

Parents Are Hard To Raise S02 E69.mp3

Lipstick Bodyguard: [00:00:00] The world is becoming a dangerous place for us women. Lipstick bodyguard looks just like an innocent little lipstick but it'll instantly drop any attacker to his knees so you can get away unharmed. Lipstick bodyguard... fear no evil. Get yours today. Only at lipstickbodyguard.com.

Announcer: [00:00:37] The Alzheimer's Association estimates there are about 16 million Americans caring for a family member with some form of neurocognitive disease. To them, life can often feel like an out of control freight train, filled with 36-hour days. This week parents are hard to raise Diane's special guest expert Molly Wisniewski founding editor of the upside to aging.com Is here to offer some much needed advice.

Diane: [00:01:18] Welcome to parents are hard to raise, helping families grow older together without losing their minds. I'm Elder care expert Diane Berardi.

[00:01:27] We have a very special guest today. Molly Wisniewski, who is a freelance writer. She's a consultant in aging services and she's become a well-known advocate for dementia care. She also is the founding editor of the upside to aging dot com. And Molly when I look at your blog it's really impressive and it is really refreshing. Because Molly is looking at the individual with dementia in a different way. She's looking at their heart and she's looking at them as a person. She's not looking at their illness. So welcome Molly.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:02:07] Oh, Diane. Thank you so much. Thank you for having me.

Diane: [00:02:11] Oh you're welcome. We're happy to have you.

[00:02:16] So did your passion for the elderly come about?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:02:22] Sure. Right out of high school. I was offered a position as a part time activities assistant. And I took it. I was out of high school and looking for a new job, and thought it would be fun. And I started in the activity department and quickly realized that this was going to be much more than a job. And it was a skilled nursing unit. And very quickly started to get to know each of the residents and learn their stories and fell in love obviously.

[00:03:07] So it started at a young age. Which was humbling for me to, at eighteen and working with individuals that were in their 90s plus. So...

Diane: [00:03:21] Now, what made you... Because you're here- your blog to help caregivers. Because, I'm sure working in the nursing home you would see the struggles caregivers face.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:03:40] Yes definitely. So, primarily I've worked in senior living. So I work with a lot of professional caregivers. But they also saw the struggles that family caregivers were going through. Whether that was just having to make that decision, whether or not they made the right decision to move their loved one into a nursing home. If that wasn't their... If their parents hadn't made that decision already. But then also, I realized really quickly in activity that was kind of unique because I was always focused on their emotional well-being. And I was able to form all these wonderful relationships that I still hold dear to myself today. While professional caregivers and family caregivers are kind of left to focus primarily on their physical needs and medical needs and I think we all know how overwhelming that can be. And it leaves little time to focus on emotional well-being.

Diane: [00:04:47] And how did you do that? You know, focus on the um the emotional well-being.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:04:54] I think in a variety of ways. I mean, luckily in activities you kind of are guided by a general calendar of the day-to-day events. But over the years you really start to get to know each individual, and you start to identify a patterns. And what works and what doesn't work. Sometimes it's trial and error. But I think for me it was it was kind of unique because I got to know the individuals after diagnosis. So I really didn't have much context of who they were, throughout her adult life. I was meeting them now with dementia. And I had to get to know them with dementia.

Diane: [00:05:45] And so you would, by seeing them probably every day, you would kind of understand how they moved, how they thought. You know what you can do or what you couldn't do. And it is trial and error.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:06:04] Yeah.

Diane: [00:06:05] Now talk to me a little bit about... You had mentioned to me, we were talking nonmedical dementia care. What is that?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:06:16] Yes. So I especially when I read any of my articles on The Upside of Aging, I really want to stress that I don't provide medical advice. I don't have a medical background. The tips and tricks, as I like to call them, are really just based off of my own experience of seeing what works and what doesn't work.

[00:06:42] And, you know, things like validation therapy or empathy training, or concepts like staying in the person's reality, which I've learned over the years all offer more holistic approaches to dementia care.

