

# Zen and the art of elder caregiving

Writer's book puts focus on safety, security and serenity

## BY SAGE STAFF

Laurel Wicks' description of her transition from culinary to caregiving professions flows as naturally as the rest of her book on elder care. A Jackson Hole baker, restaurant owner, author and caregiver, Wicks recently published *Lessons from a Caregiver: Caring for an Elder with Love and Compassion*.

In the business of anticipating a client's needs and responding, Wicks writes she noticed a woman to whom she delivered food was not eating. Founder of The Bunnery Bakery & Restaurant in Jackson, Wicks responds by presenting the food on China with a cloth napkin,

enticing her client to eat.

From there she is given a larger role in the woman's life and later in the lives of others. Wicks shares what she learned in a decade of caregiving and adds a few recipes into the mix, too.

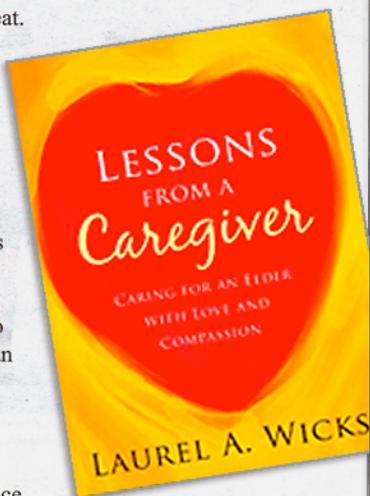
One of Wicks' early recommendations is to start a log book. "As an elder's care becomes more complex, more people will become involved," she writes. "Everyone in attendance needs to sign in and out with date, times and the specifics of their shift."

While full of practical ideas, Wicks' short but sweet book focuses on the little touches that preserve a person's dignity. She recommends a sly way to be sure people who are capable of bathing on their own are actually doing so by choosing an arrangement of towels that will have to be changed for the person to actually bathe. This avoids the necessity of asking suspicious and potentially insulting questions, while also alerting the caregiver to a problem if discomfort or impairment has led a person to forego bathing.

Wicks recommends making sure those who are frail or infirm eat full meals before dental visits

involving anesthetics because their bodies are likely to break down the drugs slowly, leaving their mouths numb for longer than able-bodied people might anticipate. In this case, they are at risk of severely biting their tongues when they try to eat, she writes, and so should be prepared to wait a long while before eating again.

With the simplicity of a good host, Wicks shows her keen ability to see every daily event from the perspective of the people she is caring for, anticipating their needs and understanding their struggles. She also demonstrates how this perspective reaps rewards for caregivers as much as for the people who are cared for.



## Suggested reading

**Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Aging Parents, Third Edition: How to Help, How to Survive**  
by Claire Berman

**The Caregiver's Survival Handbook: How to Care for Your Aging Parent Without Losing Yourself**  
by Alexis Abramson