

Care duties can double for many boomers

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Jun. 17--Millions of baby boomers are finding themselves with a less-than-empty nest, with their children and their parents living at home.

The stress of caring for both is taking a toll on this so-called "sandwich generation," according to research. A 2004 study by AARP, funded by MetLife, found care-givers' own health often suffers, particularly if they had no choice over whether to take on the care-giving responsibility, and if they were providing intense rather than casual help. The characteristics of the boomer generation -- high levels of education and a work force full of women -- have played a role in creating the "sandwich generation," experts say. But the boomers, mostly women, who have taken on this role say there are blessings hidden in what at first might seem like a burden.

"This is kind of the last thing I can do for my mom, and it's been a real sweet time in a lot of ways," said Mary Sheetz, 51, who moved her mother in with her family in Chattanooga five years ago. "You push all the other stuff away and talk very straight forward and honestly about things." With the help of a hospice worker, Mrs. Sheetz now is caring for her 88-year-old mother and running a household with her husband and three teenage children. Holly Christopher, 43, said she has cared for her mother and mother-in-law as her two sons have grown up. When her mother had a stroke and needed her care, she and her husband had been trying

to have a baby for a year and a half.

Within a few weeks of staying home to care for her mother, she became pregnant. "We have really had to look for the gifts and try to find the good stuff," Ms. Christopher said. "When you're showering your mom ... shaving her legs ... when you're doing all that, you have to figure out the blessings." Managing long-term care and addressing end-of-life issues with parents have prompted boomers to plan for their own retirements and beyond, said Barbara Friesner, a generational coach and expert on issues confronting seniors and their families who advise boomers faced with caring for their parents.

Parents of boomers didn't talk about death and illness. They didn't talk about their money or their health, the Cornell University adjunct professor said. "As baby boomers, we're more than happy to talk about pretty much everything," she said. "We will have set up the living will, the health care proxy, knowing what to do just because we've gone through this with our parents. I'm more optimistic about what's going to happen with us." During her "generational coaching" sessions over the phone, clients raise the same issues over and over, Ms. Friesner said. Many stem from a lack of planning. "So often it's just, 'it's our mother,' we just move them in," she said.

"We don't really think in terms of what that's really going to mean." E-mail Emily Berry at eberry@timesfreepress.com ON THE WEB: Help for care-givers: -- AARP

www.aarp.org/families/caregiving -- U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services
Women's Health Services

<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

[ov/wwd/caregiving.cfm](http://www.wwd/caregiving.cfm) -- U.S. Administration
on Aging Caregiver's Resource Room

<http://www.aoa.gov>

[ov/prof/aoaprogram/caregiver/caregiver.asp](http://www.aoa.gov/prof/aoaprogram/caregiver/caregiver.asp)