

## December 2nd Meeting

What a wonderful meeting. That's it in a nutshell, but of course I will tell you more. Twenty three of us met on this lovely December 2nd day, our last meeting of the year. Once again I said no party, we need time for us, and once again you did it your way. I suspect that Ann L was the ring leader who dragged Elaine, Carol, Ann G, Natti, and Lord knows who else into their scheme. They called members and everyone brought something, and they decorated and kept me completely in the dark again. And once again we had a meeting giving us time for us, in spite of my concerns.

There was all kinds of food and paper products and coffee and tea. We played our card game and gave away 12 prizes. There was a coffee, tea maker / two of my personal hand made crocheted items sets ( tissue and toilet paper cozy, and slipper socks ) 3 little friendship music box tree ornaments, and 6 little red cardinal bird lamp toppers. Paula B and Muriel were so funny - they each won the crocheted sets and both tried to put the tissue cozy on their heads, thinking they were hats. Many saw them as memories of when their mothers made things like that. Eleanor said that her family had a special liking for cardinals, and Ann L said her husband Freddie made bird houses. I felt that the right gifts went to the right people and felt good that my choices were appreciated. Everyone got a little holiday bear with a santa hat, so nobody went home empty handed. Thanks to Ann G we all got our new rosters and our new 2007 schedule.

For the first time in history, 3 people called and said they would attend today, and all 3 showed up. They are 3 woman who I felt an immediate connection to and I am so sure they will all three find kindred spirits among the group as well as receive information that I know will help them get through this nightmare.

Barbara called me months ago, she didn't know if her concerns for her mother were founded or if this was natural aging. I told her to find out, and I suggested either a geriatric or neurological work up. I told her how this could be something that can be treated or it could be dementia. What ever it is, she owes it to her mother and herself to get to the bottom of it. I told her she could call me for information or to talk, and if she needs us, she can join our group. She called back a second time, unhappy with the doctor she took her mother to. He did not meet with her ahead of time, instead seeing both women together and then asking her mother to wait while he talked in the other room with her daughter. Someone else talked to her mother as if she was a child and her mother picked up on that. It was clear to me that here was a daughter dedicated to her mother, and in need of information and guidance. I should have taken her in from the beginning, but better late than never. I stopped in mid conversation and just said, I want you to come to my group. I felt her relief pass right through me and felt ashamed for having prolonged her agony needlessly.

To show you what type of person she is, with all her own turmoil, she immediately asked if she could bring her friend who's mother has AD. She's a good person, well we all are, but it's nice to find those special caregivers who can empathize with others and reach out even though they are having problems. This makes her an excellent addition to our group. She is the type of person who will give as much as she gets. She is also driven and will take suggestions, rather than find excuses why things will fail - even before making the attempt. A number of people like Elaine and Ann G spoke highly of LIJ, but hearing about Dr. Mazurak in RVC caught her attention. She feels that he is local, and has been doing this for over 20 years. I also think that he seems more personal to her, than an entire program at LIJ. So, immediately she has options and places that others have used. She will mention The Merrick AD Support Group, and they will know that she is not alone, that she will report back. She may not get the best treatment, but she won't get the worst. On top of all that she has been visiting an animal shelter where a cat by the name of Raison resides. They share hugs and companionship, but her mother is highly allergic and she can't adopt Raison. She asked if anyone could benefit from a loving companion that would offer pet therapy to their loved one, to think about Raison. He comes highly recommended. I have two cats already, but if you are inclined - contact me and I will put you in touch with Barbara - who I must confess, I am very impressed with. She was genuinely happy with the little music box ornament she won today, that made me happy.

