

# FEARLESS CAREGIVER

Gary Barg has dedicated his life to advocating for the needs of the nation's 67 million family caregivers



**Steve Dorfman**  
Boomer Banter

Gary Barg never expected, nor planned, to become one of the nation's most prominent advocates for tens of millions of people – not to mention, the publisher of a successful and important magazine that furthers the cause. Like so often is the case in real life, he says, “It just kind of happened.”

Since 1995, the unmarried North Miami Beach native (and current Fort Lauderdale resident) has been perhaps the most vocal and visible supporter in the U.S. for family caregivers – or, as he's fond of putting it: “The people *pushing* the wheelchair.”

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Barg, 57, was a successful videographer based in Atlanta when he came back to South Florida in the summer of 1994 to visit his mother.

She had been caring full-time for her elderly parents, both of whom were in various stages of failing health: “My grandfather was in especially

bad shape, just starting to suffer from dementia,” Barg recalls.

And this was unfolding immediately after Barg's mother had endured the emotional pain of caring for Barg's father during his brave – but ultimately unsuccessful – battle with bone cancer.

“She had become what I now call a ‘serial caregiver,’” Barg explains. He spent a month helping his mom navigate from one stressful situation to the next: doctors' appointments; endless hours on the telephone with health-insurance companies; treatment sessions; trips to pharmacies; and a few middle-of-the-night medical crises. “I was exhausted – just spent, physically and emotionally,” Barg says.

When he mentioned to his mom at one point that it was a good thing he'd been around to help during this hectic period, Barg recalls, “Her quizzical expression told me everything: This wasn't ‘hectic’ – this was how it was all the time!”

## CHANGING HIS LIFE

“After seeing this, I couldn't go back to my previous life,” Barg says.

He relocated to South Florida and immediately took a more active role in his grandparents' caregiving.

As the months wore on, and more caregiving dilemmas inevitably cropped up, Barg searched everywhere for resource materials to help guide him through the confusing, and often frustrating, world of being a caregiver.

He found none.

So, ever the enterprising sort, Barg created his own repository for the information he couldn't locate – by founding the bi-monthly magazine *Today's Caregiver*.

“We started publishing in 1995, about 10 minutes before people discovered the Internet,” Barg jokes.

What Barg found was that all of his, and his mother's, accumulated caregiving knowledge encouraged readers to share their own knowledge.

Then experts in various fields began sharing their knowledge.

“Because so many of the challenges of family caregiving are universal – regardless of the ailments our loved ones have – we found that creating a ‘community’ for them to join helped them – and us,” Barg explains.

Around a decade ago, Barg began conducting large, increasingly popular caregiver symposiums – they're called “Fearless Caregiver Conferences” – around the country.

To date, he's hosted more than 100 – and he's slated to hold his first ever in Palm Beach County on Thursday, July 25, in Boca Raton (see box).

“The most important thing for family caregivers to do is ‘self-identify’ themselves, and recognize the very real challenges they face,” Barg says. “The second-most important thing is for them to truly understand: They're not alone.”



## ▲ GARY BARG, ON...

■ **The biggest challenge facing family caregivers:** “Self-identifying themselves.”

■ **The wisdom of the masses:** “I learn something new from attendees at every Fearless Caregiver Conference that we organize.”

■ **The rule in the Today's Caregiver magazine office:** “Every voicemail and e-mail is answered within 24 hours.”

## FEARLESS CAREGIVER CONFERENCE

**When:** Thursday/July 25, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

**Where:** Embassy Suites Hotel, 661 N.W. 53 Street, Boca Raton.

**Description:** Hosted by *Today's Caregiver* CEO/Editor in Chief Gary Barg, the event is a fun, entertaining day of support, information and personal interaction for family and professional caregivers – from local physicians, as well as experts in aging, disability, medical benefits, disease treatment, elder law, home care and more.

**Cost:** Tickets are complimentary for family caregivers and \$45 for professional ones.

**Contact:** To register or for more information, call (954) 362-8126 or visit [caregiver.com](http://caregiver.com).