

## **Full Transcript on Mark's interview on Time with Teepa Snow**

### **[00:00:26.370] - Teepa Snow**

Good morning, everybody. Well, as you can see, I am not where I usually am. I am near the Raleigh Durham airport because I am flying to Detroit to go down to Fosteria, Ohio, to do programs tonight and tomorrow. But actually I have a friend here, well, a newly new acquaintance here, I should say. But his name is Mark. And I'm going to let Mark tell you more about himself. But he's actually in Europe. He's over in France. So, Mark. Hey, good morning.

### **[00:01:01.730] - Mark**

Well, someone has to suffer in the middle of wine country, so I thought I would volunteer.

### **[00:01:07.830] - Teepa Snow**

Well, that's encouraging that you took the heat for everybody, but you've been doing that for a few years now.

### **[00:01:14.010] - Mark**

Yeah, I visited this place. It's a little village called Pesanas in the southwestern part of France. It happens to be in the largest wine region, growing region in the world. And the village is about 8300 people. They were just lovely. I had no French, very little French, though, apparently English and French has about 40,000 words in common, but very few came to mind for me, I think. But they were very forgiving most of.

### **[00:01:46.720] - Teepa Snow**

The time to figure out what those are because I'm having trouble with my Spanish. So that would be super helpful.

### **[00:01:52.790] - Mark**

We say a lot of things in English growing up, but anything with an "ion" is usually a french word. So question convention, things like that situation. Of course, they say it, I think, a little more sexy. But there you go. Reunion, all these things. It's good, but the people are just lovely here. So this is my apartment. This is my office. This is where I write and also cook and cook and have wine.

### **[00:02:25.990] - Teepa Snow**

Or the remains of wine appears to be up there on those shelves, maybe.

### **[00:02:29.280] - Mark**

Well, of course, those are empty bottles. The full ones are in the wine rack over in the other room.

**[00:02:35.220] - Teepa Snow**

There you go. Right. Yeah. So, Mark, you're here today because you are one of a growing number of people who do this thing called male caregiving.

**[00:02:47.580] - Mark**

Yes.

**[00:02:49.110] - Teepa Snow**

And you did it specifically for my mother, Jennifer. So tell us a little bit about how you got into that role, because, again, actually, people think it's super rare. It actually is no longer super rare. It turns out that husbands and brothers and sons and sometimes fathers make up about one third of all carers of people living with brain change of dementia. So it's not that rare. But it's still down to one third as opposed to two thirds. And those numbers have only come up dramatically in the last five to ten years. So it's new. It's still brand new.

**[00:03:31.170] - Mark**

I'm hoping my story will help inspire other men to jump in because I had a great time. In 2011. I was a carefree bachelor in my mid fifties living in California. I had a business. I was also an actor, but the acting career was, I was aging out of that. So that was a bit slow. And I decided to become a first time parent with an 89 year old, guilt tripping, stubborn as all get out woman who was my mother, Genevieve. And she had, I call it, there's a chapter in the book called silent scream. I think it was a cry for help. In 2011, a few days after her 89th birthday, she just shut down. It seemed like she was very unhappy. She was living in her own home. We had some people that were kind of helping with the household chores and things like that, but they did not get along well. And mom just seemed to want to go. So the doctor cut off all meds and food. Hospice was called. All her six kids all flew in. A couple of them were local, and we hung out. We were on death watch, and we had a catholic priest come in and deliver the last rites.

**[00:04:51.990] - Mark**

And we just kind of resigned ourselves. Mom's going. And then a few weeks later, one of the hospice nurses ignored her directive, went in, my mother's eyes were closed most of the time. She didn't talk. She would respond to touch a little bit. But this hospice nurse went in and just said, Genevieve, are you hungry? And my mother's eye snapped open for the first time in weeks. My little sister and I were there and so we were very angry with this nurse. She then went in to call her supervisor and accused us of starving our mother to death. The supervisor told her to get out of there because she broke the rules. And now we're thinking, are we, in fact, starving our mother to death? So I went in and asked my mom, are you hungry? And she said, what do you got? Her first words in weeks. I said, well, anything you want.