Diane: [00:07:03] And for our you know our listeners that may not know, what is validation therapy?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:07:11] Sure, yeah. Validation therapy is a really, I think it's one of the most important aspects of dementia care. And it is really just acknowledging the person. So no matter the situation, whether they be, maybe they're really anxious in that moment. Validation is going up to that person and acknowledging their anxiety. You know, acknowledging that they're upset. And showing them that, by either the facial expressions that we show them, or you know some mirroring their face. So if they look worried, we respond with a worried look as well. So validate that we see them. That we see that they're anxious. But then, also to offer reassurance and gentle reassurance. And listen if that's possible. Listen to what they're telling us. Even if sometimes that doesn't make complete sense to us. Maybe we really don't understand the words that they're saying, but we can listen to their tone of voice and many times understand what's going on.

Diane: [00:08:34] And then you also talked about staying in reality. What does that mean?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:08:44] Yes. So, staying in the reality of someone... I think anyone who has worked with somebody or knows somebody that has, now further on dementia, I do you want to also say, this is not... I don't want to generalize on all dementia. But those who may be further along in the process have...are often reminiscing about earlier days for them. So they may say, "Oh. I want to go home." And they're referring to their childhood home. Or they may say, "oh I'm late for work," or "I have to pick up the kids from school." And many caregivers have an innate, I think it's just the natural response to protect them, and say, "Oh no. You're fine. You're here. You're at such and such place and your kids are all grown up now."

Diane: [00:09:52] Right.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:09:54] And that can be a bit jarring. So staying in the reality is allowing whatever their reality may be, play out. And even if that means we have to play along. And it often works for them. It goes after that validation.

Diane: [00:10:18] So if they say... You know, if a woman says, I have to go pick up my children. So you say, oh yeah we do have to do that at 2:00 o'clock or... So as not to get them so anxious. You know not to. Because if you do put them, I guess and say, "no you're here and this is where you are." You can tell they're going to get confused and anxious, is that...

Molly Wisniewski: [00:10:40] Yes. Because that's you're saying you're going to leave their children wherever they think that their children are. And we're just going to leave them that are stranded. I think you can also redirect. So, I like to call it "therapeutic lying." [laughing].

[00:11:06] So you're not necessarily lying to them. But you're engaging in this scenario that they're living in. And that might be just to say, oh we'll pick up their kids leader or somebody is already going to pick them up." And then maybe talk about what you want to have for dinner that night.

Diane: [00:11:32] Okay. So you do redirect them. So, Molly we have so much more to discuss. But first if you're a woman there's a woman in your life there's something you need to hear...

Diane: [00:11:49] I Want to tell you about my friend Katie. Katie is a nurse and she was attacked on her way home from work. She was totally taken by surprise. And although Katie is only 5 feet tall and 106 pounds she was easily able to drop her 6 foot 4, 250 pound attacker to his knees and get away unharmed. Katie wasn't just lucky that day. She was prepared. In her pocketbook. A harmless looking lipstick, which really contained a powerful man stopping aerosol propellant.

It's not like it was in our grandmother's day. Today just going to and from work or to the mall can have tragic consequences. The FBI says a violent crime is committed every 15 seconds in the United States. And a forcible rape happens every five minutes. And chances are when something happens, no one will be around to help.

[00:12:22] It looks just like a lipstick. So no one will suspect a thing. Which is important since experts say, getting the jump on your attacker is all about the element of surprise.

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[00:13:11] Darkness brings danger. Murderers and rapists use darkness to their advantage. We all know what it's like to be walking at night and hear footsteps coming at us from behind. Who's there? If it's somebody bad, will you be protected? Your life may depend on it.

[00:13:29] My friend Katie's close call needs to be a wake up call for all of us. Myself included. Pick up a lipstick bodyguard and keep it with you always.

Announcer: [00:13:49] You're listening to parents are hard to raise, now thanks to you, The number one elder care talk show on planet earth. Listen to this and other episodes on iTunes, Google Play and on demand using the iHeart Radio app.

[00:14:09] So, I want to thank our new listeners in Anderson, South Carolina... [laughing].

[00:14:14] Sorry... They're making faces in the booth, there. And Bowling Green, Kentucky. Naples, Florida and Galway, Ireland. I hope I pronounced that properly. Welcome we're so happy to have you as listeners.

