Daughterhood The Podcast

Episode 17: A Conversation with Leeza Gibbons

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SPEAKERS
Rosanne, Leeza, Whole Care Network

RESOURCES MENTIONED

Five Wishes https://fivewishes.org/

Leeza's Care Connection https://leezascareconnection.org/

Whole Care Network

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Rosanne 00:42
Hello, and welcome to Daughterhood the podcast. I am your host Rosanne Corcoran, Daughterhood circle leader and primary caregiver. Daughterhood is the creation of Anne Tumlinson who has worked on the frontlines in the healthcare field for many years and has seen the challenges caregivers face. Our mission is to support and build confidence in caregivers who are managing their parents care. Daughterhood is what happens when we put our lives on hold to take care of our parents. Our podcast goal is to bring you some insight into navigating the healthcare system, resources for you as a caregiver as well as for you as a person, and help you know that you don't have to endure this on your own. Join me in Daughterhood. You may know Leeza Gibbons as an interviewer and Emmy winning talk show host, or maybe as a best selling author, entrepreneur, philanthropist, or even from her own turn in pop culture on Dancing with the Stars and as the winner of the Celebrity Apprentice. Outside of

the public eye, Leeza was thrust into the world of Alzheimer's when her mother Jean was diagnosed in 1999. Throughout her journey, she saw the many challenges of caregiving and the importance of caregivers taking care of themselves. She shared those insights in her book Take Your Oxygen First, Protecting Your Health and Happiness While Caring for a Loved One with Memory Loss. She also created Leeza's Care Connection, a non-profit organization whose goal is to help care for all family caregivers by providing support groups, educational workshops, and wellness activities to help create better outcomes for everyone - the person being cared for as well as the caregivers. I was lucky enough to benefit from Leeza's care connection and honestly from Leeza herself when I participated in one of her groups. To experience her positivity and fierce optimism was truly a gift. I hope you enjoy listening to this as much as I enjoyed the opportunity to interview her. When I was thinking about what I was going to ask you. I wondered if it was painful for you. When you talk about your mother. I mean, obviously you had great love and admiration for her. Is it hard for you to go to that place to talk about her again? Or is it an honoring?

Leeza 02:42
It is honoring Rosanne, it's difficult. And it's healing at the same time. Because you know, none of us have a direct path from, you know, the beginning to the end, we have all of those trips, we took down rabbit holes and all those climbs, we took up victorious mountains. And all those times when life kicked us to the curb. And that's important to honor in any of our experiences. So when I look at my mother and her life beyond her physical presence is still a very big influence on me. And so I think about that, when I talk about her, she didn't hide, you know, when things become painful and and certainly in my immediate experience, we want to, we want to put that pain to bed, we want to soothe it, we want to ignore it, we want to pacify it, we don't want to feel it and look at it. But my mother was really great at accepting her own vulnerabilities at looking at the parts of her life that weren't so pretty. And I tried to learn from that. And so I think that's one of her bigger picture legacies. And sure if you asked my little sister, my older brother, they have different gifts from her. I've never you know, as I have three children like she had three children, and I look at that question when people say well, you know, come on, there's got to be one that's, that's your favorite. It's you parent them each so differently, and they need different things at different times and you make different mistakes, I make the same mistakes I think with with all three of them and most of the time I make unique mistakes. Like I always appreciated that about my mother. So to answer your question, yes, it hurts, but it also helps and I tend to focus more on the helping part of it.

Rosanne 04:33
I can see that, and I can see it in, your mother seemed like a force of nature in that, I mean the fact that she even said to you go out and talk about it, go out and talk about it, and this is what I want and this is what I want you to do and this is how I want you to care for me. That was a gift. Leeza that was such a gift.

Leeza 04:53
It was Thank you It was and you know what it was also an extension of her intuitive mothering. Because I am the middle child, I'm used to trying to figure things out or negotiate between both sides and come to some consensus and all those things that a lot of middle borns may be able to relate to. My mother instinctively knew that the way for me to cope was to have a project, I think she may have hoped that I would turn that project into something beyond myself, but I really believed that she knew that she gave me a mission, and that that's when I was most comfortable. And she gave me marching

orders. So you know, when I knew what the goal was, I could get busy, and I wouldn't have time to sit in my pity, pity and sense of helplessness.

Rosanne 05:44
She knew what your strength was.

Leeza 05:45
She did. And we each, I'm sure that people who listen to your show and people in your groups all identify with the reality that that we all deal with pain in our individual ways. And that was always my way of I'll just get over busy, and I'll spin faster. And my, my sister got quieter and got smaller, and my brother got more into denial. So part of what my mother's ongoing lessons and what I think dementia and chronic illness in general teaches us is to look at our family members and our partners and our friends and fellow warriors that we all have different limits. And they come to us at different times. And we we tend to get antsy and anxious about why don't, why don't you get it? And why can't you show up the way I'm showing up and all of those frustrations. And the reality is we just we can't and for me the ability to soften. And instead of seeing resentment, for example, towards the sibling or someone else to see that that was just a different, a different limit and to not expect those people to react and respond in the way that I would or that I would find most appropriate.

Rosanne 07:03
Right. Absolutely. I think I saw in the take your oxygen first book, if you're a problem solver, especially when it comes to dementia, it's very difficult, because there's you can't solve the problem,

Leeza 07:15
And it's not going to get better. And that's for all of us goldstar people, problem solver, people, that's probably the first hurdle that you jump initially, and you keep jumping and keep jumping, because you don't quite ever clear it, which is not to say that you don't have high expectations that you don't have hope that you don't have faith all of which are not only wildly appropriate, but immensely necessary along the journey. You know, look, as you know, I think you and I have shared you know, we both love quotes. And I've told you that one of my favorite quotes is, is Harper Lee saying that real courage is when you know your licked, before you begin, but you begin anyway. And you see it through no matter what.