And she says, how about some pumpkin pie? It's March, not really pumpkin pie season, but my brother, who lived locally, was in the living room, so I asked him to take on the quest, and he came back about a half hour later with two fresh baked pumpkin pies.

**[00:06:09.430] - Mark**

The first spoonful. Again, this was the first food in weeks. She spit out, and we said, well, that didn't go so well. And we tried again, and it went great. And so she ate half the pie. The next day she finished off the next pie, and then she went on to bowls and bowls of sherbet. So this woman is eating bowls, eight bowls a day of sherbet. And we said, well, that's not the best diet. But she was back, she was awake. She seemed to be happy, and, yeah, so you never know. So I started looking at the surroundings in the house that we grew up in. The house was in our family at this point over 60 years. And I saw that I wouldn't be all that happy here either. I didn't move right away, but I stayed there for a few months, and then by the end of the year, I wrapped up everything I could in LA and decided to take over with her permission. I did ask her at one point because she seemed to be happy with me. I was the youngest of the three sons, and I have three sisters, two older, one younger.

**[00:07:15.990] - Mark**

And I had a very good relationship with both of my parents. I was a very curious kid and I got them to open up about things they never opened up about. So I had a very unique relationship with both of them. So with know, I always tried to add a little romance to her life. And when she came out to visit me in California, I would take her to my friend's beauty salon in Beverly Hills to give her this movie star treatment. One of the first things I did is bought her a new wardrobe because I wanted to return some dignity. People don't lose that desire to really want to be pretty and feel beautiful later on. That doesn't end. So I started taking care of giving her full sponge baths, taking care of her hair. She had very long nails, beautiful nails. She was a nail model in her twenties. And a little touch of lipstick and just a tender, loving care, and she was great. So I asked her after we went to a grandson's wedding in September, and I got her all dolled up, and that was the first outing since February.

**[00:08:32.830] - Mark**

So it was quite a few months of being bedridden. She didn't walk anymore and she had a great time. And I saw that she was happy. Everybody around her was happy because she was happy. And I asked her, I said, do you want me to come home and do this full time to make sure you're cared for? And she said, yes. And I said, that's it. Done deal. So I was brought up in a nice, nurturing home, not only by my parents, but with my siblings. We take care of others, so it seemed to be the right thing to do, and I was able to. While the decision was easy, working out all the logistics wasn't so easy, but once you make that decision, you make it work.

**[00:09:15.920] - Teepa Snow**

Yeah. So what's remarkable, Mark, is your mom got a new lease on life. But it started as we thought she was done. We were supporting her being done. She sounded like she wanted to be done, but the reason maybe she wanted to be done was there's nothing there to live for. And once there was something to live for, she wasn't done living. I mean, there was more to live for. There was more to enjoy. There was more to find value in. And it sounds as though a big piece of that was rediscovering a relationship she lost by virtue of everybody going out and doing their own thing. And then with the offer of, would you like me to be back? It's like, yeah, that'd be good. And that became the springboard for the shift. And you figured out the rest because you needed to figure out the rest. But your book, and you've written a book, and it's got an unusual title. Could you give everybody the unusual title? It's what I do in the morning sometimes. Rarely, males do it more than females do. Be honest. Females go in there, do our thing, and get back out.

**[00:10:23.350] - Teepa Snow**

You guys go in there and do other stuff. So tell me about that title.

**[00:10:27.690] - Mark**

We're going to get to the title. I'm leaving the bathroom, our own bathroom things alone. Yes. It's called "A Cup of Tea on the Commode." My mother's favorite beverage was a cup of hot tea, skim milk, no sugar. She was no longer able to walk so we put a commode bedside. And sometimes Mother Nature took a little longer than was comfortable. So one morning, I asked her if she would like a cup of tea, and she said, sure. And while we waited nature for nature to take its course, the cup of tea became a big hit and also became a morning staple. A cup of tea on the commode was a little treat for her. So it seemed like a good title, a fun title, but also a unique title. Yeah.