Barbara's friend is Paula F. Her mother Hazel, has dementia and lives in Queens with her father. She lives here but works there. She will learn things to pass on to her father. Carol has the same situation. Little by little she has fed her father information and he seems comforted by the fact that she either has the answers or can get them. Things are different when you are not the primary caregiver, you are not the one making the final decisions and that can be frustrating. Then again not being the primary caregiver can be a relief. Someone else is doing the brunt of the work, and you are plan B. I found Paula to be a little inhibited. If I came into our group, I too would lay back. I think Paula sees a large group of people and a clock ticking down the two hours. She isn't sure if there may be others in crisis, and she is leaving the floor open to those who need it. She is not under the gun and can probably learn more from feeling everyone out and just listening for a while. I did not have an introductory phone call with her. That is the time I learn who I am meeting and can plan a strategy to make them feel comfortable and start them in the right direction. In this case Paula had Barbara and that energy kept her in her comfort zone. I made it a point to talk with her, I needed the one on one time. I'm not sure if she takes her time to form relationships, or if she is a quiet private person, or both, but she is definitely a listener and a nodder. She wanted me to know that she appreciated being invited to come here with Barbara and that she was glad she came. Barbara said she wanted to tell me something and Paula said oh don't tell that story again - and of course I was not letting them go without telling me. It turns out these two women have been friends since they were co presidents of their Freshman class in college. I told them that not many people hold onto friendships for so long, but keeping each other close all this time has brought them to this moment in time. A time when both women are going through a tragic time in their lives, and they are doing it together. With that Paula reached out and shook my hand and said she had to leave, or she would cry. Wiping tears from her eyes, she bolted. I told her what I tell you - crying is good. Fighting it is bad. It's your release valve, use it.

Linda met Ann G at a soccer game, she was there with her 57 year old husband Patrick who has Dementia. Ann walked up to her and said, I have a woman for you to call. When I talked to Linda I immediately thought of Annette whose husband is the same age. She had asked me about being under 65 and not being able to get some help. Annette's husband Gene is covered under Cobra, and is going for Disability. Patrick would also be eligible for Medicaid. All of this can be expensive. I am giving you a list of Eldercare Lawyers that we have used, and a list of places that will help you get on Medicaid for free - if that is all you need. Ira Schneider - Merrick - 516-483-4112 Vincent Russo - Westbury - 516-683-1717 Lawrence Davidow - Melville - 631-420-4040 Maureen Ditata & Larry Berwitz - Garden City - 516-747-3200

Medicaid Help Will talk you through it and submit paperwork Free Assistance Applying for Medicaid

Nassau County Dept. For Senior Citizen Affairs - in Mineola 516-571-5814

Nassau - Suffolk Law Services - in Hempstead Free legal services to Seniors 516-292-8088

LI Center for Independent Living - in Levittown Dr. James Puchta 516-796-0135 & 516-796-0144

Lawyers - \$2,000 plus just for Medicaid

Linda was quiet, yet she had her paper and pen and took notes and asked the right questions. She is going to need help in the home and we gave her Elaine's company that connects you with people that will work directly for you, no middle man taking most of the money that they should get. Sylvia and Elaine are using this company now. Sylvia reminds us to make sure the aides are certified.

Happy Days Home Care referred by Elaine Maresca contact - Judy 1-917-501-8706 Live in aides for \$525 per week

I spoke to Annette after the group and told her to look out for Linda if she calls, she said of course. There is so

much she wants to say to her, so much to share. She also feels that it will help her to be able to talk about these things - other's can't imagine what life is like when you are half a widow. I think these women can help each other, like no one else can. Linda - call Annette and say hello, you won't be sorry.

Annette had a wonderful Thanksgiving with her daughter Joy by her side. The two had allowed their anger and frustration to over shadow their love for each other. Annette feels closer to her daughter now and I know Joy must feel the same. We are only human and we will say and do all sorts of things, being able to use that as an opportunity to talk and respect each other - is cleansing and healing. Joy reads these minutes of the meetings and prints them out for her mother. Bless her heart, she understood what I was saying and looked at what was happening with different eyes. My middle name is Joyce, my mother said she gave me that name because of the joy she felt when she first held me - I have met Annette's Joy and she is the Joy of her mother's life. I think she is terrific and has handled drastic changes in her family, with maturity beyond her years. She is Daddy's only little girl, she has watched him become a hermit and change from the strong father she adored. With all the coping she has had to endure, she has been there for her parents and has given them the much needed joy in their lives. Annette is also blessed with 2 great sons. Everyone is looking forward to spending the holidays together.