Rosanne 08:00
Yes.

Leeza 08:01
So, you know, in many ways, we're all lived from birth, right? Because we're going to, we're not going to win if winning means, you know, eternal life in the physical sense, but it takes courage to see it through. And I think that in our culture, we were so focused on winning, and we're so focused on things that are shiny, and, and firm, and new and young, and all of that we don't really know how to age. And so when people get sick, and when we get old, and all the other things that stop us in our tracks for a minute, you know, we may start complaining about it and feeling badly about it. But look, if we don't buckle ourselves into the driver's seat of our lives, then we can't really complain when we don't get to where we want to go. So as it relates to caregiving, you know, that driver's seat business doesn't mean we get to, to call all the shots. But it does mean that we have a view on the journey that our care receiver doesn't have. You know, our view through the windshield, our optics on the road forward are very

different than the person for whom we are we are caring, and and we can buckle into that problem solver, position and just seek different solutions. You know, Rosanne, we've talked about COVID and where we are in our experience with this pandemic. I think that going through COVID forces us to zoom in from 30,000 feet where we usually view our lives, you know, we now have to go in for the close up. Whether you're a caregiver or not. close ups are hard, they show the sharp details. They show the lines, the wrinkles, the the enlarged pores, the discoloration, whatever, it shows the things we may not want to see. And, you know, that's that's the point. In social media you know, we have all these platforms where we're more than happy to touch up the blur and blur the things that we don't want to show to the world. You know, we can face tune or whatever we want to make things more to our satisfaction, it's less satisfying to look at them in our real lives and say, should we blur the lines? Should we touch this up and make it a less harsh part of my life? Can I forgive myself? more easily? Can I accommodate something differently? And I think that's been a very beautiful sidebar that we've been forced to look at this close up and shed our feelings about what's wrong, and focus on what can we do.

Rosanne 10:30
Agreed. And I think also that people get caught up in isn't this the most wonderful soul fulfilling journey that you could be on? And, and there are people that are struggling through caregiving, and it makes it feel like they're wrong. It makes it, in in those terms, they're wrong. I'm wrong, because I don't feel that way. Because I'm drowning. I'm drowning in grief, and I'm drowning and exhaustion, and I'm drowning in witnessing everything. And then you see the the touched up version of people that say, Isn't this great? And you think, God, well, I must be the worst person in the world because I'm drowning. And I don't feel this way and

Leeza 11:12
And you feel horrible about about yourself. And the more horrible we feel about ourselves, the less we're able to show up for ourselves and others. But you know, when you look at it, Rosanne like emotional pain versus physical pain. So when our bodies get cut, when we're wounded, our physical body sends all the white blood cells to the location of that hurt to fix the cut, right?

Rosanne 11:33
Yes.

Leeza 11:34
So it's like an APB. So when we think about the emotional wounding, of caregiving, all of our emotions get sent to support that hurt. And so that means when we are in grief, as you say, you know, we can't always access those other functions we're on overload. We can't feel or even see isn't this great. We don't see a higher purpose, we don't see that flip side to where we are, because because our emotional body doesn't allow it. It's not like you don't want to or you're incapable, but in that overload in that APB, all alert moment, your emotional experience has come to support the wound. And the wound means you need to keep looking at it and keep tending to it.

Rosanne 12:21
That's yeah, that's beautiful you're right. And I think that's the piece that people miss. And I can sit here and say, even in the midst of this, even in the midst of all of this, I still would take care of my mother again, it's not that's not the issue. The issue is it's an and. It's not a but it's an and.

Leeza 12:39

Mm hmm.

Rosanne 12:40
This is hard. And I love my mother.

Leeza 12:42
Right? And and you love your mother. And those two things coexist.

Rosanne 12:48
Absolutely.

Leeza 12:50
That's exactly right. But you know, we talk about and you've discussed, I'm sure on your Daughterhood podcast with people who are experts or or people who are walking this experience, you know, our check engine light is on, it's chronically on, when you're when you're caring. So that's where we are, we need help. And it's counterintuitive, we're not most of us are not our own mechanics, right? When our when our car light goes on, we go to a specialist, you know, who has the knowledge that you don't, who sees the things that you don't. And that's one of the reasons why we created our HUGS Program, at Leeza's Care Connection, is to connect newbies or lost souls, or warriors who hadn't yet found their way to stand up straight to someone who has walked that path before not a doctor, not a clinician, it could be that person but the value of HUGS is this is a person who has stood where you stand. And so that's the specialist. That's the person that speaks your language. That's the person that knows, of course, you can't feel gratitude right now. But let's talk about that and recognize that you'll get you'll get there. And HUG stands for Helping You Grow Strong. And these are the real jewels in our crown. These are the people who have so much value that typically when a loved one dies, or when their caregiving experience transitions to something different, they lose their most important job, their most important identity. And so we wanted to harness that fairy dust and redirect it to people that can best use it. So, that's a, a big dream of mine is how do we how do we create, and you're doing it in your work every day, how do we all kind of join hands and create access to people in whatever way makes sense? You know, a lot of people that we talk with at Leeza's Care Connection say, Well, I don't really want to go to a support group. I'm not a joiner. Right?

Rosanne 14:51
Right. Absolutely.

Leeza 14:54
It's not I didn't grow up in a family that we aired our dirty laundry.

Rosanne 14:59
Absolutely.

Leeza 15:00
That's real, isn't it?

Rosanne 15:01
Yes, it is. It absolutely is.

Leeza 15:03
And so you know, the beauty of hugs is you can, you know, connect with someone virtually on the phone and use a fake name, we don't care. It doesn't matter. You don't have to come and open, you know, slit slit your wrist and bleed out front of someone.

Rosanne 15:19
Right.