**[00:11:23.840] - Speaker 3**

So an amazing title. And we always talk about. It's funny in social media, too. We always look for, okay, where's the hook? What's the thing that's going to potentially get people to check this thing out? Because there are lots of books out there. People have written about their journeys and their story and things like that. And so noticing how that title really does pull you in, because you're looking at that and you're like, a cup of tea on the commode. Okay, tell me more about this thing.

**[00:11:51.760] - Mark**

Yeah. And then the subtitle is, "My multitasking adventures of caring for Mom and how I survived to tell the tale" because there're some struggles. And also for me, being a first time parent, there was a big learning curve for me. But the main thing I had to learn was certainly patience and empathy. And my background not only was in acting, but also I had an industrial design career. And when you're designing, you have to certainly have the end user in mind at all times. So empathy is a huge part of anything that I've done. And you have to realize that this person is still a human being. They still have feelings and wants and desires, but their abilities have changed. And so you have to put yourself in their shoes, or in

my mom's case, her non slip safety socks because she could no longer walk. Not having children, this unconditional love thing was not really new to me, but I mean it becomes so clear at that point, because no matter what happens, her life is basically in your hands.

**[00:13:21.310] - Mark**

And I asked her early on, I said, okay, so if you want me to come back and make sure that you are cared for, I will do that. And she said, yes. And I said, okay, do you understand that I will do everything in my power to keep you safe, healthy and happy? And she said, yes. And I said, well, that means now you must obey me. And her mood shifted in an instant. And then she puckered up for a kiss. She loved the kisses. And I wasn't sure if that was a sign of surrender or one wishing me luck. So I gave her a kiss and hoped for the best. And luckily it turned out pretty good.

**[00:13:58.410] - Speaker 3**

Yeah. Noticing a lot of times these role reversals in families and how the mother, the father who cared and raised kids for so long, and then suddenly now we're in this position where the kids are coming in to now care for the parents and the challenges that come with that, and some of this idea of letting go, some of those pieces and boundaries that we had, because it's tough a lot of times for parents when they get into those situations where now their child is caring for them and that feeling, letting go, that feeling of, well, no, I'm supposed to care for you, you're not supposed to care for me. And how that can be tough at times to make that transition in those situations. But, yeah, what an amazing title and story. And I know I put your link to your Facebook page in the chat as well as to the website. Is there anywhere else, Mark, that folks should go to check out this book or any other things that you put out there?

**[00:15:06.480] - Mark**

I'm on everything. If they google "A Cup of Tea in the Commode," I've got TikTok. I've got a YouTube channel with about 140 one-minute or less teasers, which are, most of them are very fun. And yeah, TikTok, Pinterest, Instagram all over the place. The Facebook page is probably the most popular. That has quite a few followers there. Yeah, it's interesting. So the contrast between my mom and my dad. My dad passed 14 years before I moved back to take care of mom, and my dad wanted to hold on to all of his dignity as much as possible. I'm not sure if that's the male ego or what, but I only had eight days with him. We got a call again. I was in California. My brother called and said, the doctor said he's got 30 days. He had heart disease. He was about seven years into this. So we knew this was eminent. So I flew back and I was with them for eight days, and that'll be the subject of the next book. But he was great. He had a good sense of humor. We had a lot of fun. But a couple of days before he passed again, we had a commode near his bed.

**[00:16:26.000] - Mark**

And so we got him up, and at this point, he was normally about 165. But with all this water weight from the heart disease, he weighed about 200 pounds. So I had to hold him up and get him on the commode and then lift him up to get him off, and then he insisted on wiping his own butt. So my mom stood by at the ready with the toilet paper. And so when I held him up, he looks over and says, give me two sheets. And my mom says, just two sheets. And he says, I'm very accurate. And we all burst out laughing, and I almost dropped this poor guy. But that was one of the last laughs we all shared. My mom, on the other hand, let me do everything. She had a bit of royalty, I think, in her blood, because she had no qualms about me doing anything. And there was no line that I didn't cross because, again, being the son, I had to deal with seeing my mother naked for the first time. So I had to get over that and get on with it pretty quickly. And then everything else that we had to do, I had to take care of medical things and stuff like that.

