

## Are You Ready to Parent Your Parents?

Quick: can you answer the following: Do your parents have a will? Who will care for them if they become ill or incapacitated? How will you and your siblings share in that responsibility?

Jim Comer, author of *When Roles Reverse: A Guide to Parenting Your Parents* (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2006, \$17.95), says that knowing the answers to questions like this can save families time, heartache and, perhaps most importantly, money they don't have to waste.

"This book could save you \$10,000, or much more," Comer said at a recent presentation to a packed audience at St. Edward's University in Austin. "But what it can save you in time and energy in finding the answers to your questions is priceless."

In fact, there is an entire section of fifty questions Comer implores his readers not to ignore; questions like: can you legally take action on your parents' behalf in case of emergency? Are you authorized to make decisions on their behalf if they cannot? Do you have access to their medical and financial information to assist in transactions they are no longer capable of negotiating? Comer's book includes interviews with Elder Law attorneys to help readers negotiate the maze of legal cans and can'ts.

Full of humor and touching personal stories, Comer has left no bases uncovered in *When Roles Reverse*. In it, readers will find information on how to apply for Medicaid and how to negotiate the red tape bureaucracy of the Veterans' Administration. In preparing this guide, Comer interviewed bereavement counselors, geriatric and hospice care managers, funeral home directors, and managers of retirement homes, assisted living facilities, and nursing homes to help you decide which option will be best in your parents' situation, and which will be most affordable. He also consulted with insurance specialists on long-term care and burial policies, the latter of which can be an especially dicey topic to broach with one's parents.

Perhaps one of the most interesting sections is the question-and-answer session with the bereavement counselor. After all, it is those who remain who must carry out a parent's final wishes (assuming they even know what they are), and who must often make decisions even in the midst of grief. Comer's point is driven home again and again: it is better to have as many decisions taken care of as possible before the need actually arises.

Comer's personal experience in caring for his own parents over the last eleven years is considerable (his mother, 94, is a lively resident of a nursing home in Georgetown; his father passed away last year two months shy of his 96th birthday). Still, he acknowledges that, by virtue of being his parents' only living child (his only brother died at 23), there are some situations he hasn't encountered.

"I don't have to deal with siblings in coordinating my parents' care," Comer admits. "But certainly many will have to." Nor did he have the added burden of trying to juggle a career, a spouse, and growing children of his own when he became responsible for his parents' care literally overnight. Knowing that many of his readers will face just such concerns, Comer has included a section in which he interviewed several parent care-givers who gave him the benefit of their insights and experience.

In easy-to-read style, Comer packs a tremendous amount of information in just over 300 pages. He has compiled sections of price comparisons for various types of care, services, and products. The fourth section of the book contains lists, often complete with website addresses, of advocacy agencies for senior citizens, insurance departments and agencies on aging listed state by state, and health insurance assistance programs. *When Roles Reverse* is a virtual trip to the library, the equivalent of hours of googling at your fingertips. It cannot be stressed enough: this book should be in every adult child's library! For most, it isn't a matter of if you'll need the information in this book, only a matter of when. According to recent research, long-term care is starting to rival childcare as a problem affecting the business focus of American employees.

As Comer's experience and that of those he interviewed tells us, it is far better to be an educated consumer of care for your parents than one who is forced into making choices that may be neither the best nor the most cost-effective simply because they must be made immediately.

Written as personably as one of Comer's presentations to live audiences (he is a speech and communications consultant by trade), each chapter ends with one of "Comer's Commandments." Anyone who has seen Comer in action can hear his expressive voice ringing through his words. As celebrated writer Liz Carpenter puts it, "Jim Comer is a good-natured guide who brings significant tips on facing the challenges of parental care and enjoying the process." For those not fortunate enough to hear him speak in person, Jim has made three video clips from his presentations available on his website, [www.whenrolesreverse.com](http://www.whenrolesreverse.com).

While caring for one's parents may be the most difficult job one will ever have to do, Comer stresses that it can also be the most rewarding. All it takes is remembering that each day your parents are still with you is another opportunity to draw closer to them. To read an excerpt from *When Roles Reverse*, go to <http://www.texas-ec.org/publications/documents/tcp0107.pdf>.

## About the Author

Melissa Lea Leedom holds degrees in English and Professional Writing from Troy State University at Dothan, Alabama, and Towson University in Maryland. She is a member of American Christian Fiction Writers and the San Gabriel Writers' League. A part-time developmental math instructor at Central Texas College in Killeen, she makes her home in the suburban Austin area.

In addition to promoting her own novel, *To Forgive, Divine*, and working on its sequel, Ms. Leedom provides a comprehensive marketing service that can send your press release to specifically targeted states or to newspapers throughout the United States, Canada, the UK, and English-language publications throughout the world. Visit <http://www.forgive490.com/> to view the clients whose books and products she has helped to market and read the press releases she has written for them. For more information, please write to Melissa at [prpersonforbooks@yahoo.com](mailto:prpersonforbooks@yahoo.com).

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