Leeza 15:20
You can just sort of go by a fake name and say really, why how can you help me? And, and the job is and the journey is a pleasure in this work is, meeting people where they are. And when we talk about my other life of interviewing celebrities, whether it's Bette Davis or heads of state,

Rosanne 15:40
Right

Leeza 15:40
That's the glory, meeting people where they are, and we can't know where they are, if we don't sense their energy and if we don't respect their limitations.

Rosanne 15:51
Correct, right. I mean, that's, that's a beautiful program, Leeza, and to match somebody up with a former one because you're getting that, they understand and nobody understands like another caregiver.

Leeza 16:02
Right? Isn't it Rosanne is it Teepa Snow or someone like Tepa, who talks about how many hours a day how much time a day we should be spending?

16:12
us?

Rosanne 16:12
It's Teepa Snow, she said, the deeper your person gets into their sickness, the less time you should spend caring. Which is shocking, yes.

Leeza 16:23
So counterintuitive.

Rosanne 16:24
How do you do that? Isn't that ridic? Don't you spend more time and she said it's just it feels counterintuitive, but you have to to save yourself.

Leeza 16:34
And spending more time is not going to fix it to quote unquote, fix it, it's not going to give you a different outcome it's going to give you the caregiver, a less good well outcome. You're not going to benefit from it, you're going to devolve and your loved one is not going to get better.

Rosanne 16:53
Right? Right.

Leeza 16:54
So it is it's that, you know, I think with people who care, we have to reset, reboot, do it again, do it again. You have to do it every day. And that's why I know if there are people listening that are new to the journey, it may for some seem, self-indulgent to think about being in a support group or another kind of gathering where you're propping each other up because you're you're focused on yourself. But the reality is, as we know, better care for caregivers translates to better outcomes for care receivers. And sometimes that's the only way to begin this journey is to say, Okay, if you can't yet do it for yourself, and do it for your loved one. It is the selfless thing to do to the focus on you.

Rosanne 17:44
Yes. And it's, it's hard in to put it all together because it is one, literally one more thing on your list. But but you have like there's no, there is no wiggle room here. You need to take the time for yourself. Because if you don't, and you go down what happens to your person?

Leeza 18:01
What happens to your person? And you know, there's a lot of science right now being done on happiness and gratitude and you and I have talked about people who have gratitude journals, and when where does that come in? And they're, you know, there's some people who feel like maybe those are empty things to what what is, there's so much pain in the world, there's so much suffering, what is a pursuit of happiness all about. But the reality is that happy people, happier caregivers, make they create better everything. It's only whenever we can be happier in our own lives, that we have the ability to turn our attention to the outside world to another person to how we can make someone else's experience better. And it's the same with gratitude, you know, you have to be able to receive and accept something helpful or something good from another person to feel gratitude. So you find that a lot of people who have a difficult time or feel badly about trying to pursue gratitude, they may be people who grew up without being able to rely on others, without being able to receive support and help from others. Maybe they reached out for love and they got neglect or they got abuse. And so for those people, it's very hard to feel gratitude. Instead, it may feel like threat or it may feel like fear. But those situations can change over time with small things like that first phone call with someone who gets you. After a while even if you've been a person for whom gratitude has been very difficult for the reasons we just talked about, over time, you may find you begin to feel grateful that someone took the call, that someone didn't judge you that someone didn't say, you know, get over it or whatever else. That someone just let you empty out for a little bit. So those, I guess what I'm trying to say is those feelings of pursuing gratitude in your life pursuing happiness in your life, that kind of works for everybody.

Rosanne 20:07
Yeah, absolutely. And it's, it's funny because we always, we had group this week and I always say it's a judgment free zone. And somebody will say something and then say, Oh, I shouldn't have said that. And I and I was no, no, no, no, no, no, this is what you're feeling, you're allowed to say it out loud. No one here is going to judge you. And it's, it's hard. There's there shame that comes into it. There's the anger that comes with it, I always call it cold spaghetti. It's like, when you put cold spaghetti in the frigerator. You can't you're not gonna pull that apart. You know what I mean?

20:40
Cuz

20:42
I

Leeza 20:43
It's so true.

Rosanne 20:45
My Italian's showing sorry. But it's, it's, it's hard. It's hard to untangle everything that goes, that goes into this.

Leeza 20:55
Well, like we said, you know, this is nobody's version of happily ever after, right? This is not what we saw for ourselves, what we would want for ourselves. This was not as a little girl, how you wanted to grow up and love your mother or your spouse. You know, when you got married, you didn't, you know, imagine there would be a time when this would be your, you know, the worst and the better or for worse, and yet, so many people are living that and feeling understandably, resentful, and grieving and angry and overwhelmed. And, and I think most of it comes from that place of feeling helpless, because you do want to make it better. And so whether you're a problem solver, goldstar person or not, we all have that desire to want to make life better for another. And and as we get deep into, especially dementia, and some other chronic illnesses to our loved one can't give us that feedback. We don't know, when it's better, we don't see any facial cues, we don't have any physical cues, verbal cues are gone. And we don't know when it's better. So in the dearth of any of that, we just have to keep kind of, you know, filling up this vessel and then pouring out from it. And that's where we kind of really need to remind ourselves that the way to make it better is to make us more present in those in those moments, just more mindful.

Rosanne 22:18
Yes. And I think also the, the stigma that goes along with disease or dementia, specifically. Nobody wants to say, my parent has dementia, because of the everything that goes with it. And then people, it's almost like, it's not contagious, but it's harder, you can't, you're not going to be able to interact the way that you typically do. But that doesn't mean it's bad. It just means it's different. And I think that that adds to it. But how do people get past that stigma, Leeza, to say it, and to put it out there so that they can receive the help.