[00:14:29] And we're here with Molly Wisniewski, the founding editor of The Upside To Aging dot com.

[00:14:35] So Molly, why did you start The Upside To Aging? What prompted you to do that?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:14:42] Yeah well, after I graduated I found out that I had a whole bunch of more time on my hands. [laughing]

[00:14:50] But I also in conversation with other caregivers, I realized that my experience in forming these personal relationships with individuals living with dementia, was not unique, but that I had a perspective that a lot of professional family caregivers aren't able to have. Because of their focus on the physical demands of caregiving.

[00:15:33] So I started The Upside to Aging as an opportunity to highlight and validate caregivers. That it is difficult, but that I'm a firm believer that everyone deserves to have a happy and healthy relationship with their loved one living with dementia.

Diane: [00:15:53] And that's a wonderful way to put it. Because you've witnessed, as I, and the caregivers who are listening, I mean it is such a... It's such it can be so stressful. And they're concentrating on doing what they have to do. And making sure mom eats. And making sure she's taken care of. And she's dressed. And bathed. And you have to go to work. And you have so many things pulling at you. So it is really refreshing... The way you are advocating for help for the caregivers.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:16:32] Yeah. I think it's important. Because ultimately it comes down to the care that's going to be provided to the individual. And the best care comes from a caregiver that's able to take care of themselves as well.

[00:16:48] That's right. That's right. And that's such a tough thing. You know. We constantly, in the different shows, are saying you do have to take care of yourself. But like all of us, it's easier said than done at times. So...

[00:17:07] What are some of the meaningful activities that family caregivers can do with their aging parents?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:17:16] I think that they're... I love that you say that, you know, they are focusing on so many other things. And one of my missions or hopes is to provide easy ways to incorporate activities into the day to day. So whether the family caregiver is living with the individual or if they're just going over there. And even if their mom and dad are living in a nursing home setting, they're still focused on many other things... But meaningful activities throughout the day are really important and easy to incorporate, if you put them in the context of normal day to day tasks.

[00:18:05] So music is such a powerful tool and there are so many ways, so many times throughout the day that music can be used. Particularly for individuals living with dementia, putting on music

that they know and love. So some of the good classic oldies songs. The sing-along songs. That they're going to be able to.. If they don't remember the words they'll remember the melody. And they'll be able to tap their foot. And it's just an enjoyable moment. And that music can be played throughout the day so it doesn't have to be a scheduled.. "Let's carve out some time to listen to music."

[00:18:54] Another activity that is easily picked up and put down, especially for those who may have... That are meeting reminiscing a lot. They're really asking to go home a lot or they love talking about a specific time period, is a life memory board. And they can be picked up and put down on a rainy day. Use a lot of the old photos that are kind of probably collecting dust in the back of a closet, anyway. To bring them out and sort through them and, I often say, ask the person if they have a specific time. But if they're able to communicate that then you know the caregiver can pick a time that they think would be most beneficial. So maybe that's when they got married or they had their first child.

[00:19:55] So finding pictures from that time and creating a memory board of pictures and old recipes.

Diane: [00:20:03] Huh. Okay.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:20:05] And then. And that's a great tool too because once it's done you can kind of put it up and present it. And you know when other families come over friends come over to visit. It's a great talking piece as well.

Diane: [00:20:18] And I guess it's something you can do together. Right?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:20:22] Yes. Yes. It's so important to do it together. Because often the family member gets to learn a little bit more, too. Which is great. And they help with the cutting and the glue and all of that.

[00:20:42] But then there's also cooking projects. I think a lot of times because we get so busy that we tend to leave out the person or the individual living with dementia because it might take more time. But if there is one meal a week that is set aside that you both choose a recipe together, it could be a new one or an old family recipe, and allowing the stirring and the pouring of the ingredients, is really great for motor skills as well.

[00:21:19] So you have to eat. It's always a win, win for everybody involved. Plus they're being engaged and you're offering them purpose. Because while they may need around-the-clock care, that doesn't necessarily mean that they can't give as well.