**[00:17:42.200] - Mark**

And it's just like, okay. I had to separate the son part from being the caretaker or the caregiver. I don't like the word caretaker. We actually had "care-taker." I think caregiver is better.

**[00:17:54.770] - Teepa Snow**

Yeah, see, Mark, I would say it's a care partner. You partnered with your mom.

**[00:17:58.620] - Mark**

Oh, good. Okay. I like that, too.

**[00:18:00.670] - Teepa Snow**

You learned to dance with her. And I think the thing that allowed for that role reversal that you described very well is that you always got her permission.

**[00:18:11.460] - Mark**

Yeah.

**[00:18:11.930] - Teepa Snow**

And that's what we advocate so strongly, is you must have permission without permission. It's not care. And so you were very skilled at seeking and getting permission, and it turned out your mom was like, sure, I'll take a servant. Go for it.

**[00:18:30.290] - Mark**

I do have a chapter in the book about Queen for a day where she actually summoned me. One morning, I heard a little bell ringing and I'm, what is that? I don't know where she got the bell, but she rings the bell

and I go into her room. It's about 6:30 in the morning. She normally got up around 10:00 am, so I was usually safe to be able to sleep in a little bit. She's tingling the bell. And I see this lady sitting just like the Queen Elizabeth. And I said, excuse me, did you just summon me with that little bell? And she said, of course. And I said, no, I am your son. I am here out of love, not duty. I am not your servant. So we're going to retire this bell. She said, "For heaven's sakes. Why?" I said, because we don't need it. You call, I come. And at one point, she actually said, hey, why is it always I call and you come running in here? Why don't you ever call me? And I said, "I call you, what are you going to do?" She says, "I don't know." So she wanted to be called, too.

**[00:19:40.490] - Mark**

She wanted to be helpful. I did engage her, because if she wanted to, she could have just laid in bed and stayed there the whole time. I did have her do things, so I wanted to keep her active. So we played cards and we played bingo and we even played Angry Birds on her iPad. But I got her do arm exercises every morning. And when I did the laundry, I asked her to help me fold the socks and the small towels and things like that, and she did great. And I actually, after a year, got her up and walking, not without assistance, but I got her walking and she was game to do it. It was wonderful. So part of it, I mean, she had a good attitude about it for the most part. And I certainly had to have a good attitude about it. And so I think the partnering actually is a really good term. So I do like that because you're a team. And I told her again early on, I said, if I take this on, you and I are going to have fun. One of my early goals was to make her laugh at least once a day.

**[00:20:53.700] - Mark**

Yeah. And she made me laugh quite often also.

**[00:20:57.040] - Teepa Snow**

Good. All right, folks, so the reason we had Mark on is this is a special book. This is not just one of the "I did this and it was hard." I did this and there was joy, there was laughter, there were unique situations. And it's from a male caregiving perspective, which I think all too often is not seen, not heard, not believed. So, Mark, thank you for writing this book and thanks for being the person you are. It's really been fun.

**[00:21:22.570] - Mark**

Well, thank you. Yeah, I was brought up in a good house and I have good genes, as my dad would say. It's in the genes. It's in the genes.

**[00:21:31.230] - Teepa Snow**

It's in the genes. Sounds like you got some really fun genes, too.

**[00:21:35.000] - Mark**

Yeah.

**[00:21:37.050] - Teepa Snow**

Well, thank you. And for everybody out there, take care with your care. We'll see you again soon. Bye, everybody.

**[00:21:42.870] - Mark**

All right, take care. See ya.

**[00:21:44.760] - Speaker 3**

Bye, everybody.

**[00:21:58.860] - Teepa Snow**

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