Leeza 22:53
And this is a big lesson that my mother tried to instill in me and that all of us try to remind each other. You know, it's not like you want to wear it as a badge of honor but you don't want to retreat and go into the shadows, because anything that you don't claim or that you don't name has way more power over you. And we're all responsible as a culture as a society for creating language around this. We're getting better from our, you know, administrative levels, legislative agendas are getting better, not fast enough, and not enough, but getting better. And so, you know, I think we're taking steps in the right direction to acknowledge really where we are. I mean, look, you know, just as an aging population by 2030, those who are over 65 will outnumber the under 16's for the first time in history. We have tremendous power. Tremendous ability to reframe the way we deal with aging, disease, dementia. And so I think that we

need to own that and look at we have buying power we have, you know, there's going to be a period of time where it's all about us. And so when I said earlier, if we don't buckle ourselves into the driver's seat, we can't complain when we don't get there. So we we all have to be part of acknowledging that taking, destigmatizing, taking this out of the shadows, and in individual families this is difficult. I remember my sister and brother felt differently about things than I did. They were like, oh, don't show anyone pictures of mom from the time when she wasn't beautiful. And, and your mom oh my gosh, what a beautiful woman, Good heavens. For those of you who don't know Rosanne's mother, just what a stunning beauty.

Rosanne 24:47
Thank you Thank you.

Leeza 24:52
So figure out like, like my siblings were like, oh my gosh. We, you know and so in my work with Leeza's Care Connections there's, there's only one picture that I really have with my mom, it was the beginning stages of her disease, she was smiling and happy. And I thought she looked very beautiful. And I thought I saw strength and beauty. And my siblings didn't necessarily see that. So you know, I have to respect that. It's not that they want to stigmatize it or shame it, it's that it feels different to them. So we've got work to do. I think that, I live in California and there's a lot of, I think, very bold, brave action going on in California with, and not just here, but many places with diagnosed individuals who are tremendously effective advocates. And so if we make room at the table, for those who have the disease, to have that voice, and if we who are in a leadership position can create programs where we are empowering those voices, where we can make it less fearful, because Rosanne, I think that a part of it is, oh, I don't know what to say to someone who has Alzheimer's, I don't know how to act around that person. I don't want to offend them. I mean, there's all of that, that we don't know, when in reality, if we can normalize it, that, that begins to fall away.

Rosanne 26:15
Absolutely true. And I did interview someone with dementia, Tommy Dunne, and he said, It always amazes me that people will talk to plants and dogs and anything, but they won't talk to somebody who has dementia. And I was like, wow, you know what, Tommy, you're right. And I don't know if it's the fear? I don't know, I don't know what it is, Leeza, really.

Leeza 26:36
We don't understand it and things that we don't understand we tend to avoid. But the more we learn, first of all, there's so many hopeful things on the horizon about possible ways to delay symptoms or prevent them from from emerging in our lifetimes, even if we're like genetically on the way to getting it. So there's so many wonderful things to focus on. In the meantime, there are people who have this disease who may not decline for a decade or more and can keep their jobs and have so much to offer and can parent and we need to figure out what is the support that we can offer these people. I think we need more elder daycare at workplaces and we need more people in businesses to recognize when we come in with our loved ones who have dementia, they may act in mildly inappropriate ways if they're able to still go out but we still need to go out and live life with them. They are still a contributing member of society. We don't need to or should we assume that. And that and that's part of our problem that we've been talking about, we don't see people out with dementia.

Rosanne 27:47

Nope, nope, nope, nope, you're right. You're absolutely right. And because it's stressful, and it's stressful, because people are so uninformed. But then how do you inform them? When nobody is going out, it's it's like it's being on that hamster wheel of well, how do we fix this? Well, I don't know we have to pull this out.

Leeza 28:04
And neighborhoods are doing it, I think one at a time, like when you hear of the store manager at a grocery store that will allow you to come in will accommodate you to come in with your diagnosed loved one and mom or dad maybe taking things off the shelf that you're not really going to pay for because you don't need them.

Rosanne 28:24
Right

Leeza 28:24
But you've got to go shopping. And so you know, a neighborhood store manager that knows when you come in with mom, there'll be one shopping cart that we'll just reshelve will restock that. And that way the mom or dad gets the dignity of helping, it's it's and that's one person at a time, the bank teller. You know, at Leeza's Care Connection, we became certified as trainers for the virtual dementia tour. And we found so much value in allowing people to go through an experience where they could see what it felt like to have dementia, macular degeneration and the Arthritis the, all the all the things that come along with with dementia, the scrambled sounds and the noises and the startling. And when people take the tour they emerge, seeing others differently. And so when you see someone shuffling or with that darting glance and wringing their hands in a store, rather than not looking at them and having those blinders, maybe that's a person who's confused and to ask that person, hey, I'm going to the checkout line are you headed there too, or just seeing. Just having different optics on people and being able to recognize that it's not something to be afraid of. It's someone to assist.

Rosanne 29:47
Right? And, and when you think about I mean, Leeza I know this happens to me all the time. You say yeah, my mother has dementia. Oh, my aunt had dementia or my my husband's cousin had dementia like, somebody knows somebody that has dementia. So it's not that it's so foreign, that it's a place that you can't even access the thought of -Oh, God, I don't know, I've never heard of that before. It's not that. Everybody knows somebody that has this. So there should be a way, and I hate shoulds, there, there must be a way to incorporate everybody onto that page of how can we help? How can we make this more mainstream and get it out of the shadows of being this awful, awful stigma.

Leeza 30:29
But I think that's what you're, I think that's what you're doing. And I think it's community, and we are increasing our community, and with that comes the power to change and to heal. And all the steps that we that we desire. You know, it's like Rumi said, what you are seeking is already seeking you. And and I do believe that, and I think we're, I think we're getting there. But, but very few diseases have a depletion factor as exhaustive as dementia. You know, physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially. You know, it, it causes the unraveling at such a hyper state. That it's almost like I think that that for some of us in our caregiving experience, I got this way that I thought, well, if I say it out loud, if I if I really admit to how difficult this looks and feels and seems how deep the hole is, then then I'm giving a

I'm giving a sort of voice to it. I don't want to give voice to it. But in fact, the opposite is true. It's only when we give voice to it that we can seek that that light.

