

“The oak fought the wind and was broken; the willow bent when it must and survived.” – Robert Jordan, The Fires of Heaven

Deep inside the human spirit lies the necessary ingredients for resilience – in life, relationships, finances, work, and business. The broad spectrum of emotions encased in the human spirit can be embraced, if not celebrated, as we learn how to become resilient. No one would choose to endure the challenges that test the human capacity for burden; however, we must view them as opportunities to work through problems in such a way that they will enhance us rather than reduce us.

I recently had an opportunity to witness resilience, as well as the lack of it, as a literal storm played out in my life. As the winds blew fiercely in the wee hours of the morning several weeks ago, a large tree, over 100 years old and 125 feet tall, succumbed to the raging forces and crashed down on my barn, killing my sweet rooster, but sparing the twenty-four hens that lived inside. With a gaping hole where the roof once covered the now-traumatized hens, I scrambled to protect them until I could provide suitable temporary housing. That night, as it grew dark and I grew increasingly concerned about their safety, I felt so helpless in protecting them from predators. I kept going to the window throughout the night to check on them and after several hours, it occurred to me that for the first time in their lives, they were able to experience the incredible beauty of the night sky aglow with the light of the moon and a massive display of starlight. I would like to imagine that they were able to appreciate the wonder of it in the way that we do. I'll never know for sure, but the storm that caused such destruction and chaos actually provided opportunity for them to see something magnificent. Thankfully, they remained unharmed through the night. I was able to set them up in another small building where they'll remain until the new barn is built. They were certainly traumatized and stopped laying eggs for more than a week, but they have demonstrated tremendous resilience and have gradually resumed production.

The assisted living industry has taken a massive hit as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sadly, we have witnessed loss of precious lives, as well as the loss of our way of life. As a people, we have been changed forever, but we have not been reduced by this virus. We continue to see examples of resilience all around us, proving that we are enhanced by the challenges rather than having allowed them to diminish us. We have gained an appreciation for things that may have been taken for granted, we have witnessed selfless acts of humanity as we have filled in for family members who could visit only through closed windows or by technology, and we have provided support for residents, staff, and family members through the most difficult of times. The acts of kindness, both great and small, have elevated humanity in a way that we could never have anticipated and the efforts of all in providing the best care possible for residents have been nothing short of heroic.

We at Mass-ALA are honored to be a part of that spectrum of care as members of a synergistic web of support to stabilize and enhance the services and care provided to all involved in assisted living. We will continue to offer education and training opportunities to assisted living staff and to provide information on how to best care for ourselves and each other, as well. At our education events during the pandemic, we aim to devote part of each training to self-care, recognizing the importance of supporting those who provide care and support to residents. As we are all aware, battle fatigue is real and the pandemic has pushed many people to a point where the difficulties become too challenging to manage without additional support.

Our calendar of events includes the following:

- Provider Relief Fund Webinar, March 31
- Nurses and Clinical Coordinators Training – April 14
- Regulations Training – June (date to be determined)
- Annual Conference – September 29 and 30
- Dementia Training – November 9
- Boot Camps – April 8, June 9, August 12, December 15
- Regional Connections Meetings
- May 25 (Region 9 – South Shore & Region 10 – Cape and Islands)
- July 13 (Region 1 – Far Western Massachusetts (Lenox, Pittsfield, etc) & Region 2 – Western Massachusetts (Springfield, Longmeadow)
- October 12 (Region 3 – Central Mass – (Worcester, Leominster, etc.) Region 4 – MetroWest – (Framingham, Sudbury, etc.)

We will continue to offer workshops that address self-care and ways to minimize the stress associated with providing care to the most vulnerable among us during the most difficult of times. Please check back on the Mass-ALA website often for additional information about upcoming virtual events that are currently being scheduled.

As we conduct our educational events throughout 2021, please feel free to reach out to me at lcashman@mass-ala.org with any thoughts or suggestions on how we might better meet your current and future training and education needs.

Wishing you boundless opportunities for growth, joy, and celebration of life and resilience.