Catherine and her daughter Paula got the call to join the party. This is another mother daughter partnership that works to keep the entire family connected. Catherine has a temper, me too. She readily admits that she yells at her husband Al, we all do it. Fortunately many of our patients forget the incident quickly and unfortunately we do not. The family seems to be upset over the fact that Al is convinced that the husband of Catherine's other daughter - hit him. He has kept this up for months. Now, everyone knows that poor Al has dementia, that he is delusional, yet this accusation is something they can't let continue. There is the constant attempt to convince him that it just isn't true. His son in law did not hit him. Of course in Al's world he was there when he was hit, and you can not tell him differently. The daughter is hurt that her father would say this about her husband, and her husband is upset because of all the people in the family, why is he the one that Al hates and blames for hurting him. This family is in a round robin. Lots of suggestions were made. Everyone knows that this man did not hit Al, they have to reaffirm this truth over and over, and they must be very supportive to him and his wife - their feelings are hurt. They could also have the accused bring gifts each time he visits. Like Elaine said, he doesn't have to confront the accusation or apologize for something he didn't do, but in Al's mind it will be like a peace offering and he may decide to forgive this unforgivable attack. At least Al will think of him as submissive, and possibly not a threat to him. When problems like this arise, it is a matter of trying something and hoping for the best, and if it doesn't work, try something else. At the very least be the bigger person and let it go. Nobody is physically getting hurt - mentally Al is the weaker link here, to push would be taking the part of the bully who can easily beat the other kids in the playground. One ray of hope is that many problems are just phases. Granted the phases can last way too long, but eventually the patient will go to a different stage, which will unfortunately bring with it a whole bunch of other probably more difficult behavior problems. It's hard to believe that having your mother call you every name in the book, isn't the worst thing ever, but one day that person may not be able to recognize you or care that you exist or ever talk to you again.

Our other mother daughter team is Mary and her daughter Pat. Although Mary is quiet in group, I can see her as a dominate member of the household. She also has a delicious sense of humor, she always has a come back. Over the years she has become weary and lost much of her fight. I think Pat sees this and more than anything she is pained by her mother's struggle. She has become like a pit bull protecting her parents. Her life is over shadowed by the mission to make things right for them. Her father is in rehab and she has stuck to her guns and over ruled her mother's desires to have Tom home again. Mary will bow to her daughter. Pat is the drive, the doer, the spokesperson. She does so with much thought and research. She makes the hard choices, and in doing so she has taken the responsibility of being a daughter to another level. If only I had a daughter like her, we should all be so lucky. In reality I have one son and he would and has dropped everything for me. I feel safe and secure in his love. For being so good, I am glad Pat won a prize today.

Jean has always been the silent but sweet member of the group. Listening and understanding what other

members are experiencing. But, lately she has become more vocal, she is witnessing a frightening decline in her husband Arthur. She has seen first hand the difference adult daycare can make. It gives our patients a purpose, often they feel like they did when they went to work. They get stimulation which keeps their mind working. They get attention by those who know how to behave with our patients. Best of all they are safe while we are given needed time to ourselves. Arthur had been asked to leave 2 programs he was in. Why - he was falling asleep and not able to participate. So, let him sleep and let Jean relax. They just don't understand their function. Arthur was without a program for a few months and he declined, having no ambition or desire to do anything. She had a terrible fright when he fell out of bed and she couldn't help him. She had to call the police, they came and were kind and helped them. I thought it was so sad that Jean felt that now her husband has lost confidence in her ability to protect him and care for him. She is his everything, he hasn't lost confidence in her, his depression is his lack of confidence in himself. He is feeling more and more helpless. Jean now has him in Broadlawn, but a trip to their doctor confirmed the decline and she now feels she needs help in the home. She has names and numbers and she will make things happen. Today I saw a different Jean. She found herself sitting right in the middle of our 3 new woman and that effected her. She whispered things to them and took on the role of welcoming committee. So much so that meeting so many people at once, makes it difficult to remember names, yet Barbara remembered Jean and not just Jean, but Jean Foley. We have certain members of the group that will step up to the plate and respond to what is being discussed. They are good at it and have the right information and if we had the time, I wish everyone had that quality. My number one speaker upper is Elaine and she has helped everyone who has passed through those doors. But, there are others that have to be called upon, and that only allows them to talk about themselves, which many times hasn't changed since the time before. Those are the ones that I wonder what they could have added to other discussions. What words of wisdom we have missed. Jean rose to the occasion today. She made a difference, she touched the lives of strangers. I know she really enjoyed the whole experience, even though things aren't good at home, she was still able to beam from ear to ear, and I felt so good for her.