Rosanne 31:42
Yes. Yes. And and it's, you know, when you when you see in different diseases, there is that, that back and forth that you have with whoever is sick. And with dementia, you don't have that,

Leeza 31:55
Right.

Rosanne 31:55
So you don't have the ability to be boy, this is tough is this tough? How you doing? You know, like, or whatever, just to talk, in real terms, you don't have that. And I think that adds to that stress and that sadness.

Leeza 32:09
It does because we're hardwired to connect. And that's why I'm so proud of its Leeza's Care Connection. And we look at what kind of impact that has with your work with my work. We often survey our attendees and our guests, and 100% of them say they feel more connected. And, and 97% say they learn better coping strategies. Now that doesn't mean 0% of them said it fixed my problem. 0% of them said it changed the path of my loved ones illness.

Rosanne 32:46
No.

Leeza 32:48
But what we can change, you know, we're well aware of that statistic that a high percentage of the time caregivers will pass away before the ones for whom they are giving care. Well, that's just a horrible, unacceptable reality. Now we, we right now can't change Alzheimers, for example, a path the path of a lot of these terminal chronic illnesses, but we can change the wellness of the people who who are caring, and that's the seat at the table. We don't have to accept that you need to erase 10 years off your life. What? When I first learned that ten years ago, I thought, why is everybody okay with this? That we programmed our culture to believe that okay, well, you know, you got a sucky hand, life dealt you this this hand, the only way to play it is to know that you give up 10 years of your life and you better feel good with that. Because, you know, that's what a good daughter does. That's what a loving husband does. Well no. There is nothing Okay, about that. And we can change that. And that is getting better. So, you know, I think when we look at focusing on where is the hope in the horizon, that's the hope and, and, and I really, I, I get so energized by people that do what you do, and by just connecting with others who are even interested in the experience.

Rosanne 34:14
Well Leeza, thank you. And back at you. The connection part is that part and you're so right. And it's almost like, well it's your mother, of course you're gonna do that.

Leeza 34:24
Yeah.

Rosanne 34:25
And it's like, Oh, hold on here. Wait, how did this happen? And I don't know if it's one of those things where as we, as we get to that point, and then you get in it and you're in caregiving, and you're like, hold on a second. This is how this works? I didn't sign up for this.

Leeza 34:43
Right.

Rosanne 34:43
How are we changing this? And you're doing that every day. Your Care Connection is, the people that you have there, your staff is fantastic, and the programs that you run are fantastic. And it's so energizing and I know that I felt that way. I did the journaling class with you, which was spectacular and life giving. And I would always, it didn't matter what was happening, I would leave there and feel like I had an infusion of oxygen. And, and I thank you for that. Because that was, it was very, you know, this has been a very hard year with the pandemic and not leaving the house and not having help in and it's, it's hard and it's dark. And any place that you can get that oxygen from is is wonderful, but it's it's life sustaining. And it makes you feel like you're a person again, you're not just a caregiver, you are an actual living breathing person, and you matter, and your health matters.

Leeza 35:47
And those are lovely, lovely reminders, though, because they are there are days when it's harder for us to get to that reality. Right?

Rosanne 35:55
Yes.

Leeza 35:57
And so to people that, that are listening, and I know you deal with this often where people think I don't have time to go to, I don't have energy to call anyone, I, I don't I don't want anyone to talk to me to touch me to say hello, I just don't want I don't want that. And those are the times when we have to really just bear down on the reality that we know of what's good for us. And so I always say that your your fear is is just your courage kind of knocking on the door, right? Or calling on the phone, you've got to answer the line. But but if your courage is calling, you do have to pick up the phone. So if we can remember that, Oh, I'm feeling fearful, I'm feeling worthless. What does that mean? That means that the antidote to that is somewhere on the other side of the phone or a keyboard, or a support group or something that that is going to help you. One of my dreams, when we started Leeza's Care Connection was to move towards a culture that people in AA for example, know very well. A culture where no matter where you are in the world, someone knows you immediately by that experience, and where you can't wait to raise your hand. My name is Leeza and I'm a caregiver. And then that's all you need. And then you're off and running. So So I think we will, we will get there where we self identify, which I know is the big, you know, bugaboo of this disease course we don't, we don't self identify. But Gosh, can't we? Can't we place where we're able to put on that jacket. And, you know, when I was a young girl, we had this talent show at school, and I didn't have a talent. And so my mother, she could see, she knew that I couldn't dance and couldn't sing and wasn't an artist and couldn't crochet or hula hoops. She knew I really had no talent. But my mother said to me, okay, you do have a talent, tell your story. Tell your story. And the label of being a storyteller not only changed my career, but it changed the way I look at caregiving and my optics on everything really. If we can take those labels, and say, great, whatever it is,

you need to call yourself, put that jacket on, if we can make caregiving as noble as it is, and as inclusive as it is. And if we can, what I call kind of pink up the dementia movement, the way breast cancer, you know, fantastic. You know, I don't have anyone in my life with breast cancer, I don't have it, but I sure participate every year. I get involved in the walks and I wear the ribbons, and I do the fundraisers, that's where we need to get to with our seat. We can get to that place and that's what inspires me every day.

Rosanne 38:55
Agreed. Agreed. All of it.

Leeza 38:59
Let's beat that drum together. Right?

Rosanne 39:01
I'm in, I am in

Leeza 39:03
I know you are.

Rosanne 39:03
I will hold the drum, I will give you a drumstick, I will do whatever you want.

