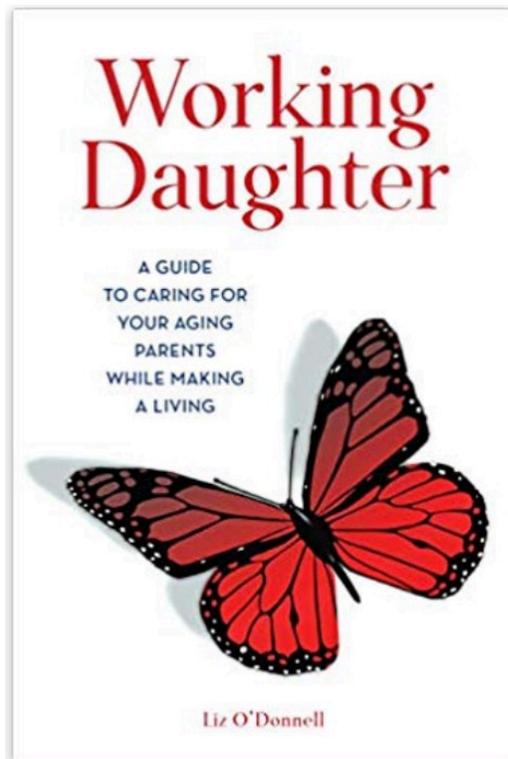


Liz O'Donnell, Working Daughter



Liz O'Donnell is the founder of Working Daughter, a community for women balancing eldercare, career, and more. A former family caregiver (four times over), long-time marketing executive, and working mother, she is a recognized expert on working while caregiving and has written on the topic for outlets including [The Atlantic](#) and [Time](#), and appeared on shows including [WNYC](#), Good Day Sacramento, as well as on countless [podcasts](#).

Liz was enjoying a fast-paced career and raising two children when both of her parents were diagnosed with terminal illnesses – on the same day. From the challenges she faced and the lessons she learned, she wrote *Working Daughter: A Guide To Caring For Your Aging Parents While Making A Living* so that no other caregiver would feel alone as they navigated care and career. Liz also wrote [Mogul, Mom & Maid: The Balancing Act of the Modern Woman](#) (Bibliomotion, October 2013). She lives in Boston.



Part memoir and part how-to, *Working Daughter: A Guide to Caring for Your Aging Parents While Making A Living* gives women, and men, a roadmap for managing eldercare along with raising their children, maintaining their relationships, and pursuing their careers. With 10,000 people turning 65 every day, this book sparks the conversation we so desperately need to have about caregiving and the workplace. And, it shows caregivers how to achieve the caregiver's gain, the under-reported but well-documented benefits of caring for someone else.

“VERDICT This book provides much-needed support for the growing population of women caregivers. Highly recommended for both public and personal collections. – *Library Journal, Starred Review*”

“Few understand caregiving as much as Liz O'Donnell.”





What people are saying:

“Caregivers dwell in the tension between meeting their own needs and the needs of their loved ones—a conflict explored in *Working Daughter: A Guide to Caring for Your Aging Parents While Making a Living* by Liz O’Donnell. ‘I wrote this book in the hopes that I could turn my family’s crisis into your family’s road map.’ She also calls on business leaders and policymakers to recognize and accommodate the needs of those caring for loved ones.” — *Publisher’s Weekly*

“Drawing from her own raw experience caring for her aging parents while juggling young children and working as her family breadwinner, in *Working Daughter* Liz O’Donnell offers hard-won lessons on dealing with shame, guilt and unrealistic expectations, as well as how to navigate the complex, confusing and woefully inadequate elder care system in America. A welcome and practical guide to anyone struggling to honor and care for aging loved ones while seeking to live their own lives fully.” — *Brigid Schulte, author of the New York Times bestselling "Overwhelmed: Work, Love & Play when No One has the Time"*

“*Working Daughter* is an unflinchingly honest, sharp, often funny guide to caring for an aging parent while holding down a job. If you’ve ever wished you could just talk to someone who understands what you’re going through – who could also offer the best advice – you’ve found her.” – *Ashley Milne-Tyte, host, The Broad Experience podcast*

“Liz O’Donnell is a woman who knows how to write, how to be brutally honest, how to tell caregivers’ unique stories, and how tell a bigger story about the new normal we’re all experiencing as our parents live so much longer than any generation before now. I love this book so much. It’s required reading for every grown-up with a loved one to care for. Heck, it’s just required reading about modern American life.” – *Anne Tumlinson, founder of Daughterhood.org*

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Why this book is important:

There are currently 44 million family caregivers in the United States.