Judy was my adult education computer teacher, when I learned her mother Francis had AD I told her to come to my group. She hesitated for a minute, but I'm persistent. She will speak up, and when she does it is usually cautionary. She wants to be sure we are prepared and watchful and don't needlessly get into trouble. Today she emphasize the importance of having a relationship with our patients doctor, of being the eyes and ears for our patient, and keeping the lines of communication open so that our patients get the care they need. Her mother is in a nursing home and in the later stages. Judy and other family members rotate their visits, for Mom and to let the facility know that people care about this woman and they are watching. This has been going on for a long time and this long good bye with her mother is breaking her heart. Francis doesn't deserve this end to her life. She has little dignity. Yet Judy sits with her and talks with her and hopes that she is a comfort to her mother. I know she is. The last time she visited her mother, she was crying. How sad and painful that was. All Judy can hope for is that next time Mom will be tranquil or maybe have a little smile for her daughter. Everyone reading this knows exactly what Judy is feeling.

Eleanor's mother Anne does not particularly like her daughter. She does not like her aides. She curses at them and chases them around the house, terrorizing them and prompting a call to Eleanor. While Judy can only guess what her mother would say if she could, Eleanor hears it first hand how she is not the daughter Anne hoped for. She provides food and clothing and shelter and medication and all that Anne could need, and it's still not good enough. So, this has become a thankless job. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you. With all this, I looked at Eleanor today and saw a new and improved version. A few months ago when she first joined us she dragged herself in, she was pale and haggard. She was at the end of her rope. Today she told me that this is the best thing that has happened to her all year long. She feels like she is not alone, that others are going through the same thing. That alone is a comfort. She doesn't have the weirdest home in the world, and we won't fall over when she talks about it. Feeling better, she is now motivated to look into Assisted Living. The burden is too much and her mother is not happy or stimulated. She visited a home and saw a women in her mother's stage. She walked up to Eleanor and a rep from the home and asked if she could go downstairs. This is a secure floor. The woman told her she could in a little while, with that another staff member came over and took the woman's arm. She told her they had to have lunch now and then listed other things they had to do. Listening to the agenda and

enjoying the attention, the resident followed happy to go along with the program. Eleanor feels that she can try that at home, but she especially liked the way the place handled the situation. She readily admitted that she will probably spend more time with her mother in the facility, but she feels it will be less stressful. She is doing the right thing, physically visiting places, connecting with the staff, and knowing that she isn't giving her mother away - she is allowing others to help make her mother safer and comfortable.

Ann G has such a good attitude. She plays into her father Victor's reality. She quickly encourages him to do things, without asking, and having him protest. She has both her parents living with her. She looks after her grown children - she is a new Grandma. So is Judy. Judy has a grandson and Ann has a granddaughter - we are already trying to hook them up. So much of Ann's life is taking care of others, and not just family members - she approached Linda at that soccer game. She works and is our printer. I think this is what keeps her sane. There is too much on her plate to dwell on one thing and she is too committed to give up and walk away. She is always smiling and gleefully giving feedback. The whole package is perfect.

Natti is our resident finagler. You are having a problem with your patient, you want them to do something or not do something - she will tell you what to say and do. Her husband Jim worked for NASA. I think he really was a rocket scientist. His mother had AD and when he got it, he told his wife and his doctors what was wrong with him. Natti used to always bring him to group and he would tell us about his mother and his plight. One time someone talked about their patient having nightmares. Jim said I can tell you what that is - FEAR. In the beginning before we know anything, they do and it scares the hell out of them. That feeling stays with them a long time. Try to remember that when you feel abused or angry. We don't know the half of what it is like to lose your mind, your identity. Natti also has been at this a long time and she is feeling the weariness of her existence. Jim is her whole life. Her children are grown. She deals with her husband with all the love she has for him. She will do anything to make him calm. If she can't get him to dress, she will become lovey dovey and tell him how handsome he is in this shirt. Works every time. She is a loyal relentless wife.