Leeza 39:08
Which by the way is you know, one of the programs we do and that we continue to do through our virtual expression is drum circles. It's fascinating to look at we've talked today about sometimes you don't have words, sometimes even if you do have the words, you don't want to say them. Sometimes you're so mad that you don't want to just scream at another person. Well, all of that comes out in a drum circle. There's this innate primal experience of just being in a group where you're, you're all just beating a drum together and it requires no talent. It just requires connecting to this kind of kinetic energy that's deep down inside you and there's, there is that, that primal release. So I love drum circles and I know some people feel like oh, I don't know people are going to be looking at me. And then you go to a drum circle and it's like, no one's looking at you they're into their own thing.

Rosanne 39:15
Oh yeah. They're banging out their own rage. They're not looking at you.

Leeza 40:03
That's right they're banging out their own rage.

Rosanne 40:06
Oh, my goodness, oh, that's great. That's wonderful. I'm gonna have to look that up Leeza.

Leeza 40:10
And it's really it's you know, so when we look at the three things that we do is focus on education, important, empowerment, really important, and energy and the energy piece feeds the other two. Because, you know, dementia is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And we have to look at how do we sustain the caregivers energy so they can continue to stay on course, and that we feed the body, mind, soul

and spirit in ways that allow it to come back against the odds. We started out by saying about you know, courage is, you know, when you know, that you're doomed from the get go, but you see it through anyway. So we have to continue to offer the things that you know, and maybe laughter yoga works for one person and not for another, maybe an improv class or stress management class works for one and not another. But that's why we have different offerings at different times. And you may not need, you know, a line dancing class or a chair exercise class today, but you might need it later. And, you know, when when we're we all know that when we're ready to receive messages, the messenger appears, and all of us are messengers for somebody else. So so if there's anybody listening, thinking, well, who am I to say this? Who am I to offer support? Who am I to speak up in a group? Whatever it is, you are the right person for somebody at this time. So to diminish our individual lights by thinking we don't know enough. Or we don't have it right. Or we're not articulate enough. Or we're shy. Or whatever. Your message, someone is waiting for your message. You are the answer for someone on this on this trip.

Rosanne 41:48
Yes, you're right. And you have said that you who don't know who you're going to touch, when when you tell your story, you don't know.

Leeza 41:55
Or even when you just smile at somebody.

Rosanne 41:57
Yes.

Leeza 41:58
This whole business of being interconnected is part of the answer to how do we, how do we destigmatize. You know, we, we just, we just begin, we just begin. And maybe we don't have a master plan. And so many of us and you know, that come from a business world, or even if you come from a world where the business is running your household, you know, you you have to have strategies, right? Even even if it's like, how do I get dinner on the table tonight, and make sure that mom gets a bath, and blah, blah, blah. So we're all about strategies. If we see what our what our role is, in this bigger strategy, we just have to know that every, every time we pay it forward, or allow someone a safe place to witness their lives, that is part of the master plan. That is part of the strategic plan of how we change it.

Rosanne 42:47
Right. Now, I know your father had a heart attack, is he doing better?

Leeza 42:51
Dad is doing better? Yes, thank you. What a what a process that was. And I continue to learn so much about myself within our family structure, and we look at what are the roles that we each have? What do we uniquely have to offer? And, and I, I really respect the people whose role it is to manage and organize with staff. To or to write checks or to pay the bills or to pick up the dry cleaning and water the grass while everyone's at the hospital. I mean, there's there's a lot of roles and they're all really important. And and they don't all the biggest merit doesn't come from the ones who sit at the bedside necessarily and that's a big part of the grief. We've got the blaming the shaming, re-wounding of childhood injuries and our birth order. And you know, all of those things come falling out. So yes, with

with my mom's Alzheimer's and with my dad's heart disease, and ultimately bypass, all those things happen. And I find that with each step forward, there's more clarity, and more gentleness and more tenderness with with myself and and with others. They may tell you something different. They may say Leeza? Yeah no, don't call her because she'll start lecturing me right away. Don't call her she'll get right in the minute. I try to realize that not everybody is helped by having a plan of attack. Like I'm going to jump into a plan.

Rosanne 44:19
Right absolutely.

Leeza 44:21
People don't want to hear your plan. So just okay.

Rosanne 44:24
Right. Okay, well, that's it. Alright, I'll do this, this, this and this. Well, and you're, you know, listen, you're you're so you have a plan, and you're so optimistic in going forward and looking at things and thinking I can do this. And that's a gift.

Leeza 44:40
It's Yes, thank you. It is a gift I came. I arrived that way. But I also think that for people who roll their eyes at it, and I know there are a lot, optimism is a mental competence. And it is a skill that we can develop. It is an advantage because when you're optimistic, your brain goes into a configuration that allows you to access solutions faster. So if you're an optimist, this is just the science, you can connect to the, to the answers that are already within you. It just gets some things out of the way. So, you know, it's not that you have to be a, you know, a glass half full person. But I always find that I like to look at the glass and say, You know what, that's my glass. I own that glass. It's mine. So if it's empty, I'm going to fill it back up. And it's not that I always see it half full. Sometimes it is just flat out parched and empty. But it's my glass. So I own the glass. I own the work to fill the glass back up. And you don't have to be an optimist to do that.

Rosanne 45:50
Right. Right. No, agreed. And, and it it, it strikes me because when you were on the Apprentice, you knew going in that they were already counting you out.

Leeza 46:02
Yeah.

Rosanne 46:03
You knew that those girls had already targeted you to be like, nah she's out. She'll be first out.

Leeza 46:09
Pushover.

Rosanne 46:10
Yeah, yeah. And then and you showed them most fundraiser money woman there at the end. And that was a tough season Leeza. That was you had to housewives on that season.

