

A CAREGIVER'S HOLIDAY JOURNAL

Coming Home to Yourself

Before the storm, in the thick of it, and finding your way home

Meredith Glynn

SERENITY & SWEET TEA

The porch light is always on.

Welcome, Friend

Dear friend,

If you're holding this journal, I'm guessing the holidays feel different for you now.

Maybe you're the one making sure Mama gets her medicine on time while everybody else passes the sweet potatoes. Maybe you're wondering how Daddy will do with a house full of people and noise. Maybe you're grieving the holidays your parent used to make, while they're still sitting right beside you. Or maybe you're just tired, and the season hasn't even started yet.

I know that feeling. I've been my Daddy's full-time caregiver for more than five years, and the holidays haven't looked the same since. Some years I tried to do it all the old way and ran myself into the ground. Other years I learned to let things go, and those turned out to be some of the sweetest.

This journal is the soft place to land I wish I'd had. It walks with you through three parts of the season: **Before the Storm**, **In the Thick of It** and **Finding Your Way Home**.

It isn't a pretty book for the shelf. It's meant to be written in, dog-eared, coffee-stained and real. There are no right answers here, only your truth. Some of these questions will be hard. Don't rush them. If a page is too much today, skip it. It'll be here when you're ready.

You're not failing. You're carrying more than most people will ever see, and that deserves care too.

The porch light is always on.

Meredith

How to Use This Journal

Caregiving doesn't keep a tidy schedule, so neither does this journal.

1. **From beginning to end.** Follow the three parts in order. This works best if you start a few weeks before the holidays.
2. **By section.** Jump to where you are right now. Already in the thick of it? Go to Part Two. Holidays over? Go to Part Three.
3. **As needed.** Come back to a page when you need it, like the boundary scripts before a hard phone call or the crisis plan on a rough day.

What you'll find inside

- Reflection prompts to help you sort through what you're feeling
- Worksheets for boundaries, family help, money and time
- Planning pages for the holidays with your loved one
- Daily check-ins for the busiest days
- Permission statements and affirmations, because you're allowed
- Simple grounding practices like Porch Breathing
- Questions to ask your loved one, so their holiday stories don't get lost

Getting the most out of it

- Keep it somewhere easy to grab: by your chair, on the nightstand or in the bag you take to appointments.
- Five minutes counts. You don't need a quiet afternoon you'll never get.
- Be honest. Write messy, write angry, write sad, write real.
- You can type right into the lines on a computer or tablet, or print the pages and write by hand.

Now take a breath, pour yourself some tea, and let's begin.



Part One

Before the Storm

Setting boundaries, asking for help, releasing perfectionism and preparing your heart

Use these pages a few weeks before the holidays, while there's still a quiet moment.

Opening Reflection

Before the company arrives, before the calendar fills up, before the stress kicks in, there's this quiet moment. This is your chance to decide what this season will look like for you and the person you care for, instead of letting it happen to you. First, let's see where you're starting.

Where are you right now, emotionally? Write freely. No judgment.

How is your loved one doing this season compared to last year?

What are you hoping for this holiday season?

What are you dreading?

What do you need most right now?

WORKSHEET

Expectations Inventory

Most holiday stress isn't about what we want. It's about what we think we should want.

Write down every expectation you're carrying this season, big and small. A few to get you started: *"I should host like Mama always did." "I should bring Daddy to every gathering." "I should handle all of this without help."*

My holiday expectation	Where did it come from?	Mine, or inherited?	Keep or let go?

For each one, ask: Do I actually want this, or do I feel obligated? Does it still fit the season we're in now? What happens if I don't do it? Keep the ones that are truly yours. Let go of the rest.

Permission Statements

You're allowed. You're so allowed. Read these out loud.

I am allowed to:

- Have a holiday that looks different from the ones I grew up with
- Say no to traditions that don't fit this season
- Keep my loved one's routine, even if it means leaving early
- Say no to hosting this year
- Ask for help, and accept it when it's offered
- Buy the pie instead of baking it
- Spend less than I think I should
- Let someone else sit with them so I can breathe
- Skip a gathering that would be too much for them, or for me
- Rest without earning it
- Feel sad, angry, tired or overwhelmed
- Grieve the holidays we used to have
- Feel joy, even in a hard season
- Change my mind
- Be imperfect, and be human

Which one do you need to hear most right now? Write it big, and put it where you'll see it every day.

