

## **"Women and Aging: Bearing the Burden of Long-Term Care"**

### **Joint Hearing of the Senate Special Committee on Aging and the Subcommittee on Aging Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions**

Opening Statement  
Senator Jean Carnahan  
February 6, 2002

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Missouri author Adele Starbird writes about a visit with her mother in a nursing home. The conversation went like this:

Mother says: "Well, things are going well for me ... I am on an entirely new track. I'm just trying to be pleasant all the time."

Adele: "Is it a great effort?"

Mother: "Did you ever try it?"

Adele: "No, I am going to wait until I'm your age before trying anything so drastic."

We both laughed and then she grew serious.

"It's the only thing that's left now that I can do for anybody.

"I can't read or write, but I can at least be pleasant and not add to the troubles of others.

"You know I think that every human being is already carrying about as much as he can bear, and I don't want to make it harder."

Adele concludes: Pleasant. She was more than pleasant - she was gallant.

I tell this story as a prelude, because today's hearing focuses on women as caregivers. But, you cannot truly understand what it means to be that caregiver unless you look at the whole picture. The whole picture includes a human being who is the recipient of that care.

Whether that person is your husband, mother, or father, chances are they do not want to be a burden. Chances are they do not want their kids caring for them when it should be the other way around.

The first stage in the caregiving process occurs when the aging family member moves from independence to dependence. For many seniors, this involves leaving their home of some 30, 40, or even 50 years. The decision is usually precipitated by an event that forces a change to occur. The reason could be declining health or finances, a fall or an accident, or the death of a spouse. While it may be clear to the family that their loved one can no longer live on their own, it is not always clear to the individual.

I speak about this from personal experience. After my mother passed away, it was clear to me that my father would be better off in my home. The problem was I lived in Missouri, and he lived in the Washington area all his life.

He was asthmatic and diabetic and subject to insulin reactions. He needed reliable care to make sure he ate properly and exercised regularly. Most of all, he needed the love and support of his family.

While I recognized that he should move in with me, this was not clear to him at all. In fact, it was a real test of my powers of persuasion. I gave him all the logical reasons why he should come home with me. Although he listened, he was not convinced.

Finally, in one final desperate appeal, I took his hand and said this to my father:

"Remember what you hear in church on Sunday morning? That sometimes you need to make a decision based on faith.

"This is one of those times. You need to believe that this is going to work."

There was a pause. He replied to me - "Where's my suitcase?"

I am happy to say that my father lived with me and my husband and our 4 children for the remaining 7 and 1/2 years of his life. I cherish the memory of those days. I would not trade them for anything.

Thank you.