Leeza 46:23
It was it when my husband is the reason I did the show. Because I said, you know, having done Dancing with the Stars, which was like, you know, I can't dance. I just said, Okay, these reality shows this is not for me, like I and I don't like to have confrontation, I don't like to scream and yell, it's not comfortable for me. I grew up a good girl in the South, I value that. And I said to my husband, you know, I'm, I'm, I have a PhD in conflict avoidance. Like, I'm very good at it. And that's not what happens on the show.

Rosanne 46:55
Right.

Leeza 46:56
He said the bigger thing, Leeza is two things. You're good at business and this is a business opportunity. And he said, Is this really what you want to show your kids that your burning desire, you've walked away from an opportunity to create the thing you care about most? And I knew I was doomed from the get go you know? Wow, he just used my stuff right at me.

Rosanne 47:18
Yup.

Leeza 47:18
But I think that piece is a, is an element that we can all keep in mind. I have what I call my theory of crap, inevitability. And when you look at it, CRAP, what does it stand for it's everywhere, it's in your job, it's in your life, it's in your caregiving. It's criticism, resistance, antagonism, and pressure. So if we focus on the craft, we're going to get more crap. You know, we all know that what you focus on is what you get. So recognizing that it's out there, and there's a lot of it. That's what I did on Apprentice is okay, there's this drama, there's this crap out there, I need to stay in my lane and focus on my burning desire, which was bigger than the daily drama. It allowed me to cut the crazy and drop that trauma because my desire was tell the story. We talked about the story of our lives, what is it? And I wanted to tell the story of family caregivers and Alzheimer's disease and people like my mom, and that's what got me to the end because that was more powerful than the sabotaging and the backstabbing.

Rosanne 48:26
Yes, absolutely was. And you came off like a real person. You were a real person, because you were, you were being you.

Leeza 48:33
Well thank you for that. In the in, what choice do we have? When you get right down to it you know, when we authentically show up in life as who we are warts and all and strengthen. I'm a big one on strengthening our strengths while we encourage other people to win as well. You know, we have this weird thing that indicates if somebody else is winning, it takes something away from you. And it's so the opposite. So we strengthen our strengths help other people look great, do great succeed in what matters to them, we get more of what matters to us. And I think that's the thing about real leaders and when they talk about that business of being you know, the first to get credit and the first to take blame and the last to take credit but to give it out towards others. I think there's a lot of merit to that which is very different than being a martyr. But I think strengthening our strengths and if you take a caregiving window on that, so you know in my family, my strength was, and is, that piece of I can push the energy

forward. I can bring the parties to the table. I can do the research. I can I can figure out what we need next. And my sister's great strength and when what I really try to pull from her and learn more of is showing up, showing up, showing up. You know I can I can be the front line boots on the ground. And my brother's great strength was, you know, I can get the legal overlay and look at all our documents there were. So that was, that was that was exciting for us. Yeah, that's a powerhouse team right there, Leeza.

Rosanne 50:11
It was. And is. Yeah, you're not kidding. I mean, that's wonderful.

Leeza 50:16
For for people who are sharing this time with us, a lot of this can be made better when we as younger families and, and beyond, but if we share our wishes. And whether that's through a document, like the Five Wishes, that in very planed, conversational terms, helps you write down and share with your loved ones what you want. And it's legal in almost all of our states. So if you don't want to go through a lawyer or you don't want to do it online, you can get this Five Wishes and just write it down and share it that way. When you get to a place where you are a caregiver or you need a caregiver, there's no arguing there's no fighting. There's no, there's none of that feeling awful about each other during the process. There's just honoring the wishes.

Rosanne 51:07
You are absolutely right. And when your mother, when I read that your mother said, when it comes time when I don't know you, and it's time to place me, even if I'm making a fuss, know it's the disease and it's not me.

Leeza 51:20
Right.

Rosanne 51:21
Leeza that, I mean, that is that was a gift, that was a gift from her to you.

Leeza 51:27
A true blessing. A true blessing. And I think it came from her mother had the disease, she and her sister fought over it. There was the promise that we all talk about, I promise Mom, I'm going to take care of you at home. And then the two sisters got to a place where being safe at home was no longer an option. And the sister that made the promise couldn't live with it, couldn't live with going back on that promise. So my mother had walked through it. And when we used to visit my granny, she would say to me, honey, if this is ever me, and of course I would say Oh mom, that's never going to be you and she would push through it and say if this is ever me, and then when it was her, she kept pushing. And I I am so grateful for so many things. But that clarity, and that blessing to say, look your brother, your sister, Daddy, this is what, this is what I want you all to focus on.

Rosanne 52:20
Yeah. Truly a gift truly a gift. Now, I have to ask you about Dancing with the Stars. I'm sorry. Like I said, my mother was a ballroom dancer. And we would watch it every week. We still watch it. But I have to ask you, what is that like Leeza? You said you don't like to dance and you don't know how to dance. You did well, you were, you were good there.

Leeza 52:46
You're very sweet. Here's what I, here, what's your question? What is what?

Rosanne 52:52
What is it like to stand back there? When

Leeza 52:55
Oh it's awful.

Rosanne 52:55
When, when they're, you know, here's your package.

Leeza 52:58
Oh it's awful.

Rosanne 52:58
Okay, here's Leeza Gibbons doing the cha cha cha. And there's your package and are you sweating? Are you spray tanned? Are you just out of your mind? What's it like?

Leeza 53:07
You hit every single thing. Except I wanted to throw up. I was physically sick. You know, I grew up in front of cameras, and I'm very comfortable in that kind of setting. But this was unlike any experience I'd ever had. And, and I wrote my dancing diaries right after because I realized that I was so in my own way because to to to ballroom dance, as your beautiful mother knows and perfected, you can't control you can't always lead. You have to wait, react, respond. And wow, was that hard for me. Trust. That was hard. I didn't know I had such a problem with trusting other people who were in charge. That was tough. So I learned that I had to A, wait for the music and listen for the music. And know that when the music starts, you will remember the steps because when they announce your name, I couldn't think what I was supposed to do at all, at all. And then the music would start and something would take over. So I learned, listen for your music and your musics gonna change in life. It's going to change even through the four pitiful dances that I did on that season. And then trust that someone else is there with you and you don't have to do anything until they take a step forward and you take a step back. And that was really hard for me Rosanne, I know that sounds ridiculous.