Sylvia brings her husband Ben to group. They are inseparable. She just went through her third bout with breast cancer. She put Ben in Asst. Living. He became combative without her and she was lost without him. The day after she came home, her daughter reunited them with a live in. So far they have gone through many aides, none have worked so far. But, our Sylvia is not a quitter. She will find a live in - but she will not accept just anyone. She had one that just watched as she did all the work. Another that didn't bathe once in the week she was there. You just have to understand that many things take time, others happen on the first try. But, if you don't move forward you will remain at this very spot. All of this has caused Sylvia to be a little feisty and may I say feisty is a good thing. We all prayed for her when she was in the hospital and we continue to include her in our prayers. All of the cancer was removed. She is taking a new medication now and we hope she will be fine for years and years. Looking at her today she doesn't look like she has gone through this medical crisis. God bless her.

Muriel is our little cupie doll. She is the kind of sweet senior that boy scouts fight over who will escort her across the street. When you see her and listen to her, you are hooked. I am one of those under her spell. Her husband Al is incontinent, which in itself is awful, but he suffered with diarrhea for months and Muriel was beside herself. Can you imagine having to clean that up especially since it will effect more than the diaper area. Finally she found a doctor who tried a drug given to people coming off substance abuse. One of the side effects was stopping diarrhea and it worked. He has been fine for 8 whole days and Muriel is so happy. Al has to have lab work to check for side effects like liver damage, but for now everything is fine. She was like a walking encyclopedia telling us all about the drug. She also went to the city with Al and her son, to try out for a drug testing program. They will get back to her. If they are accepted into the program they will get free transportation and medication and consultations and social workers for both of them. As Muriel said - you have to try things. She is such an inspiration.

Like Ann found Linda, Muriel found Lee. They met in a parking lot in the rain, and for the last two meetings they have been sitting next to each other in group. Lee has been taking care of her husband Harry. Like Ann G's

father and Annette's husband and others, Harry will sleep till 1 pm. She is not able to give him his medication because he won't eat or drink in bed. Lee dismissed all suggestions saying she has tried them or they will not work. Ann gets her father up by being forceful and quick. She takes his hand and says come with me. She doesn't listen to protests, she continues to pull back the covers and slide his feet out. Once in a sitting position she gets him up and out. Sometimes we have to decide to become the boss. This is one of them. Taking medication and eating 3 meals at reasonable intervals is essential. Lee if you are afraid that Harry will get violent, don't pay attention to the rest of this. But, if he just gets mad, let him. We have all put up with our kids temper tantrums. I want you to try this - take the covers off the bed, and hold Harry's hand. Tell him repeatedly to come with you. If he gets agitated, walk away and leave him without his covers. A few minutes later go back in and take his hand and tell him to go with you, slide his feet to the floor. If it doesn't work repeat until he is up and ready to prepare for breakfast and medications. It may take a while. It may not even work the first time. But, you have to be persistent. Eventually he will see that you will not quit and he will not win. Make a big deal out of his cooperation and make the table fancy in celebration. If you don't win this battle, what will you do about the situation. I hope you will really make an effort and succeed. Lee's son David feels she needs more. He is in a support group and encouraged her to come to this group. Since she is not computer literate, he receives and prints out these e mails. She is having trouble finding someone to watch Harry, so David arrived this morning and stayed with his father so his mother could be with us. He gave her the minutes of last meeting, and said he will not read it because he respects her privacy. I told him to read them so that he and his mother could be on the same page. I would like to see him read them one day, and I know Lee would like that also. He is a Godsend to her and as she says - he is gold. I agree.

Martha's husband Larry has dementia. She has been practicing the art of going along with what ever his reality tells him. Who ever he thinks she is today - she goes along with it. It keeps him calm and happy. Martha was an opera singer and Larry is still very proud of that. Martha uses humor on her husband. She acts flip when things go wrong, he takes her lead and no one panics. At one point Larry used the phone and somehow the operator got involved and she was concerned and Martha had the police knocking on her door. Nervous as she was she handled it with grace. She had joined us once before, but so many things happened that we got disconnected. Like all of us she is comforted by being with people who are going through the same thing. She is very effected by the whole chain of events with her husband. Her previous life did not prepare her for this. She has lost her soul mate her confidant. She is a high energy woman trying to keep her emotions in check. When she talks she tends to go off on tangents, and she is so aware of that clock on the wall, so she talks faster. I am waiting for her to become more relaxed. That is the only way to get the most out of our group. We want to offer suggestions or comments, but by the time she finishes one thought she is onto another and we can't jump in. To all of you, I say just follow my lead. I will speed you up if necessary. I can't promise to give you a lot of time, but my goal is to give everyone a chance to speak. If you make one short point and rest, I can then do my job and get you the right feedback. Then I will usually let you make a few more points - all with the responses you need. I can only make your time in that room productive if you follow the process and work with me. If it's not your turn, by all means get my attention and add to the subject at hand. We all want to hear what you have to say.