WORKSHEET

Boundary Setting

Boundaries are how you protect your peace, and your loved one's.

Step 1: What do you need to protect? Your sleep? Their routine, rest and medication times? Your budget? Your one quiet hour?

Step 2: Get specific.

For example: "Daddy does best with a quiet afternoon, so we'll come for lunch and head home by 3."

Step 3: Who needs to know, and what will you say?

Person	What I'm going to say

Step 4: What will you say if someone pushes back?

A boundary isn't a punishment. It's how you take care of yourself and the person you love.

WORKSHEET

What I Need From Family This Year

Family often wants to help but doesn't know how. Get specific, so nobody has to guess.

What I'm handling right now (medications, meals, appointments, bathing, nights, paperwork):

The specific help I need this season, and who I'll ask:

"Sit with Daddy Saturday from 1 to 4." "Bring a meal on the 23rd." "Pick up his prescriptions." "Take the overnight shift Christmas Eve."

Help I need	Who I'll ask	When

What to say: "I'd love your help this year. Could you ___ on ___? It would mean so much, and it would give me a chance to rest."

If they say no: "That's okay. Is there something else you could take off my plate?"

How I'll share updates so I'm not repeating myself (a group text, a shared note, one weekly call):

Releasing Perfectionism

The holidays people remember aren't the perfect ones. They're the messy ones that become the stories.

What am I trying to be perfect at this season? (Cooking, decorating, gifts, hosting, keeping my loved one comfortable every minute, managing everyone's feelings.)

Who am I trying to impress, and is it worth what it costs my peace?

The ONE thing I'll do "good enough" this year, and what good enough looks like:

How I'll feel when I let it go:

Mindset Shifts

Old belief	New belief
"If I'm not perfect, I'm failing."	"Real is better than perfect."
"I have to do everything myself."	"Asking for help is strength, not weakness."
"If I don't do it, nobody will."	"If I don't do it, I'll find out who else can, and we'll be okay."
"I should sacrifice myself for my family."	"Taking care of myself helps me take care of them."
"If I say no, people will be upset."	"My boundaries are mine. Their feelings are theirs."
"I have to make everyone happy."	"I can't control anyone's happiness but my own."

Your turn. The old belief I'm ready to release:

My new belief:

How this shift will change my holiday:



Porch Breathing

Before we go further, let's ground you.

1. Sit somewhere quiet. Outside is best, but anywhere quiet works.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose, like you're smelling fresh biscuits: warmth, butter, comfort.
3. Hold it for a moment.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth, like you're cooling a cup of sweet tea. Watch the steam, and feel the ease.
5. Keep going for 60 seconds. Do it now.

Use it anytime: in the car before you walk into a gathering, in the bathroom when the kitchen gets loud, or at 2 a.m. when your mind won't stop.

How do I feel now?



WORKSHEET

Holidays With Your Loved One

A little planning can make the day easier on both of you.

Their best time of day: _____

How long they can comfortably stay: _____

A quiet room or spot where they can rest: _____

Who will sit with them so I can take a break: _____

Foods they can have, and foods to watch: _____

Medication times during the gathering: _____

What to pack: _____

Our plan if they get tired, confused or upset: _____

What I'll tell guests ahead of time ("Daddy may not remember names. Just tell him who you are and talk about old times."):

_____

_____

From my porch to yours: Smaller and calmer is usually better. Many people with dementia do best earlier in the day, so daytime gatherings often go easier than late nights. Keep their routine as close to normal as you can, and give them a simple job, like folding napkins or stirring the tea. Old songs and old photos often bring comfort. If anything about their health worries you, check with their doctor before the big day.

Preparing Your Heart

The holidays aren't just logistics. They're emotional and spiritual too.

What emotions am I expecting to feel? (Sadness, joy, worry, grief, overwhelm, anger?)