Rosanne 54:35
No.

Leeza 54:35
But I did learn a lot throughout that experience.

Rosanne 54:38
Doesn't sound ridiculous at all because I would be, I'd be a puddle. They would just say it's time to dance and there'd be a puddle on the floor, I wouldn't even know what to do with myself. But and you had Tony, which I think he's he's tough. I mean, you know, I don't know, but I think he's tough.

Leeza 54:54

He's tough.

Rosanne 54:54
And you turned 50 when you were doing it and you had that fantastic outfit. Like Hello Leeza, you're 50, rock it sister.

Leeza 55:04
My sister said, I love how you started out dressing like a nun you said it's not appropriate to wear those hoochie outfits. And then by the time you got kicked off, you were wearing the hoochiest outfit of all.

Rosanne 55:16
I don't think it had a back. Did they have a back?

Leeza 55:18
No it didn't have much. And I just, I it was the greatest thing ever.

Rosanne 55:22
Oh my goodness, it's I thought so too I was like, Wow. Did you get to keep it? Did you take that home?

Leeza 55:27
No, no, the the costumes all belong there as, as they should. But you know, the, the experience really taught me how much I could take. And, and my kids were proud of me because the lesson was, okay, kids, what's the goal, the goal wasn't to win. The goal was to do my best.

Rosanne 55:48
Yup.

Leeza 55:49
Like mom said, Do your best, show up, you know, let go with the rest. And I had to model for them that I was able to, to let go of the rest. But it did, it did haunt me for months.

Rosanne 56:00
Did it really?

Leeza 56:01
Oh, gosh. I mean, my first dance was Strangers In The Night and to this day, I still can't listen to it at all. It's like post traumatic.

Rosanne 56:09
Makes you twitch.

Leeza 56:11
Yeah I just can't. But I love the show too. And, and I had an assistant working with me at the time and when I would get my feelings hurt, and Tony was tough, I would like leave and go to the bathroom or go to the closet because my goal was just I'm just not gonna cry. I'm not gonna cry. And that was, that was silly. And so my sweet assistant, Bobbie would kind of go and say, you know, Tony, she doesn't really do well, unless you give her positive reinforcement. And Tony said, I didn't sign her up for the this, I'm the

expert. It was just, there's a lot of learning that my old ways of coping were not going to work and I had to pivot.

Rosanne 56:51
Yup, yup. Well, and they say it's like they break you down and then by, by week, 12 they're like, this is the best thing in the world but week four, they're like crying. They're just, I'm done with this. I don't know why I signed up. I hate you. You know?

Leeza 57:05
Which the advice I got going into Celebrity Apprentice that you will pray to go home every week and then something kicks in. And then you just kind of start going on fumes and and instinct, I guess. But yeah, that the but my husband was right, the the difference was I do know business better than dance.

Rosanne 57:25
Yeah, but I'm sure you got really cool. Mom points there.

Leeza 57:29
You know what? It's funny, because I'll have to get a look back on my kids because they're obviously adults now. I know, they were, they had viewing parties and I'm sure they were, I'm sure they were both horrified and proud.

Rosanne 57:41
I would think that they would and I caught a clip of your kids talking about caregiving. And I think it was when Nathan was little. And he said, You have to show up, make it count, show up, but you have to make it count. And it, and that sounds like really great advice number one, but it sounds like that was a very good example, the example that you have set through all of this is allowing your kids to then show up and make a count.

Leeza 58:09
I hope so that's that's and that is my, I got chill bumps when you said that because that's my mother's legacy. And we we only get to stay here for a little while. Right?

Rosanne 58:19
Yes.

Leeza 58:21
But but our impact, which is not really ours to judge or grade or observe how big it is, how little it is, how meaningful it is our impact our soul print, is is the thing that that lives on. And think about the things that inspire you and encourage you and propel you forward or telling you not to do something that doesn't feel right to you. Think about your Jiminy Cricket, who is that? Those voices in our head that we've created for our own existence all came from someone and and we are that voice for someone. So that's that's the thing about Alzheimer's. We watch people disappear and we think where are they? And is mom still in there, is my husband still who he was. And anybody who experiences it knows this kiss from the angels when there's that that glimmer of who they were who they are. And sometimes it's music that'll bring it out. It's a laugh, it's the smell of perfume, it's the stuffing at Thanksgiving and we have that kiss from the angels. And those are important reminders that your loved one is still that

person, their brain can't access that part of it right now. It's all gunked up with those plaques and tangles or whatever else we don't understand but that person is still in there.

Rosanne 59:37
A big thank you to Leeza Gibbons for being my guest today, and for her positivity, her compassion and her unyielding commitment to help all caregivers. Everything we spoke about today will be listed in the show notes at Daughterhood.org under the podcast section. And if you would like to know more about the programs that are offered at Leeza's Care Connection, check out her website leezascareconnection.org You can also find us on the Whole Care Network, as well as on iTunes, Spotify, Google podcasts, and really all the podcast platforms. We are also on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at Daughterhood the podcast. Feel free to leave me a message and let me know what issues you may be facing and we'd like to hear more about or even if you just want to say hi, I'd love to hear from you. A very special thank you to Susan Rowe for our theme music, the instrumental version of her beautiful song Mamas Eyes from her album Lessons In Love that you can find on the iTunes Store. I hope you found what you were looking for today, information, inspiration, or even just a little company. This is Rosanne Corcoran. I hope you'll join me next time in Daughterhood.