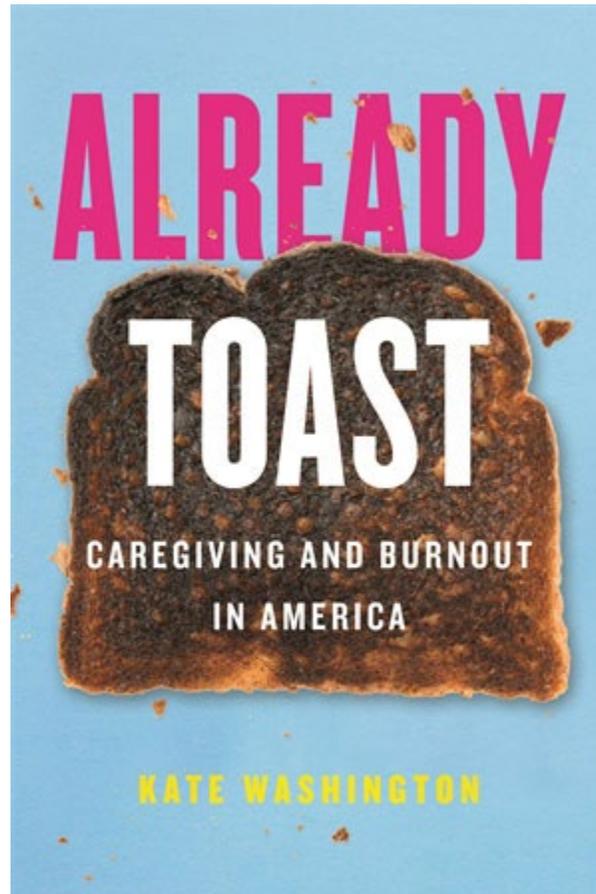


Already Toast: Caregiving and Burnout in America by Kate Washington

Readers' Guide Discussion Questions



Introduction - Collateral Damage

1. What is the first thing you think of when you hear “caregiver”? (1)
2. The author writes, “Our culture undervalues caring and exploits those who care for others.” Do you agree? Can you think of an example of this in your own life? (3)
3. The author admits, “I was among the most privileged of caregivers: I was well off and financially stable thanks to an inheritance from my mother, so Brad’s health crisis was not also a financial crisis for us.” If the author hadn’t had those advantages, how, do you think, would her experience have been different? (6)

4. The author brings up Victorian caregivers in literature as a point of comparison. Do you agree that their portrayals have influenced the expectations of women as caregivers today? (48)

One: The Learning Curve - Beginning Caregiving

1. When describing the discharge process, the author says, “That nurse in this case spent about half an hour training me how to keep my husband alive and left me nervous and unsure about my ability to do so.” If you had been in her shoes, how would you have felt? (29)
2. A report issued by AARP, “Home Alone,” sharply criticizes the widespread practice of foisting nursing tasks onto family caregivers. The report urges healthcare providers to “fundamentally rethink and restructure the way they interact with family caregivers in daily practice.” What are your thoughts on this? (29)
3. The author compares caregiving to first being sent home with a newborn baby. What do you think of that comparison? (29)

Two: The Thick of It - BMTU, Part One

1. Do you agree that isolation has always been a part of illness? (40)
2. When she talks about socializing, the author says, “When I did socialize I couldn’t relate to other people. I unfairly found their concerns trivial, so much so that I could hardly listen patiently; on the other hand, my problems were such a stone-cold bummer it really lowered the mood to talk about them.” (44) Do you think your friendships would have been affected in the same way? As Brad became sicker, the author says, “I knew I was

withdrawing from Brad as he became sicker. To tell the truth, it was at least partly self-protective. I thought he was dying and I couldn't really bear to keep our bond as strong as it had been when losing him entirely seemed imminent." What do you think of this choice? (50)

Three: On His Blindness - BMTU, Part Two

1. What do you think of the pressure that the author felt to be like Jane, the selfless, perfect caregiver in *Jane Eyre*? (54)
2. Why, do you think, is there an underlying assumption in the healthcare industry that all patients have care help standing by at home? (63)
3. The author mentions a hotline that she calls in a moment of despair. Do you think it would have helped her a lot more if she had been part of a support group with people going through the same thing? (65)

Four: Careworn - Life After Discharge

1. Why do you think the author's home caregivers preferred the longer hours, even though she offered more "humane" ones? (69)
2. Do you agree that what the author did—delegating, at relatively low wages, the care of a loved one to women of color—is part of a problematic pattern? (69)
3. In your experience, during this pandemic, has the unpaid caring labor fallen heavily on women? (81)

Five: To a Crisp - Burnout

1. The trip to New York did a lot of good for the author, as did leaving her daughters with their grandparents to relieve the pressure. If you have children, do you feel guilt or comfort at asking family members to watch them so you can relax and have fun? (87)
2. Why do you think female caregivers are more likely than men to take on the most difficult tasks? (88)
3. What, in your opinion, should be done about caregiver burnout so it doesn't lead to depression? (96)

Six: Invaluable - Work and the Economics of Caring

1. Can you understand why the author projected herself into Brad's writing? (103)
2. Do you agree that caregiving fuels generational poverty? (106)
3. Do you agree that people who are household caregivers should get paid? (109)
4. Is it true, do you think, that men see nothing to gain in becoming more like women?
(116)

Seven: A Lack of Reasonable Options - Sandwiched Caregiving

1. Can you imagine asking your partner what kind of death they would want, as the author does? (120)
2. How would you imagine the pressure of a sandwiched caregiver differs from one who only has to care for one person? (121)
3. What do you think of, in Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, the traditional Mexican expectation that a youngest daughter will remain unmarried and childless so she

can care for her parents in old age? What are the care expectations in your own culture?
(124)

4. What do you think of the author's decision to stay home rather than go to New York with her husband? Would you have done the same if you were in her shoes? (134)

Eight: Something Is Not Right - Post-Caregiving Stress

1. When it comes to caregiving for a loved one, would you be willing to risk going through vicarious trauma? (143)
2. The author says she soothes anxiety with food and drink. If you experience anxiety as well, what do you do to ease it? (149)
3. Do you think that going to therapy while simultaneously serving as a caregiver would be too much of a challenge? Why do you think some wait until later to seek help, if at all?
(151)

Nine: The Aftermath - Rebuilding from Caregiving

1. Do you agree that caregivers are invisible in our culture? (155)
2. Do you agree with the author's decision not to divorce her husband? (162)
3. How do we make caregiving an issue that people will care about, like parental leave?
(169)
4. Do you think we should implement nationally the caregiver support policies piloted in Hawaii and Washington? If so, how can those programs be expanded? (171)
5. Do you think a universal basic income would help ease things? (177)