Almost forty years ago, when I was an Army social worker, a social work technician who worked for me often raised a rhetorical question after a particularly difficult day of hearing the sad and true situations of soldiers engaged in combat and combat support operations: “Who treats the treaters?” More simply put, the questions was, “We take care of and confront the emotional pain of everyone who comes into this clinic; who helps us?” There are no easy answers as to who treats the treaters, but this book will go a long way in moving professional helpers closer to understanding the dynamics of caregiving and ways to achieve the best caregiving results. In their own voices, professional social workers and social work educators tell poignant stories of the responsibility of caregiving to their loved ones. The caregiving role knows neither gender nor race. Each caregiver voice tells a story of preparation by the loved one for this service. The now-vulnerable loved ones taught them lessons of sensitivity and caring during the socialization process and in the building of those relationships. In these relationships, as care was given and received, old difficulties between the caregiver and the cared-for relative were resolved, and new connections between them were made as the caregivers strove valiantly to acknowledge and respect old roles and the meaning of these roles to each of them.
while having to address changes in their respective roles. It is of note that these
caregivers worked to make sure that their loved ones maintained as much au-
tonomy as possible and that their loved ones were actively engaged in decision
making about their care. All caregivers were aggressive in their advocacy ef-
forts to ensure the ongoing respect by healthcare and service providers to their
loved ones. In a straightforward way, the authors acknowledge the costs in-
curred to themselves and significant others in having to provide the kind of
care that was needed. Each social worker and caregiver highlights the impor-
tance of a network of friends and family, creative caregiver coaches, and profes-
sional healthcare providers.

Race, ethnicity, and familial relationships notwithstanding, each of these
social workers recounts the physical and emotional fatigue and social isolation
brought about by the caregiver role. Yet each speaks about the joy and triumph
he or she experienced in the caretaker role. Among those joys and triumphs
were the strength they derived from their loved ones as those cared for tried to
ease the burden through humor, expressions of reciprocal care, and genuine
love and gratitude for the efforts being made so that they might live their lives
in dignity and as adults.

Through the life stories, the book does a remarkable job of pointing out the
value of educating professional social workers to assume and use the roles of
broker, mediator, manager, and advocate to improve systems of care. These
professionals played all these roles in providing care to their loved ones. They
describe how they were strengthened through contacts with their individual
family members and friends and with the friends and caring networks of their
afflicted relatives. The authors recount the strategies they used for successful
caregiving and the various ways they maintained a sense of personal integrity
and inner peace as they strove to make the lives of their loved ones less chaotic,
more manageable, and as fulfilling as possible.

It becomes apparent as one reads each of these stories that by recording
their stories, the tellers impart valuable solace to those of us who are now or
have been caregivers. Although turmoil and toil were essential elements of each
author’s experiences, they remained tenacious and courageous in their strug-
gles to make sense of senseless service systems, incongruous insurance ar-
rangements, unresponsive and poorly situated systems of care, and sometimes
unresponsive family members. Each author portrays the caregiving experience
as having made them more sensitive and more caring people and perhaps bet-
ter social workers. Who treats the treaters? In some way the answer is different
for each of these social workers, but support resided in the knowledge they had
acquired as professionals about systems and system change, in the networks of
care that existed for them or that they helped to create, in friends and family, and in the loved ones receiving care. Clearly, treatment inheres in the quality of relationships the caregiver has and is developing. The reading of these stories gives new meaning to the reality that weeping lasts for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Although the morning for each caregiver was different, it came when the pieces to the puzzle of caring for their loved ones eventually came together.

This book is a must-read for any helping professional who assists clients who are caring for a loved one. It is also a must-read for anyone who values the lessons learned from others who have faced caregiving responsibilities for elderly and infirm relatives and friends and the opportunities they present for living a fuller life by helping a debilitated loved one live a fuller life.