Am I grieving the holidays my parent used to make, or the person they used to be? Is there someone else I'm missing this year?

What do I need to honor that grief?

What would help me feel more grounded? (Practices, people, places, prayer, rituals?)

What am I most afraid of this season, and what would help me feel safe?

Daily Check-In: The Days Before

Use these for the three or four days before the holidays begin.

Day 1 DATE: _____

How am I feeling today, and what's weighing on me?

What do I need today?

One thing I did to protect my peace:

One boundary I'm going to hold:

My affirmation for today:

Day 2 DATE: _____

How am I feeling today, and what's weighing on me?

What do I need today?

One thing I did to protect my peace:

One boundary I'm going to hold:

My affirmation for today:

Day 3 DATE: _____

How am I feeling today, and what's weighing on me?

What do I need today?

One thing I did to protect my peace:

One boundary I'm going to hold:

My affirmation for today:

Day 4 DATE: _____

How am I feeling today, and what's weighing on me?

What do I need today?

One thing I did to protect my peace:

One boundary I'm going to hold:

My affirmation for today:

You're ready, or ready enough. You've planned, set boundaries, asked for help and prepared your heart. Breathe. Pour the tea.



My Thoughts

Before the storm



Part Two

In the Thick of It

Getting through with your boundaries, your loved one and yourself intact

Use these pages when the house is full and the days are long.

PART TWO

In the Thick of It

The holidays are here. The house is full and the schedule is packed. You're watching the clock for medication times, keeping an eye on your loved one, answering the same question for the fourth time, and somehow you're supposed to feel merry too.

This section is your survival guide. Not to perfection, but to getting through with your sanity, your boundaries and your sense of self still standing. You don't have to do it all. You just have to take care of what matters most, including you.

Daily Survival Practices

Morning · 5 minutes

1. Three deep breaths
2. One thing you're grateful for
3. One intention for the day
4. Say: "I am doing my best. My best is enough."

Midday · 2 to 5 minutes

1. Step away for a moment
2. Five rounds of Porch Breathing
3. Hand on your heart: "I am safe. I am capable. I can handle this."

Evening · 5 to 10 minutes

1. Three things that went okay (not perfect, just okay)
2. One moment you protected your peace
3. Release it: "I did what I could. Tomorrow is new."

WORKSHEET

Family Dynamics Map

Who will be there this season?

Person: _____

What kind of relationship do we have, and what don't they see about my caregiving?

What stirs up conflict, and what boundary do I need with them?

Person: _____

What kind of relationship do we have, and what don't they see about my caregiving?

What stirs up conflict, and what boundary do I need with them?

Person: _____

What kind of relationship do we have, and what don't they see about my caregiving?

What stirs up conflict, and what boundary do I need with them?

The Peacemaker Trap

Do you find yourself smoothing things over, managing tension and putting your own needs last to keep the peace? It's a role a lot of caregivers fall into without ever choosing it.

What does being the peacemaker cost me? (Energy, honesty, rest, boundaries?)

What would happen if I stopped? What am I afraid of?

One place this season where I'll stop managing everyone else's feelings and start protecting my own peace:

WORKSHEET

Financial Boundaries

Total I can comfortably spend: $ _____

Category	Budget	Actual
Gifts		
Food and entertaining		
Decorations		
Travel		
Extra care or respite help		
Other		

What am I NOT willing to do? (Go into debt, overspend, cover everyone else's costs?)

How will I share these limits with family, friends and myself?

If money gets tight, what help do I need?

WORKSHEET

Time and Daily Survival

Build these around your loved one's routine, not on top of it.

Morning (5 to 15 minutes): how I'll start with intention

Midday reset (2 to 10 minutes): how I'll catch my breath

Evening wind-down (10 to 30 minutes): how I'll get ready for rest

Non-negotiables every day (their medications and meals, my sleep, one break for me):

What I can skip, hand off or do "good enough":

Daily Check-Ins

Up to ten days. Take one each evening, even if it's just a line or two.

Day 1 DATE: _____

How am I feeling in my body, heart and spirit?

Where did I protect my peace? What do I need tomorrow?