The average caregiver is a woman in her late 40s, with a parent over the age of 65 and a child under the age of 18 and she is struggling to balance eldercare and career.

Working daughters often switch to a less demanding job, take time off, or quit work altogether to make time for caregiving duties.

They lose an average \$324,044 in compensation due to caregiving.

American businesses lose as much as \$34 billion each year due to employees' caregiving responsibilities.

10,000 people turn 65 every day in the United States and we are facing a shortage of caregivers.

By 2030 we will need between 5.7 and 6.6 million caregivers to support the sick and aging.

Already 40% of family caregivers are men and 25% are millennials.

Half of family caregivers are performing medical tasks like giving injections, handling pain management, managing feeding tubes, in addition to assisting with bathing, dressing, and meals

Caregivers receive very little, if any training for these critical tasks.

They spend an average of 24.4 hours per week providing care.

The care they provide has an estimated value of \$470 billion.

Potential Interview Questions:

Q. How does working daughterhood differ from working motherhood?

A. For working moms, there is an endless stream of resources to guide them – friends and family throw them baby showers to help prepare them for childcare, they go to Mommy & Me classes to meet other mothers. But for working daughters, there is very little available to help them navigate between their careers and the needs of their aging parents. There are no Me & Mommy classes, no celebration when eldercare begins, and no advance notice about when caregiving might begin.

Q. What can companies do to support family caregivers?

A. Start with culture. Teach managers to be and compassionate. Revisit programs and policies and make sure they support workers with parents, not just workers who are parents. Offer flex hours, work from home options, backup eldercare. Talk about it so so that working daughters don't feel so isolated.



Q. How can caregivers deal with siblings who aren't pulling their weight?

A. Family dysfunction often flares up when our parents need care. Old roles and wounds resurface. Be realistic about family members' strengths, weaknesses and willingness to step up. If someone has made it clear they are not going to help, move on. Your time and energy are better spent elsewhere.

Q. Should working daughters talk to their bosses about their caregiving responsibilities?

A. It depends. Ideally, you can and should be as transparent at work as possible – you never want to surprise the boss. But assess your workplace culture first. There are still companies where workers are penalized for having lives outside the office.

Q. What about the working sons?

A. Forty percent of all family caregivers are men and while they face many of the same challenges as working daughters, I focus on women in my book because women and men have unique challenges when it comes to career, expectations, guilt, etc.

Q. What is the caregiver's gain?

A. Research has shown that while caregiving is absolutely stressful, caregivers report emotional and physical benefits as a result of their caregiving experiences. If we view caregiving as something that gives to us, not just takes from us, we can have a better experience as we go through it.

Q. What can working daughters do to make balancing eldercare and life more manageable?

A. I outline 10 steps in the book starting with accepting your situation and ending with reflecting on the experience.

Q. Why did you write this book?

A. 1. I'm on a mission to make sure no one goes through caregiving alone. 2. I want caregivers to know that what they are thinking and feeling is normal. 3. We need businesses and legislators to step up and support family caregivers.

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Excerpt:

“The problem is no one dies anymore.”

My oldest sister looked at me, horrified by what I had said. And then she started to giggle.

“You’re awful.”

“It’s true.”

We were walking around the lake near my parents’ house, the same lake we swam in as kids. It was a familiar walk, but we were in unfamiliar territory. Our father had started acting strange – he was confused by simple things, he didn’t recognize his granddaughter, and he had lost all patience with our mother.

Our mother was distraught. Several years earlier she had tripped on her Crocs, and the fall, which resulted in a broken nose, stitches, and bruising so bad she looked like her favorite flower, a pansy, had changed her. She stopped driving, started using a walker, and became housebound except for the errands, doctors’ appointments and occasional lunches out with her home health aide, a neighbor, or me.

