

A Final Message to Caregivers

A few years ago, my daughter and I had the tremendous experience of riding mules deep into the Grand Canyon from the North Rim. The mule team leader, easily seeing my inexperience, assigned me to a mule named Maude, a gentle creature who chose her own pace. She was particularly immune to prodding on the return, uphill trip, and I soon stopped caring that I was causing the last three mules to lag behind. But that's when I also learned she had been misnamed. To put this as delicately as possible, she ought to have been named Tooter. She was not in the least discreet – indeed, there were times when she sounded like a trumpet in a John Phillips Sousa marching band. The mule path was also shared by hikers, and she startled quite a few of the adults. Children found her hilarious, of course. (Frankly, so did I.) One hiker thought she might be pregnant. She was momentarily quiet as we passed, so I didn't enlighten him to the true cause of her distended belly. However, when we finally returned to the stables, she gave a whole new meaning to “running out of gas.”

The young woman on the mule behind mine showed infinite patience (but tended to keep her distance) at one point saying, “Whatever gets her up the hill.” The life of a caregiver is often stressful. Any caregiving book worth its salt will admonish caregivers to take good care of themselves: eat a balanced diet, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, surround yourself with cheerful friends and keep a positive attitude. But the reality is that sometimes caregiving is a steep journey with a heavy load. Sometimes the unhealthy comfort food or the foregone exercise class is what gets us up the day's hill. Remember Maude, set your own pace, and make no excuses.

Excerpted from *Activities of Daily Living - an ADL Guide for Alzheimer's Care*, by Kathy Laenhue.