Day 2 DATE: _____

What challenged me, and how did I handle it?

One thing I'm proud of:

Day 3 DATE: _____

Who or what drained my energy?

What brought me joy?

Day 4 DATE: _____

What family dynamics came up?

What boundary did I hold?

Day 5 DATE: _____

How is my loved one doing?

How am I doing, and where do I need support?

Day 6 DATE: _____

What am I learning about myself?

What am I letting go of?

Day 7 DATE: _____

Halfway. What's been harder than I expected? Easier?

What do I need most right now?

Day 8 DATE: _____

What set me off today, and how did I respond?

What would I do differently?

Day 9 DATE: _____

What's keeping me grounded?

What should I adjust?

Day 10 DATE: _____

What am I most proud of?

What will I carry forward?

WORKSHEET

Stress Relief Tracker

What calms me? (Movement, quiet, prayer, music, nature, creativity, a certain person or place.)

In 2 minutes, I can:

In 10 minutes, I can:

In 30 minutes, I can:

At my breaking point, I will call:

Permission to Be Human

You're going to be human this season, and that's okay.

I give myself permission to:

- Lose my patience, and then apologize
- Feel anger without acting on it
- Say no, even if it disappoints someone
- Rest, even when there's more to do
- Ask for help
- Change my mind
- Take up space
- Be exactly as I am

WORKSHEET

My Crisis Plan

Fill this in on a calm day, so it's ready on a hard one.

When I'm at my breaking point, I will:

1. Step away and take 10 slow breaths.
2. Remind myself this is temporary and I'm doing my best.
3. Reset with Porch Breathing, a walk, a few lines in this journal, tears or rest.

If my loved one has a hard day or a medical emergency:

Their medication list and emergency info are kept: _____

The first person I'll call: _____

Who can come sit with them, or with me: _____

After a hard moment, I will:

1. Offer myself grace.
2. Reconnect: talk to someone, take time alone, or do something restoring.
3. Move forward: learn, adjust, let go.

If I feel like I'm falling apart, I will reach out to: _____

If you ever feel unsafe or like you can't go on, call or text **988**, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the U.S., anytime, day or night. You don't have to carry it alone.

Affirmations for the Thick of It

I am doing my best, and my best is enough.

I am a good caregiver, even on the hard days.

I am allowed to have boundaries. My peace matters.

I can feel overwhelmed and still be okay.

I am not responsible for managing everyone's feelings.

I am worthy of rest.

This season is temporary, and I will get through it.

I am not alone.

Reminders for Hard Moments

- You don't have to do it all. Ask for help. Say no. Let things go.
- Your feelings are valid: anger, resentment, overwhelm, grief. Feel them without judging yourself.
- This is temporary. The chaos will settle.
- You are not your family's emotional manager. You're responsible for your own peace.
- Your home, your meals and your presence don't need to be perfect.
- Rest is sacred, not selfish. You are enough, as you are.

Holiday Stories to Ask Them

The holidays stir up old memories. Write their answers exactly the way they say them.

1. What were the holidays like when you were a child?

2. What's the best gift you ever got?

3. Who did the cooking, and what dish do you miss the most?

4. What songs do you remember singing at church or around the house?

5. Tell me about a holiday when something went wrong that we laugh about now.

6. What did your mama or daddy do to make the holidays special?

7. What did the house smell like this time of year?

8. What tradition from our family do you hope we keep?

9. What do you remember about my first holiday?

10. What's one thing you want us to always remember?

If they can't answer anymore, write your own memories of them instead. Those count too. For more prompts like these, *While I Still Can* has more than 70, with room for their stories, recipes and photos.



My Thoughts

In the thick of it



Part Three

Finding Your Way Home

Processing the season, honoring grief and stepping into the new year

Use these pages once the decorations come down and things get quiet again.

PART THREE

Finding Your Way Home

The decorations come down. The visitors head home. It's back to the two of you and the everyday routine. Now comes the season of after: the time to process what happened, honor your grief, celebrate what went right and carry the lessons forward.

Coming home to yourself isn't just surviving the holidays. It's letting the season teach you something, so you step into the new year a little lighter and a little more yourself.