My sisters and I saw her growing older and sadder, but we felt helpless to do anything. We wanted our parents to move to an assisted living facility, and my mother wanted that too, but my father wouldn’t go. We tried to convince her to go without him—we thought they’d both be happier having their own space—but she wouldn’t leave him and we didn’t know how they would afford two residences anyway. Now, with my father clearly not well, my mother appeared to be at her breaking point, and my sisters and I didn’t know what to do.

Most people think about the fact their parents will die someday. They prepare themselves as well as anyone can prepare for something they know nothing about. But what they don’t consider—and don’t prepare for—is that their parents might not die, at least not quickly or well. Parents might grow old and sick and stay that way for years; they may become frail or infirm but not ill. Nor are children ever prepared for what feels like a role reversal, when they start to care for their parents. They aren’t prepared for all the times that their parents resist their support, shun their help and ignore their advice, and they are forced to stand helplessly by and watch the people who raised and cared for them decline.

I wasn’t ready for any of that. Like the time my father decided to start driving again after years of riding in the passenger seat. He was in his mid 80s at the time and was frustrated that he couldn’t take himself to the grocery store or the library.

“My brother is taking me to the RMV to renew my license,” he told me.

“I hope you fail the test,” I said. I knew I couldn’t stop him from going so I could only hope the trip would be fruitless.

“He’ll drive whether he passes or not,” my sisters warned me. They wanted me to take away his keys or remove the spark plugs from his car. Despite pressure from the two of them and many teary phone calls from my mother begging me to stop him, I didn’t. He passed the test and drove himself to visit my mother who was in a rehab facility recovering from a broken wrist. I was visiting her that day too, and he and I left together. I got in my car and watched him wander around the parking lot.

“What’s up?” I yelled out my car window.

“I can’t remember where I parked,” he said.

“Seems to me, if you can’t find your car you shouldn’t be driving it.”

“Bullshit,” he said. “I’ve been driving for over 60 years. There isn’t a more qualified driver on the road.”

God help us, I thought.



Nor was I prepared for what happened the night one of my cousins threw a party to celebrate the launch of my first book. I had just gotten out of the shower when my cellphone rang. It was my aunt who lived in the same town as my parents. “I don’t want you to worry,” she blurted out, “but your mother called us. Your father hasn’t come back from his walk and he pushed his Lifeline.”

The Lifeline, a pendant that both of my parents wore around their necks in case of emergency, automatically called for help in the event that someone pushed the panic button. It was dark out and my parents’ neighborhood was isolated.

“Do you have his cell phone number?” my aunt asked me.

“I do. But I bet the phone is on the counter next to the toaster oven.”

It was. My parents never turned it on; never carried it with them.

Part of me wasn’t worried. My father frequently wandered off – not in an Alzheimer’s kind of way – but to visit neighbors – and talk to them for hours. But part of me did start to panic. I pictured him lying beside, or in, the lake. Fifty people were expecting me as the guest of honor in an hour but my father was missing. It would probably take me two hours to get to my parents’ house on Cape Cod on a Friday night and my father could be found by then. What was I supposed to do?

I decided I would dress for the party but pack a bag for the Cape. I’d start driving toward my cousin’s house – it was in the same general direction as my parents’ place – and make a decision as I drove. I tried to apply eye makeup but I had started to cry and my tears kept smudging it. Just as I was about to head out the door, my mother called.

“The jerk is alive,” she sobbed. Sure enough, he had stopped to visit a neighbor and decided to demonstrate how the Lifeline worked.

And I certainly wasn’t prepared to become a criminal as part of my caregiving responsibilities. But shortly after my father got back behind the wheel, he informed me that he’d climbed a ladder to clean out his gutters.

“Dad, you could fall and die,” I cautioned.

“I’ll take my chances” was his response.

“I’m fine with that,” I said. “If you want to be a stubborn jackass and die that’s your business. But if you fall and get hurt and don’t die, it will be my business and I don’t have time to take care of you.”

He wouldn’t listen. So the weekend after our phone call, I took my kids to see him. I set my alarm for early Sunday morning, snuck out of his house, carried the ladder up the street, and stashed it in the bushes behind my cousin’s cottage. When he discovered it missing, my father assumed that one of the handymen my mother occasionally hired to do odd jobs stole it. The ladder is still in the bushes a few hundred feet from the house but my parents no longer live there. And I wasn’t prepared at all for how that would happen.

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