

How To Cultivate Resilience: Have Faith and 'Be Still in the Boat'

Lessons in weathering the storm from Advocates for Aging Angela Burton, Rosanne Corcoran and Next Avenue's managing editor Julie Pfitzinger

By [Julie Pfitzinger](#) | January 7, 2026 | [Living](#)

The word "resilience," as simply a word, has a bit of sparkle to it. It's a soft word, at odds in a sense with what it means: to be tough, to bounce back from challenging circumstances, to find a new shape to life after a trying period. To hold onto hope as you look over a horizon that might seem bleak, but feeling confident, in spite of yourself, that there will be brighter days ahead.



Being calm instead of going into panic mode can serve us well. | Credit: Getty

I've been thinking a lot about resilience lately – well, for a while now. As I mentioned in a recent story I wrote about [downsizing](#), I lost my husband to cancer in 2023. Last fall, I sold the house where we had lived together for 31 years, but I have found some brightness – I'm in a new place that makes me happy and is beginning to feel like home.

This is my last week at Next Avenue because my job has been eliminated. It's a place where I've worked for more than eight years, and I've been privileged to have a role I've loved.

The need to be resilient isn't done with me yet. This is my last week at Next Avenue because my job has been eliminated. It's a place where I've worked for more than eight years, and I've been privileged to have a role I've loved. Next Avenue will become part of the [Twin Cities PBS](#) website in February with a collection of some of our best stories from the past several years. Truthfully, it hasn't been the same here without my Next Avenue colleagues, all of whom have been gone since late July. We were significantly affected by the cuts to federal funding for public media.

So, as I focus on looking for a job and figuring out what the new shape to my life will be, I decided that I wanted to talk to two women I've met through Next Avenue who have faced challenges that tested them, formed them and helped them to walk forward in new ways. And honestly, both have brought sparkle to every conversation I've had with them separately, so a recent Zoom call we shared together was truly a bright spot.

Life as a Caregiver

[Rosanne Corcoran](#) first came to Next Avenue by way of an essay she wrote for our "Telling Our Stories" initiative in 2020 – her piece, "Dear Dementia," was one of the 12 winning essays and offered an eloquent reflection on life with her mom, who suffered from vascular dementia, and lived with Corcoran's family, which included an eighth grader and a high school senior, during her final years. Corcoran was her primary caregiver.

Today, Corcoran is the [creator and host](#) of "Daughterhood The Podcast: For Caregivers," which consistently ranks among the Top 10 caregiving podcasts across all platforms. She is a Daughterhood Circle Leader and serves as its Director of Content, guiding the organization's strategy and ensuring alignment with its mission to empower family caregivers.

In 2024, Corcoran was selected as a Next Avenue Advocate for Aging, in conjunction with the American Society on Aging (ASA).

When asked what being a caregiver for her mom taught her about what it means to be resilient, Corcoran said: "It's like being dropped into a country where you don't know the language and you have to learn everything from the top to the bottom. So, it's not just what your person has. It's how the medical system works or doesn't work. It's all of the things that come with that that they ask you to do, the actual medical care that you're providing that you were never trained for. All of that."



Rosanne Corcoran

She continued, "And you're trying to manage your own life and trying to figure out how you're going to deal with all of that. You have to deal with all of the emotions that go with that, too – guilt, anger, frustration and the grief that no one wants to talk about or even recognize."

Recommended

Dear Dementia

A heartfelt reflection on how the devastating disease is affecting the writer's mother and family

Helping Others Tell Stories

Like Corcoran, [Angela Burton](#) arrived at Next Avenue through the power of stories – she is the [founder](#) of Feet to the Fire Writers' Workshops, a licensed global writing program for older adults in senior living communities and wellness organizations. As a 50+ entrepreneur, she was accepted into the WILD Female Founder Accelerator for her startup passion and innovation in aging. In 2020, Burton was selected as a Next Avenue Influencer in Aging.

"I know instantly I learned to trust my own gut better."

She's currently the COO for Harbor House, a Louisville nonprofit that provides vocational, health and educational services for individuals of all ages and abilities. She's also working on a memoir.

For Burton, resilience was a necessity, not an option, when her first marriage ended after 21 years in a divorce that blindsided her, leaving her to raise her two children, who were 9 and 13.

"It was nothing short of hell because I had to reconfigure my life and I had to become a single parent," said Burton, who was 40 at the time. "I



had to take care of my children who were grieving, and I had to take care of myself, and I was grieving. I had to save the house, save my job, and not go under completely."

Angela Burton

"Thank goodness I had my parents, and they really helped, and I had friends, but there were nights I'd go to bed and think, 'I don't know if I can do this,'" she said.

In our conversation, a common theme resonated – figuring out how to deal with what you have in front of you because there really is no choice. And what you learn in those moments.

"I know instantly I learned to trust my own gut better," said Burton. "Maybe I knew that in a sense, but during that challenging time, I think I really learned to be on my own, trust my decisions, understand that I wasn't going to just fall apart or fall through a crack or just disappear."

Most Popular

1. Documentary Faces the Reality of Lewy Body Dementia | **Health**
 2. 6 Must-Have Nutrients For Brain Health | **Food and Nutrition**
 3. 3 Foods That Help Regulate Blood Sugar | **Health**
 4. How To Support Your Prostate Health | **Health**
-

Corcoran's operative word during her time as a caregiver was "adaptability," she said.