Carol is a doll. She is a social butterfly and a flirt. She was making eyes at Sylvia's husband Ben and he started whistling at her right in the middle of the meeting - we all laughed so hard. She is a man's lady - is that the opposite of a lady's man ? My husband joined this group with me, we were caring for his mother Gladys. Four months later our leader burned out and walked out, I stepped up to the plate, that was 15 years ago this month - the rest is history. Shortly after that Gladys died and George kept coming to group with me. After a few years he said - I can't do it anymore. I can't listen to the stories anymore. I understood and he never came again. But, he does come by once in a while. He likes to maintain some connection and he also likes to put a face to the people I care so much for and talk about to him. He is proud of the work I do and looks forward to those visits. Today when he arrived he was stunned that people said hello George, and amazed when Ann G and Elaine gave him a kiss. Of course Carol made her move - we have so few men in that room. Apparently I was pulling her leg one day and when she asked me who George was I said - oh, he's the janitor. It sounds like something I would say. Well she fell for it and was shocked today to find out that he was my husband. When she realized he was my sweetie - she went to him and the two of them talked and talked. At one point they walked across the

auditorium to the bathrooms. George has had knee surgery on both knees and since he refused rehab, he can barely walk. He almost fell down the stairs to the bathrooms and Carol was there for him, if he had fallen he could have been laying there for a while if it wasn't for her. She made my husband feel like he was a part of the group and he talked about it all the way home and as I write this he pops in to talk about what a nice time he had and how much he liked Carol. George and I have been together for almost 41 years, we were high school sweethearts. He went to Calhoun and I went to Mempham. The way Carol and the rest of my group treated him today is a gift I will treasure. I just wanted you to know that. I don't like to talk or think about myself, especially in group, but I also have two bad knees. It keeps getting worse and I now use a cane at times, especially when using the stairs - but I can't bring myself to use it at group - dumb I know. Well I have a great deal of pain when I first stand up, so I try to do it once per meeting. Elaine asked if she could bring me something and I automatically said no. Then Carol said let me make you up a plate, for some reason I said yes. She brought me a tea also. I almost never ask for help, but Carol, you have a quality about you that made me feel okay about getting your help. Thank you for letting me take full advantage of our party.

Since Millie lost her husband Pete about a year ago, she comes to group intermittently. She still feels the wounds when she hears our stories. But she says she is feeling stronger and she is so grateful that I include her in our e mails and she is able to stay in the loop. When she visits she can follow what is being said. I want her to come when ever she can. She is a nurse and she has been through the world of AD from beginning to end. She has experience and medical knowledge, an unbeatable combination for our group. She said that she was talking to Ann L. Ann lost her mother Ann to AD a few weeks ago. Millie asked her if she was planning on coming to group and Ann said YES. She told Millie that she felt she had things to share, she feels that she can help people. This is a way for her to give back. So, Millie wants to be able to do that also. In her own time. Millie has kept up her friendship with Gilda who also visits us on occasion, but not today. She lost her husband Ken when Millie lost Pete. Both their husbands followed the same path at the end of their lives. The woman feel a kinship and I am glad they were brought together by this group. Esfira was not with us - but she lost her husband Sam 10 years ago. She has stayed with me all these years. She was a pharmacist in Cuba and a Social worker here, so I call her my little Yoda. She whispers to me during group all the time and on the way home she always tells me how she felt it went. She goes to lunch once a month with about 5 other widows from our group. They stayed connected all these years. These widows were way before all of your time with me. But, the bonds they formed remains to this day. I am very proud of this group.

