

Dear Caregiver,  
When I ask why you do what you do,  
you tell me it was reading all fourteen Oz books  
to your mom during her last year of life that was the beginning  
of your soul's insistence  
on who you could be in this life.

You tell me about Ann, who lived with Alzheimer's.  
Her amazing spirit. The sunsets  
you watched together, and how she told you to  
do the things in life that you want to do *now*,  
"Do them now," she said, because "Time waits for no one."

You tell me about Phil. How his type 1 diabetes  
meant no birthday cake for at least 50 years.  
So you cut, measure, and weigh  
one piece of birthday cake to determine  
the exact number of carbs he can safely devour,  
and serve it to him.  
Then you tell me about his smile.

You tell me about your client living with dementia  
who was in WWII, and how  
in the middle of a PTSD moment,  
thought you were the enemy.  
How you redirected and redirected and  
redirected until he felt safe  
and home again.

Dear Caregiver,  
You are home for so many.

Diverting a person from scared to calm,  
walking a person from lost to found  
is a superpower.

Knowing when to say,  
"Let's play" or "Let's pray."  
is a superpower.

You don't wear a cape, but dear caregiver,  
you are a superhero.

There's no degree for what you do, and yet  
You have a masters in compassion.  
You have a masters in respect.  
You have a masters in patience.  
You have a masters in comfort.  
You have a masters in presence.  
You have a masters in dignity.  
You have a masters in laughter.  
You have a masters in love.

We belong to each other.  
What more important work is there?  
We of the aging body, the new diagnosis,  
the painful recovery, the fading memory.  
There is so much fear here.  
So many questions.  
When will we need help? How much help will we need?  
Who should we ask? How will it feel?  
Will they like us? Will they love us?

Dear Caregiver,  
Somehow, you find us.  
You enter our lives and become instant family.  
As beloved as a brother, sister, daughter, son.  
No matter how alone or broken we feel,  
you remind us we aren't.

*I didn't choose to be a professional caregiver.  
It chose me.*

*I didn't choose to be a professional caregiver.  
It chose me.*

Inspired, I sit quietly with the things  
that have chosen me, and there are three:  
my son, my parents, my poetry.  
Here's what I know:  
when life tells us which direction to go,  
and we go,  
love happens.  
Again and again and again.

Dear Caregiver,  
Because of you, love happens  
again and again and again.  
Everywhere you go, everyone you touch.  
Chosen. And loved.  
Again and again  
  
and again.

*written by cin salach and commissioned by LeadingAge  
in collaboration with Pam, Peer, Niki, Luis, Ahmed, and  
Denise, November 2023*