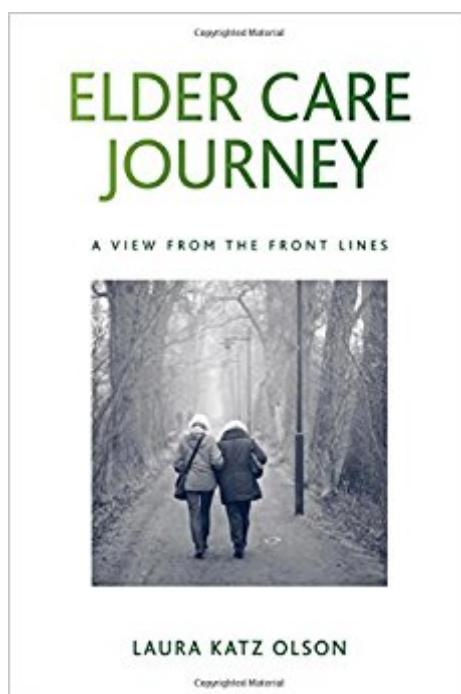


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Elder Care Journey: A View From The Front Lines (SUNY Series in New Political Science)



Synopsis

Shortlisted for the 2016 Sarton Women's Book Awards in the Memoir category presented by the Story Circle Network For millions of Americans caregiving is the "new normal." For Laura Katz Olson, a respected researcher of long-term care for the aging, *Elder Care Journey* chronicles the disruption of her world and how it is upended by the ever-increasing long-distance needs of her own mother. A healthy, Senior Olympics medal winner, Olson's mother is slowly and steadily incapacitated by Parkinson's disease and a gradual loss of vision. Thrust into a long-distance caregiving role, Olson finds her previous academic notions about assisting a frail parent increasingly at odds with the reality of the lived experience. In a narrative full of "ah-ha!" moments, tears, sighs, and outrage that will be familiar to many, Olson opens a window into the nursing home and home care industries that consume much in the way of taxpayer dollars, but often fail to deliver quality care. Olson's personal story vividly demonstrates not only the overwhelming bureaucratic barriers faced by care-dependent seniors but also their beleaguered adult children's attempts to ensure their parents' health, safety, and well-being.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

After losing two siblings, Laura Katz Olson is left singularly responsible for her physically active and lively mother, Dorothy, a thousand miles away, both young at heart and eagerly bicycling everywhere, but increasingly limited by the normal process of aging. Being an expert on aging and

health care, Olson is at first confident as she tries to let her mother age in place. More than anyone, she believes, she should know what to do. Shuttling between Florida and Pennsylvania, Olson settles into a crushing routine, and with each visit she finds incremental downward change in her mother's health. Pulled by daughterly guilt at times, but also a wellspring of love, Olson is frank about the resentment she sometimes experiences. With a unique perspective that links the systemic flaws in our policy approach to elder care to real-world experience, Olson exposes the challenges we all face or are likely to face. More than a personal story, but nevertheless an extremely compelling one, the book should be read by those confounded and frustrated, and by those without direct knowledge of what quietly repeats itself millions of times a day. Miriam Laugesen, Department of Health Policy and Management, Columbia University In *Elder Care Journey*, Laura Olson tells the riveting story of helping her aging, disabled mother navigate the system of long-term services and supports. A renowned scholar of aging and long-term care policy, Dr. Olson was nevertheless unprepared for the daily frustrations involved in confronting a bewildering array of obstacles, deceptions, burdensome and repetitive procedures and paperwork, and catch-22s, ranging from the annoying to the downright dangerous. She shows how well-intentioned policies can fall far short of meeting people's needs, especially for those in greatest need, in a system based on fragmented interests and private-sector profit maximization. Combining scholarly expertise with personal experience, she ends the book with a detailed but highly accessible analysis of the long-term care system and how it could be improved to the benefit of both taxpayers and beneficiaries. This book is a compelling read for policymakers and for students and scholars of health care and social welfare policy, highly recommended for undergraduate and graduate courses. The author's experiences also provide helpful advice to caregivers on what to expect and how to deal with it, as well as reassurance that they are not alone. Christine L. Day, University of New Orleans If a society is judged by how well it treats its most vulnerable members, Laura Katz Olson, a prominent health policy scholar, demonstrates that we have a long way to go in how we serve frail and disabled elders in need of long-term services and supports at the end of their lives. Olson develops a compelling narrative that describes the subtle and not-so-subtle indignities imposed on elders and their caregivers navigating the complex maze of health and social service systems at their hour of greatest need. Even an expert such as Olson struggled in light of the challenges posed by these impediments. By connecting her own personal journey to the larger societal challenges within which her struggles are embedded, Olson makes a significant contribution to the literature that should be required reading for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers looking to advance the welfare of the nation's most vulnerable citizens. Edward Alan

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Laura Katz Olson is Professor of Political Science at Lehigh University and the author and editor of many books, including *The Politics of Medicaid* and *The Not-So-Golden Years: Caregiving, the Frail Elderly, and the Long-Term Care Establishment*. She lives in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania.

Thank you.

Many of us have to face the incredibly difficult experience of advocating for friends and relatives who are elderly and/or disabled, and almost inevitably we feel helpless and ineffective in the face of so much uncertainty and bureaucracy. Laura Olson's account of her experience, her "journey", as someone who thought being an expert in the field would make it easy, is beautifully written and moving. It is also reassuring in an odd way to know that we cannot blame ourselves for not trying hard enough or knowing enough. There is so much to learn here about the state of elder care in the US and how it could be a great deal better.

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