To hear that Ann L will stay with us was another gift for me today. Because of the way George feels, I put a tremendous amount of importance on not pressuring anyone to keep coming to this group. How unfair that would be. I really form strong attachments to all those that come to me for help. I don't want to let anyone go. But, of course I realize that if nobody left, we would be meeting in the Colosseum today. I've learned to let all my little chicks fly the coop and go on with their lives, knowing they will keep me in their hearts as I will them. I am proud of all our ex members and proud of myself for getting them through this, and then setting them free. Ann L is special. She talks so well, she makes sense, and she hits the nail on the head everytime. She makes people understand. She made such a huge effort with her mother and battled her sister in court and she did it all with dignity. She is also the little devil who orchestrated today's holiday party, saying when she spied me, oh here she is and she's going to give it to us. She has to say that every year, and every year I say, your right, we will have that final day of the year for a celebration of what we accomplished that year. And the next year I put my foot down again and get my authority stomped on. Well next year will be different. I will smile and thank everyone. And if I start up with you again next December, you have my permission to quote this e mail and embarrass me, because I will deserve it. The look on everyone's face today, when we went into party mode, has convinced me. I want to see those smiling eyes again and again. So Ann thank you for going over my head. Thank you for knowing what our group needs. You are the best.

I have saved Elaine for last. She is the caregiver to her mother Albena and the wife of Ralph - she is also a mother and grandmother. Now I know that you know that I love all of you and think you are all unique and soooo special. But, one of you rises to the top and that is saying a lot compared to who she is standing amidst. Yes, that person is you Elaine. She came to me in March of \_04. She had burned out. She had given up. She saw

no light at the end of the tunnel. She walked in sat down and allowed us to bring her back. Within the blink of an eye she snapped out of it and turned back into Elaine the wild cat take charge Italian who takes no prisoners. She started checking things out on the internet or by this person to that one to this one and on and on. She has brought us a wealth of alternatives for doctors, aides, and every kind of program around. She seeks out the best bang for the buck. She finds people who adore her and give her their cell phone #'s, and shares it all with us. If you are in group and you have a problem, Elaine is the one who has been there done that and here is the name and number that will solve your problem. She will tell you about Medicaid, guardianship, behavior problems. She is amazing. If someone is sick, she will be the first to contact you and has been known to send balloons too. Above all this she has taken it upon herself to make contact outside of group, with anyone who will join her. If you're not busy and you want company, call Elaine. She will tell you when a whole bunch of group members will be meeting for lunch. I think she has been to most people's homes. She told Carol that her husband was very handsome, how does she know, unless she snuck up there and rang the door bell. She knows how everyone is - her cell phone address section is begging for mercy. She is funny and so caring. Ann L who just lost her mother is going to spend Christmas with Elaine. The first holiday without someone you love, is hard. Elaine is making sure that Ann's holiday is filled with new happy memories. It doesn't get better than that. She is one of those things that Mastercard can't buy. She is priceless and I wanted her to know that I know what she is doing and I appreciate how she has made this group stronger and better. And now all of you know about Elaine. I'm glad I got you babe.

Everybody is always amazed by these e mails, yes they are filled with information, and they are your window into what happens when you sit in that room, and into who is sitting there with you. You need to know about each other so that you can care about each other so that you can help each other. And yes I know that I go on and on, and that Efra will say - Kathy this is so much to read, what's the matter with you. Well, you will have a whole month to read this one. I just felt so good today and the longer I sit here at my computer the longer I feel all of you and the events of the day. But, this too shall pass and I will close soon. I promise. I just wanted to thank all of you for the card that Ann G passed around. All of you signing it makes it a keeper. The money is from all of you and I know just where it is going. It just so happens that I need a new toner cartridge for my printer - I can't understand why, so thank you for letting me buy one. Thank you for all the nice things you said about me and to me, you made me feel special, even when I came home and one of my cats coughed a hairball on me and took me down a notch or two. Right now my ego is still inflated and knowing that my efforts this year have touched many lives, I will happily continue on this path with you. Almost every member of our group showed up today and that is such a magnificent feeling to have us all in the same room together. I want to thank all of you for being a part of the process and making this a special day. You impressed our new women, and I hope they will return for our next meeting January 6, 2007. Just don't be expecting all the frills and gifts - we are a working group. One more thing, Jack and Zena left for Pa. a month ago and they never missed a party. They are reading this and I want you to know you were missed and I think about you always. I wish everyone a Happy Holiday and a Happy New Year. Stay well, and stay in touch. Love Kathy