

Accepting Guilt-Free Meals

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“If you don’t know the name of the drain cleaner nor how much he drank, you’ll have to go home and get the bottle,” the Emergency Room nurse said.

I’d been cooking supper one evening in late 2008 when Murray flew out the kitchen door foaming at the mouth. He couldn’t say why, so I rushed to the bathroom to discover he’d taken a swig or two from the bottle of drain cleaner we’d brought home an hour earlier.

By then, his deepening dementia was compelling him to shred paper and flush bits and pieces down the toilet. He knew he wasn’t “supposed to,” so he’d switched to stuffing them down the bathroom basin, hence my need for drain cleaner.

Back in Emergency, I told the nurse it was a good thing she’d sent me home. In my haste to get him to the hospital, I’d left supper bubbling on the stove. By the time I returned, it was boiling away!

A week later, Murray’s case worker from the Veterans Independence Program telephoned to suggest maybe I was under stress and needed some help. The program’s goal is to support veterans at home, and she’d already approved modest allowances for house cleaning and lawn maintenance. Now she was suggesting ready-prepared meals.

For heaven’s sake, I thought, what kind of moron does she take me for? I know how to cook. Besides, what will people think if I accept meals?

If there’s one thing family care givers seem to share it’s this: We feel certain we are the only one who can care for our loved one. We can do it all by ourselves and we can do it all day, every day, and usually during the night as well. Generally, we don’t stop thinking this way until we collapse.

My most memorable breakdown was at Islands Savings when I began weeping and wailing in front of a roomful of customers because my debit card wasn’t working. A customer service rep ushered me into her office, offering tea, sympathy, and a chance to calm down. It turned out I was getting no joy at the cash machine because I was trying to use my on-line password number instead of my PIN.

That’s what stress can do for you!

Marg Monro, (537-5004), coordinator of the Caregivers Support Group at the Senior Services Society, encourages stressed caregivers to accept whatever help we're offered. Guilt and pride generally reside at the heart of our resistance.

Veteran's Affairs had been offering to pay for seven pre-frozen dinners per week. "We know you're under stress," Murray's caseworker had said. "We want to help you. Providing pre-cooked dinners is something we can do. Give Chef on the Run a call and we'll do the paperwork."

So I gave them a call and soon discovered that quality frozen meals were lightening my load more than I'd expected. Not only was I grateful, but I was overcoming my guilt about accepting assistance that I didn't realize I needed.

Maybe you could use some help too, but don't like to ask. Perhaps you're living alone and, after a lifetime of cooking for others, you're now making do with tea and toast. Maybe you're recovering from a broken bone and don't have the strength or the balance to stand at the stove. Maybe the smoke detector has awakened you from a nap. Uh Oh! You've burnt the bottom of yet another pan. Maybe this is happening with Mum or Dad. Don't just sit there. Get help!

Here are two options for well-balanced, care-free meals, both approved by DVA:

Chef on the Run (1-877-704-2433) is based in Sidney and delivers pre-frozen meals once per week. All you have to do is warm them up at mealtime. They offer a wide variety of entrees at \$8.50 each plus \$2.75 if you want dessert. Or you can order meat pies a la carte. Find their menus at chefontherun.net.

Meals on Wheels is coordinated by Catherine Bennett under the auspices of the Greenwoods Elder Care Society. It offers home cooked, hot meals prepared daily in the Greenwoods kitchen; volunteers deliver Monday through Friday between noon and 2 p.m. Arriving with a friendly smile, they also make sure you're still doing well at home. The meals are subsidized by Island Health, so they only cost \$6.25 plus \$1.50 for an optional dessert. The program offers hot meals to seniors in need of a daily or weekly meal, either short or long term. Contact Catherine at 250 537 5561 ext. 233 to discuss how Meal on Wheels can help you.

Sometimes we're too proud to accept help or we feel don't need it, but if we want to remain in our own homes, there's nothing like good nutrition to keep us strong and healthy.