Processing the Season

What was the hardest part of this season?

What surprised me? How did my loved one do?

What am I most proud of? What do I wish had been different?

WORKSHEET

Grief

Grief is love with nowhere to go. Grieving someone who is still here is real grief too.

What am I grieving? (The holidays they used to make, who they were before, a parent who's no longer here, a tradition that's changed, a version of myself.)

How is this grief showing up in my body?

What does this grief need from me?

How will I honor it?

You can grieve the relationships that disappointed you, and the holidays you imagined but didn't get, too. Let yourself feel it, and give it time.

Lessons Learned

What did I learn about myself: my limits, my boundaries, my strength?

What did I learn about my relationships: who showed up for me, and for them?

What did I learn about what actually brings joy?

What will I do differently next year?

WORKSHEET

Letting Go

What am I ready to let go of? (An expectation, a resentment, guilt, a "should," a tradition, a role.)

Why am I releasing it?

What will I replace it with? (A new boundary, a new tradition, a new way of doing things.)

How will I mark the release? (Write it down and tear it up, say it out loud, pray over it, tell someone I trust.)

WORKSHEET

New Traditions

What brought real joy this season?

What traditions fit my loved one now? (A drive to see the lights, old movies, a quiet breakfast, their favorite songs, looking through old photos.)

A new tradition I'd like to start, and when and how it will happen:

Old traditions I'm ready to release:

Forgiveness

Forgiveness isn't saying it was okay. It's choosing to put the weight down. You did the best you could with what you had.

Who do I need to forgive, and for what? What's keeping me from it?

What do I need to forgive myself for? (Snapping when they asked the same question again? Needing a break? Not making it the way it used to be?)

What would self-forgiveness feel like?

WORKSHEET

Carrying It Forward

What am I taking with me from this season? (A lesson, a boundary, peace, a connection.)

How will I honor what I've learned? (A change, a conversation, a commitment.)

What practices will I keep? (Porch Breathing, journaling, a morning ritual, asking for help.)

Who do I want to become in the year ahead?

WORKSHEET

Year-Ahead Intentions

MY WORD FOR THE YEAR

Peace · Rest · Boundaries · Presence · Healing · Joy · or your own

What do I want to create this year? (More rest, stronger boundaries, deeper connections, more help with caregiving?)

What must I release to make room? (Perfectionism, people-pleasing, guilt, old patterns?)

What support do I need? (A few hours of respite care, a caregiver support group, a counselor, a friend, a community that gets it?)

My commitment to myself:

Porch Reset Practices

For the quiet days after.

Body scan · 10 to 15 minutes
In a quiet spot, move your attention slowly from head to toe. Notice where you're holding tension, and breathe into it.

Release ritual · 10 to 20 minutes
Write down everything you're letting go of. Tear it up or burn it safely, and say: "I release this. I am free."

Gratitude · 10 minutes
List 10 things from this season you're grateful for, big and small.

Self-compassion · 5 to 10 minutes
Hand on your heart: "I did the best I could. I am human. I am worthy of compassion. I am coming home to myself. I am enough."

The Porch Moment · 15 to 30 minutes
Sit with a warm mug. Breathe. Be still. Come home.

Ten things I'm grateful for



CLOSING REFLECTION

Coming Home to Yourself

As this season closes, ask yourself: what does "coming home to yourself" mean to me?

You carried a lot this season, and you carried it with love. Claim your word, your boundaries and your peace. Let this be your candle in the window, your porch light left on for the parts of you that are still finding their way home.

You are allowed to be exactly who you are, exactly as you are.

The porch light is always on.

Meredith



My Notes

More From the Porch

The Porch Light Caregiver Collection

When Caregiving Changes Everything and *While I Still Can*, together. A guide to get through it, and a journal to remember it.

While I Still Can

A journal for saving your loved one's stories, recipes and photos, in their own words.

The Porch Light Post

A free letter for caregivers every other week, plus the free Caregiver Survival Checklist.

The Sweet Tea Society

A private community of caregivers who get it.

serenityandsweettea.com

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