



## **Writing Our Journey: Poems and Essays by Family Caregivers**

Each meeting has a suggested prompt, or idea, for people to write about. Everyone is free to interpret that prompt however they'd like. Below is one of the prompts, followed by a sampling of what was written in response.

Please remember that each piece of writing belongs to the writer and, if quoted, must be credited to that writer.

### **A picture of yourself**

Find a picture of yourself, for anytime in your life, with or without your child, and write about it. What was happening in the picture? What was happening outside the picture that can't be seen, or just before or just after the picture was taken? What were you thinking or feeling? Who were you then? How have you changed? How does it make you feel to look at that picture?

- "Notes for A Newlywed" by Gail Frizzell
- "Strong Summer Sun" by Brenda Considine
- "Family Snapshots" by Kathy Roberson

## Notes for a Newlywed

Silly girl, afraid of heights! The mountain rising before you is small compared to the peaks and precipices that you will need to climb in the next thirty years. It is good, though, that you do not know what lies ahead. It would scare the pants off of you. You will need to be stronger and smarter than you could conceive of right now. Fortunately, time will allow you to learn all that you need to know. You think you have your future all planned out. Surprise! It's not going to be anything like you think it will be. Don't panic though; your life is going to be really interesting. At times you're going to wish that everyone would just stop making your life so interesting.

Prepare yourself for worry, pain, and uncertainties that will be so overwhelming that it will be many years before you will gain perspective enough to realize that the years have also held riches and blessings. I wish I could tell you not to worry, "it will all work out", but it is that very worry and fear that will motivate you to become the person, the mother, the wife that you will need to be. It will push you to find answers to unanswerable questions. It will motivate you to hang on longer than you think you can. It will make you tenacious, stalwart, and compassionate.

Perfection only happens in fairy tales. Learn that early, because your life is not going to be a fairy tale. You could not understand yet that this is a good thing. You are going to make yourself crazy trying to pursue perfection. It's hereditary. But really, try once in awhile to embrace the freedom, the wisdom, the mediocrity of the phrase "good enough". Be careful of using the quest for flawlessness as a haven when you judge all around you to be so clearly deficient, so seriously wanting. Your most important lessons will be learned from that which will be most imperfect in your life. On the other hand, you'll never simply settle. You'll never just accept the status quo. That is going to be really important. You will amaze your shy, "scared of her own shadow" self. Where will you find your courage? In the soft, brown eyes of a very small child with very great needs.

You will spend so much time and effort in the care of that child that you will lose yourself. In order to find yourself again you will need to learn to recognize joy. That's going to be really hard. You will fear letting your spirit soar lest the fall be too great. One of the hardest things you will have to learn is that letting yourself be happy is not an indulgence, rather it should be your mission in life. Find what gives you joy. Figure out what is fun. Learn what really matters. Nepo said that, "...part of the blessing and challenge of being human is that we must discover our own true God-given nature." One day you will realize that you've spent far too much time being who others wanted you to be, and who you thought you should be, rather than who you actually are.

I know that you think you're a totally grounded, in control adult, but boy, are you clueless. The older you get the more you will realize how little control you actually have over your life. The struggle to gain control, to make sense of the insanity which will often surround you, will exhaust you. Though there will be brief respites, small victories, that struggle may never end, at least it hasn't yet. I seriously doubt if it ever will. I hope to come to terms with that someday because time is passing, more quickly than seems possible. Yet, many days seem to pass too slowly to bear. Keep trying to find the balance in your life that will get you through the days and make the years memorable.

I can guarantee you just a few things. Opportunity will knock. Good people will teach, guide, and support you. And, you will be loved. It will be the love that will sustain you through it all. It's going to be a bumpy ride. You don't realize it now, but you're up to it.

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## Strong Summer Sun

It is hot. Early Summer.

We are at the beach, embraced by a blue sky and a bluer sea  
with ribbons of white surf rolling in on the sand behind us.

You are smiling, head on, facing into the strong summer sun  
with your Ray Bans on.

Proud.

Like a pageant winner holding a bouquet of roses,  
you hold our newborn son.

Here, in this moment, you radiate the joy  
of a new father.

The sleep deprived, delirious, delicious sense of hope  
that all things from this point forward are possible.

Already, this baby has profoundly changed our lives and yet,

He is still so tiny.

Asleep in your arms, limp and toes curled,

Unaware that he is wearing a pair of tiny sun glasses you bought him to match yours.

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## Family Snapshots

Picture this: 1931  
a young man shyly  
smiling, standing  
straight in a slightly over-  
sized suit, tie neatly  
knotted, a placard around  
his neck, number 3468,  
almond-shaped eyes the only  
clue, and below, the labels  
*Imbecile (Mongolian)*

And this: 2004,  
an elderly woman opening  
file number 3468, requested  
for years in politely penned  
letters, two faded pictures  
bringing it back... *Pennhurst  
State School*, her brother  
smiling...not knowing then  
how decades later, even after  
husband, children, grandchildren,  
great-children, this small, hidden  
missing of him would persist.

I hold them close now, those  
photographs of Buddy, this one  
of my daughter, who in another time  
might have been there; here  
she's sitting on the back porch  
in a bright red sweater, our bodies  
leaning into each other, fingers tightly  
entwined, not bothering to look  
towards the camera, laughing  
without restraint, content for an  
instant that was more than enough,  
so much more than enough.

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