"Whether we're talking about caregiving or grief, things change. And you can stomp your feet and say, 'I don't like this, I can't believe this, this isn't fair.' I don't use fair. Life isn't fair. What are we going to do?" Corcoran said. "Instead, you can accept it and think about what you can do to make it better. If it's caregiving, how can you make it better for your person, but also for yourself?"

"Whether we're talking about caregiving or grief, things change. And you can stomp your feet and say, 'I don't like this, I can't believe this, this isn't fair.' I don't use fair. Life isn't fair."

She added: "I agree with you, Angela. You get that feeling of needing to trust your gut because our bodies always tell us." [Both paused to recommend the book "The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk.]

The conversation pivoted to how overwhelmingly difficult situations – caregiving, divorce, the death of a spouse – can sometimes reduce tolerance for smaller problems in life that others share with us.

Burton, who has also faced breast cancer, said she definitely understands that sentiment. "That was harder in some ways than divorce

because I really did feel like, 'Oh, s***, I am alone in this.' And people that have never experienced that, they don't understand what it's like to have that diagnosis and to get that wallop."

As a widow, I know there are some problems that I now perceive through a much different filter.

Our Capacity for Resilience

Corcoran and Burton (and I) agree that our capacity for being resilient truly does increase as we get older, as does our desire to help others see things through. This is particularly true for Corcoran, who continues to talk about the caregiving journey with others even though the one she experienced is behind her.

"I know what it feels like. And if there's a way to make somebody feel a little less scared, a little more hopeful and a little more like 'Okay, I can do this,' that's the world for me," she said.

And for those bad days we all have, Corcoran said she believes we benefit from "more tools in our toolbox" than what we had when we were younger.

"You think, 'okay, I'm going to put on my favorite song.' But then your favorite song doesn't work. So you decide to go for a walk – and the walk doesn't work. Maybe it's time to bake some bread," she said.

Taking a longer view, she said, "At this point in life, we're on the clock. How much longer are we going to put up with stuff we don't like? How much longer are we going to carry around this sack of stuff that we have put in our packs and think, 'Oh no, I'm not worthy. Oh, this is just the way I am.' Give yourself permission to get rid of it because if you're going to do something differently, you better do it now."

When I asked Burton how her mom, Faye, is doing – a few years ago, Faye was featured in [a photo project](#) for Next Avenue and talked about her love for quilting – Burton said she and her siblings are "starting to have to get into that caregiving place with her, but she will not have any of it."

"I think about one of the things my Aunt Mary Katherine, a

Faye is 95, living alone and legally blind. "Talk about resilience," said Burton. "She can't see to do the quilts anymore, her short-term memory is really going, but she's funny as hell and says, 'I don't know how I'm still

**very Irish woman,
used to say: 'Be still
in the boat.'"**

here.' She's been through everything, raised seven kids, but not letting life beat her."

When I started to raise the subject of women and resilience, and whether

we do it better, Burton said, "You don't even have to finish that question. Yes."

"We're better at everything," Burton said, as Corcoran nodded. "We come from good stock. We're better communicators. We typically have more compassion, more empathy. We care for children. We have childbirth, and we can handle pain."

Corcoran said, "Listen, if men had hot flashes, there would be a cure for perimenopause and menopause tomorrow. Not only would there be a cure, it would grow our hair, make our nails stronger and we'd lose weight. I mean, come on."

To close our conversation, I said: "We're all going to get older and things are going to be harder in different ways. What are the lessons that are going to serve you as you become older women?"

Burton started. "I think about one of the things my Aunt Mary Katherine, a very Irish woman, used to say: 'Be still in the boat.' And what I've learned is when I panic, it doesn't serve me well. If I can be calm and patient and understand that I will get up tomorrow and deal with whatever is happening, then I'm not going to completely implode."

The Gift of Age and Wisdom

She added, "I've been impatient a lot of my life, but as I get older, I'm less impatient and more willing to wait it out and understand that things take time."

"Have some faith in yourself and somehow life gives you what you need."

"My mother used to say 'old age is a gift' because not everyone gets to be old. And then she'd say that things would always work out how they were meant to work out," said Corcoran. "It always used to drive me crazy since I didn't understand how. I always wished I had more of that

perspective; lately I've been trying to live in that world of 'it will all work out.'"

"There's a lot of faith in that. There's a lot of 'let go of control' in that," Corcoran noted.

"Have some faith in yourself and somehow life gives you what you need," said Burton.

"At the right time," added Corcoran.

If I've learned nothing else from my experience at Next Avenue (but believe me, I've learned a lot), I've learned about the importance of having deep appreciation for [friends](#) — even those I have never actually met in person — and this also extends to my abundant gratitude for the many freelance contributors who have impacted my life and work at Next Avenue.

Be still in the boat, no matter how rough the waters get. Reach out because others will be there to offer support and encouragement. Trust me.



Julie Pfitzinger is the managing editor for Next Avenue and senior editor for lifestyle coverage. Her journalism career has included feature writing for the Star-Tribune, as well

as several local parenting and lifestyle publications, all in the Twin Cities area. Julie also served as managing editor for nine local community lifestyle magazines. She joined Next Avenue in October 2017. Reach her by email at jpfitzinger@nextavenue.org. [Read More](#)

Editors Recommendations

The Next Interesting Thing from Abigail Thomas



Traveling Across America to Thank Fellow Caregivers



Where Older Adults Write Their Own Stories



STORIES FROM AROUND THE WEB



Meeting the needs and unleashing the
potential of older Americans through media

[About Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Sponsorship](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Advocates for Aging](#)

[Contact Us](#)

A nonprofit journalism website produced by:



©2026 Next Avenue