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Finding Hope in Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Local caregiver credits the experience for a happier life at home

The *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* program is supported through a grant from the Area Agency on Aging. We appreciate this issue's contribution from guest writer **Kelli L. Davis**, Program Coordinator of Community Outreach for the Kettering Health Network's *Powerful Tools for Caregivers* workshops.

Martha admits she was struggling with the emotional and physical demands of caring for her husband Bill.* Both in their 80s, Martha and Bill still live in their Dayton-area home. To make that possible, Martha takes the role of caregiver for Bill, who suffers from memory and hearing loss, arthritis, and depression.

While she's passionate about taking care of her husband, Martha felt her extended family members didn't understand how hard it could be to care for Bill's needs and how taxing it could be on her.

"They really just can't know what it's like," Martha says. "I think people who don't see the day-in, day-out life of a caregiver have a hard time understanding how important it is for the caregiver to get away and even talk about the situation without having to hear suggestions and/or criticism. And talking about it is not 'complaining.' Perhaps it's a cry for help."

She struggled with emotions such as guilt for wanting help, though she didn't really know how to ask for it. Then Martha learned about ***Powerful Tools for Caregivers***, a free class offered through the Kettering Health Network. She completed the six-week class in the fall of 2017.

"I signed up to adjust my attitude and to get professional help as well as feedback from others in caregiving situations," she says.

Martha shares that the class and its reading material were great. "I learned I am not alone in my feelings," she says. "I was able to see how important it is not to try to change the other person. Changing my own attitude makes for a happier environment."

She says the most valuable thing she learned in the class is how critical it is for caregivers to get breaks so they can recharge. "Being a caregiver 24/7 drains your energy," she says.

Martha also learned to ask for help from family members, the importance of maintaining a sense of humor, and treasured her fellow caregivers' willingness to share. "I also enjoyed the laughter, support, and even applause when someone took a giant (or even small) step toward success," she says.

Through the experience, Martha has found connection with others and a greater connection with her own perspective. "I learned to appreciate others in caregiving situations. I also learned to be grateful."

Powerful Tools for Caregiving workshops are scheduled throughout the year at various locations. Call **1-800-888-8362** for additional information.

** The couple's names have been changed to protect their privacy.*