expectations of both past and present. Many women get a sense of what their role of wife and mother is from their own mother, but women's roles have evolved since then. "Women today cannot be the mother of the past and the mother of today. Gender roles have changed," states Carrico. To "have it all," women must make choices. There is no magic formula for success; rather, each individual must come up with a personal plan that works best for her life. "It takes sacrifice and prioritizing. There has to be a give and take. The order of your priorities must mesh with your life goals and value system," Carrico explains.

Zuilhof agrees. Although she states that family is her first priority, she admits that she can't be the sole caregiver to everyone. "While we were arranging for Dad to move into a new facility, he stayed in our home for a two-week period. It gave me the opportunity to see that I couldn't juggle it all. The reality is Dad's best served living in a facility near me that understands the disease and can give him around-the-clock care." Zuilhof advises, "The biggest thing that women can do to lighten their load is allow others to help."

Achieving Emotional Balance

Whether the caregiver acts alone or shares the responsibility with others, each person

Cindy has learned to lighten her load by allowing others to step in and help when needed



that cares for others must take some time for themselves. "The key to emotional balance is taking time for you," Carrico emphasizes. "Women need time to reflect and connect with their friends. It's important to have a release, an outlet that can be a stress reliever." Zuilhof achieves balance by doing just that. "I've learned to slow down and appreciate the simple things in life, like taking a warm bath. Taking a deep breath helps me relax." While Zuilhof can't go on vacations to far away places, she's learned to vacation in her own backyard by enjoying the sights and sounds of a nice day or enjoying a glass of wine with her husband on the patio. Zuilhof also says prayer helps her relax and gain balance.

Carrico warns that the consequences of not living a balanced life may include: depression, stress, not feeling well, loss of energy, resentment of the people you're doing things for, or feeling out of control. Carrico and her staff see people with these signs every day, and they try to help them work through their feelings of stress and guilt. "First we listen so we can understand what's happening in their lives, then we explain how we can help." Carrico shares testimonials that others can relate to and encourages family to attend the monthly support groups. "They need to know that others are going through the same thing and feeling the same emotions and that after asking for help, it does get better. After they relinquish control and accept help, they're grateful to us for lessening the load. That's the best part of my job, seeing how we've helped a family decrease their stress."

Don't Wait for a Crisis

Carrico strongly urges families not to wait until a crisis hits before asking for help with caring for elderly parents. "Families need to start planning long-term care in advance. Stress is going to be higher in a crisis mode and it affects the whole family. Stress can bring in family dynamics that cloud a good decision. And their loved one is better able to adapt to a new environment when a crisis is not present."

No matter where you place your aging parent, make sure that it's the right facility for your parent's needs. You know your parent best and knowing their long term wishes will help you make this decision. You want to make sure it is the right fit because you don't want to move them around a lot. Change can be very hard on the elderly, especially in someone with Alzheimer's disease or dementia. **KM**

STACY GIDDINGS enjoys living in Katy with her husband Aaron and dog J.D.

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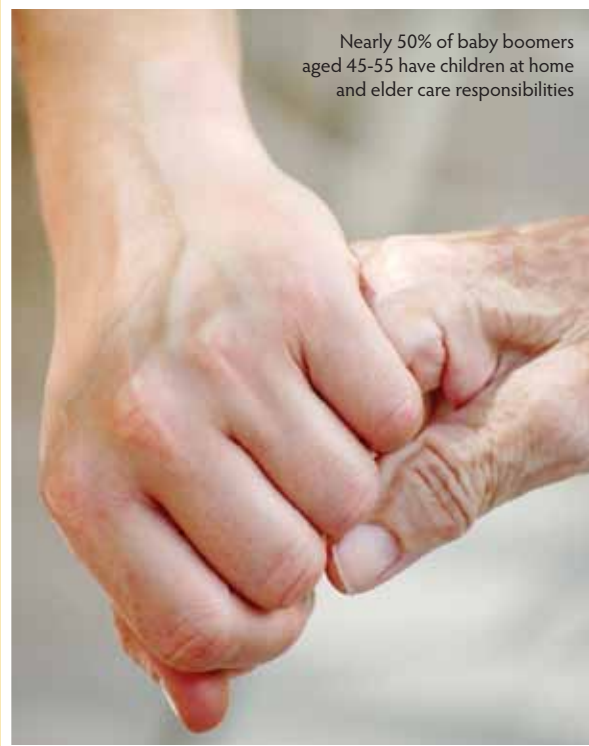
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Sandwich Generation Stats

- ✓ 44% of Americans between the ages of 45 and 55 have aging parents or in-laws as well as children under 21. This is known as the Sandwich Generation phenomenon.
- ✓ 59%-75% of family or informal caregivers are women.
- ✓ The average caregiver is age 46, female, married and working outside the home earning an annual income of \$35,000 per year.
- ✓ Nearly half of all baby boomers aged 45-55 have children still living at home and elder care responsibilities.
- ✓ 64% of caregivers are employed full-time or part-time.
- ✓ More than 14 million US workers care for aging family members. The fastest growing population group is older Americans.
- ✓ The most rapid population growth is among people 85+ with the majority being females.

From familycaregiversonline.com



Nearly 50% of baby boomers aged 45-55 have children at home and elder care responsibilities

Know Their Wishes

Carrico suggests that families begin talking with their aging parents now to ease the stress of care placement later.

Talk to your parents before illness hits about their financial situation. Ask about long-term care insurance.

Establish power of attorney, and ask if they have a living will.

Ask your parents how they feel about retirement communities and gather information so you have it when they are no longer able to care for their home.

Get information on assisted living communities. Tour these places with your parent and let them ask questions about different living options.

Tips when touring: look at the residents - do they look happy? Look at the food, the cleanliness of the facility, and make note of any unpleasant odors.