



“Once you read this book,
you’ll realize, *I’m not alone!*”

KEN *and* JONI
EARECKSON
TADA

WE’RE
STRONGER
THAN WE
LOOK

Insights *and* Encouragement for
the Caregiver’s Journey

JILL CASE BROWN



Unheralded, lonely, and very hard—that’s a *good* definition for caring for a loved one who struggles with disability. Every caregiver wonders, *Can I do this for the rest of my life?* Then, *Was this a big mistake?* And finally, *I’m trapped*. Despite all the good times in our thirty-eight years of marriage, I have felt the same. And it’s why my wife Joni and I heartily endorse the book you hold in your hands. It’s filled with bruising candor, honest stories, and heartwarming insights that will inspire and refresh the faith of *any* caregiver. Best of all, once you read this book, you’ll realize, *I’m not alone!* So get reading, and be ready to be blessed!

KEN and JONI EARECKSON TADA, Joni and Friends
International Disability Center

This is a beautiful book. Jill Case Brown invites us into her story, her heart, and her soul. No simple answers, no easy formulas; Jill takes us on a journey of questions, weariness, anger, regrets, and renewal. As a former caregiver, I am hesitant to read books on caregiving by someone who has no “up close and personal” experience. I was drawn into Jill’s story because of her honesty and raw emotion—because she’s been there and is there. She invited me, and

all readers, to join her as she explores the hidden blessings God offers if one is open to journeying through the dark places of illness and caregiving. It has been a few years since my husband battled with, and died from, Alzheimer's disease, but *We're Stronger than We Look* blessed me with insight, wisdom, and words to assign to my still-present questions. This is a book for all current caregivers and for those who will become caregivers. I will keep several copies on my bookshelf, ready to gift to those in the caregiving community.

DR. CYNTHIA FANTASIA, author of *In the Lingering Light: Courage and Hope for the Alzheimer's Caregiver*



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We're Stronger Than We Look: Insights and Encouragement for the Caregiver's Journey

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*For David's parents, Bob and Joan Brown, who said,
"We'll stay as long as you need us," and did.*

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WELCOME TO YOUR BOOK

Does the walker choose the path, or the path the walker?

GARTH NIX, *Sabriel*

IF YOU HAVE BEEN, WILL BE, or are now a caregiver, this book is yours.

Or maybe you're checking to see if it might make a good gift for a caregiver you know. If so, that's great. Every caregiver needs someone like you in their life.

This is the book I would love to have been given when my husband, David, came home from the hospital as a new quadriplegic. Thanks to family and friends, we had good support. But then the time came for David's parents to head back to Delaware and for us to settle into life. I'd never liked the phrase "the new normal"—way too overused—but it kept popping into my mind. It fit our situation.

And here's the problem with that.

As a caregiver, your "normal" probably isn't like that

of most people you know. They can't really understand your world because they don't live in it. I didn't understand mine until I had to. Until then, I had no idea how many sidewalks bristle with broken concrete from tree roots or take scary, lumpy dives into and out of their intersecting alleys. I'd traveled those sidewalks how many times? Now, with David in a wheelchair, I see them differently: as challenges, obstacles, and sometimes impossibilities.

I love meeting people who do understand. It's good to talk, to compare experiences. But just when we most need that, we caregivers can't have it. We're at home, feeling isolated, overwhelmed, discouraged.

That's when we need a book written by someone from our world, and that's what this book is. I hope you find it both down-in-the-dirt real and a lift to your soul. It isn't a how-to. Instead, you'll enter into my life and the lives of other caregivers.

Depending on your situation, you'll probably connect with some chapters more than others. I hope you love them all. They're short because I know from experience that many caregivers have only brief spurts of time to read. But they should take you deep.

Be sure to read the quotes that begin every chapter.

WELCOME TO YOUR BOOK

Some might not have much meaning for you. But others suit their story so perfectly, they'll make you laugh, smile, cry, or whatever you need right then.

SHE'S GOT IT ALL TOGETHER

Comparisons are odious.

ANONYMOUS

SHEILA GLOWED WITH YOUTH AND LIFE. So did her husband, though his bulky power wheelchair somewhat cramped Tim's style. The four of us had arranged to meet for dinner at a restaurant, where we could trade stories and get to know each other.

Their how-we-met-and-married saga turned out to be as charming as they were. They'd known each other since kindergarten, but their casual friendship didn't deepen until after his diving accident. Tim waited a full year, wanting to make sure Sheila understood what she was getting herself into. Only then did he ask her to marry him, and she said yes.

"I'll say she did." Tim grinned. "She didn't even wait for me to finish the question."

Sheila grinned back. "I'd already waited too long."

Now, that's romance!

We in turn told about a cold January weekend when David and I led a marriage seminar at a downtown hotel. Back then, David could handle the three steps at our back door, so we didn't yet have a house ramp or converted van. To save time with our early morning start from home, I'd packed his manual wheelchair in the car trunk the night before. We got to the hotel, I assembled the wheelchair, and David sat down.

Thunk!

Overnight, his chair's gel cushion had frozen solid. To make matters worse, the heat malfunctioned in our part of the hotel. Everyone at the seminar was shivering—even those of us who didn't have to sit on a block of ice. The cushion took hours to thaw, and David never really warmed up that day.

Not romantic like their tale, but funny. Sheila laughed long and loud, then sighed and said, "I love stories like that."

After dinner, the four of us left the restaurant together. Tim and Sheila watched with interest as I

helped David stand for his transfer into our car. The people from the SUV next to us showed up just then and stood around waiting for us to get out of their way. Flustered, I tried to hurry the transfer.

Sheila spoke up, her voice firm and confident. "Take your time. They'll wait."

Finally, David sat safely down on the passenger seat. I swung his legs in, closed the door, and hustled his wheelchair back to the trunk.

"G'night," Tim said. "Let's do this again. It's good to talk to someone who can relate."

"Definitely! This was great." Sheila hopped up to stand on the back of Tim's chair, holding onto its handles. She turned to wave at us and rode jauntily off to their van.

In the gathering darkness of the spring evening, their beauty pierced my soul. Tim and Sheila understood their challenges and met them with grace, youth, and clear thinking.

The SUV beside us drove away. Feeling dull, middle-aged, and foolish, I climbed into our trusty Chevrolet, buckled us both in, and headed for home. David and Tim might stay in touch, but I doubted Sheila and I would.

She had it all together. She didn't need me.