Diane: [00:21:39] Yeah. That really is a great idea. Because everyone's busy and so you kind of have Mom sitting you know... Just sitting and you're trying to get dinner together and then do things rushing around. So that really is a wonderful idea.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:22:06] And, it helps a lot.

Diane: [00:22:07] So what are some other non-medical interventions and how can these activities help in providing care?

Molly Wisniewski: [00:22:21] I think a big one, and not so much an activity per say, but midday tends to be a particularly difficult time for individuals living with dementia. There's a lot of commotion going on. They've had to process a lot already throughout the day. So whether that

meeting new people or maybe they're just ready to take a nap. There's a lot of stimulation.

[00:22:52] So I like to dim the lights around 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon. And it doesn't have to be for long. About 15 minutes to a half hour. And put some quiet music on in the background.

Diane: [00:23:07] Okay.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:23:08] And it's a really great intervention for... Particularly for individuals that are living with dementia. Because it offers the dimmed lights will naturally kind of cue them to, "Oh it's time to quiet down." And I've used this time and time again. And it's so helpful. And it offers such a respite, I think, to the caregiver as well. To just kind of have that moment of peace.

Diane: [00:23:40] It quiet too. Yeah. For both of them. Yeah.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:23:43] Right. But then, you know, at the start of the day, I think it's really important to have a little morning stretch and even a bit of trivia.

Diane: [00:23:59] Ah. Okay.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:24:00] Yeah. So starting both you and the caregiver and their loved ones can stretch together. It doesn't have to be for long. I mean doctors recommend, I think it's a half hour. But it doesn't have to be that long.

[00:24:16] But that's stretching offers them time to kind of orient themselves. So are waking up there they're kind of getting their bearings, which may take a little longer than for us. We might be able to just jump out of bed and go. For them, they need that time to...

Diane: [00:24:39] Acclimate.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:24:39] Yeah. Right.

[00:24:42] But then following that up with a bit of trivia, and trivia that they would know. So I always like to go to the finish my line. So it's raining cats and dogs. A penny for your _____. Things That are going to be really easy recall for them. So that's good. That validating for them out... that they still have that. But it also gets the brain going a little bit and be ready for the day.

[00:25:14] Yeah. That's a great idea.

[00:25:17] Now how do we how do we get in touch with you Molly? And can you tell us also you know your Website.

[00:25:25] Yeah. Sure. So, the website is TheUpsideToAging.com and the contact information is on there. And I'm always... I love to listen to other people's stories and I learn from personal experiences. And we welcome others to share their own experience with us. So, Everyone's Welcome. I think this is information that everybody can really benefit from.

Diane: [00:25:53] Definitely. Definitely. Molly, thank you so much for being here. You're a great elder care advocate.

Molly Wisniewski: [00:26:00] Well. So are you, Diane. Thank you for having me. Really appreciate it.

Diane: [00:26:04] Thank you.

[00:26:04] I hope this episode helped you with something you may be dealing with at the moment.

[00:26:09] Please keep emailing your questions and comments and share as much detail as you can. Because listeners just like you come here each week insight and inspiration, and your story can also help someone else.

[00:26:21] Diane@ParentsAreHardToRaise.org. Or Just click the green button on our home page.

[00:26:25] If you found something helpful in this episode-- Episode 69-- subscribe to our show on iHeart Radio, iTunes or your favorite podcast app.

[00:26:33] I'd be so grateful if you'd share this episode with your family, co-workers and friends. Episode number 69.

[00:26:39] Parents Are Hard To Raise is a CounterThink Media production. The music used in this broadcast was managed by Cosmo Music, New York, New York.

[00:26:47] Our New York producer is Joshua Green. Our broadcast engineer is Well Gambino. And, from our London studios, the melodic voice of our announcer, Ms. Dolly D.

[00:26:56] Thank you so much for listening and I look forward to reading your comments and can't wait till we meet up again on the next episode of Parents Are Hard To Raise.

[00:27:03] Till then... May you forget everything you don't want to remember, and remember everything you don't want to forget.

[00:27:11] See you again next week.