"BUT I FEEL GUILTY" PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL ISSUES IN CAREGIVING

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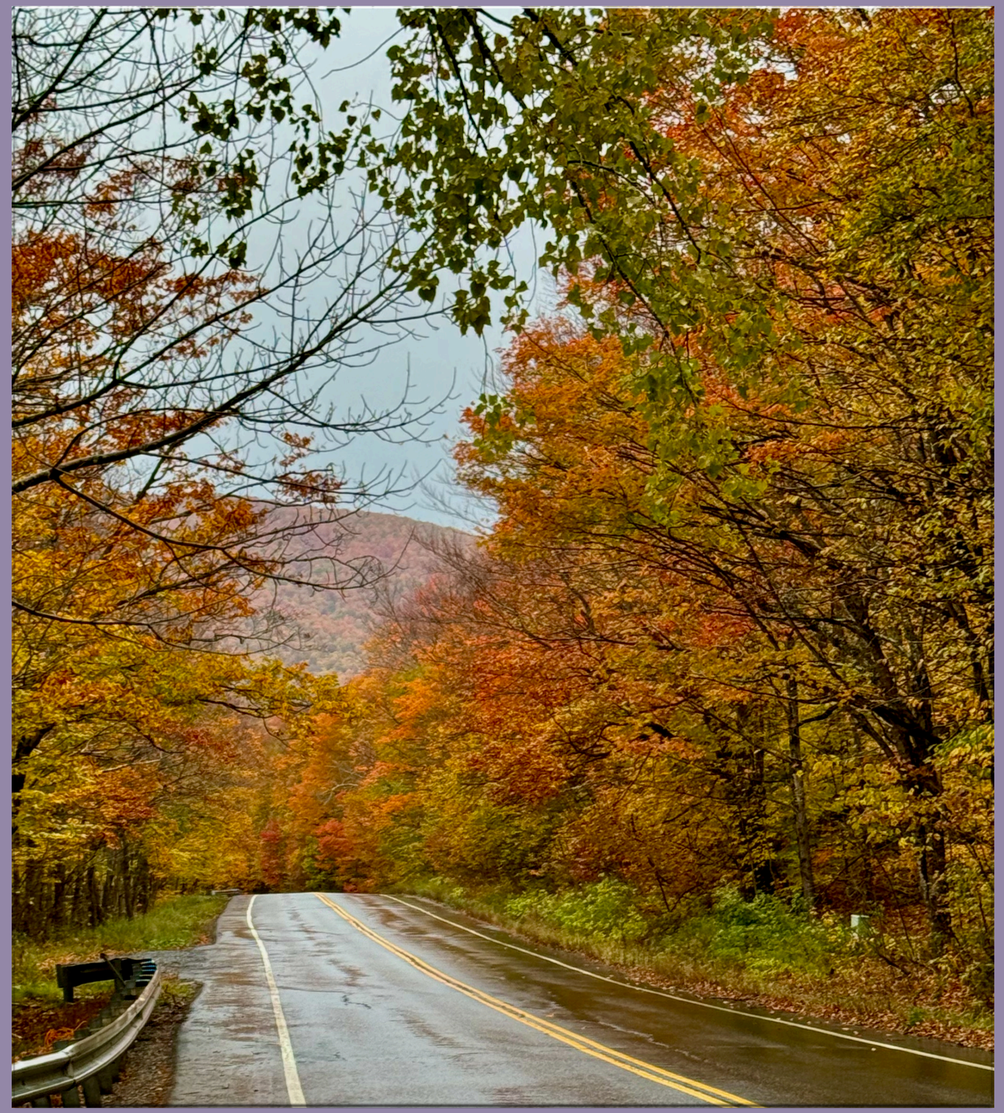
Basic Point:

Self Compassion is key.

I don't want you to feel guilty about feeling guilty!

One view of the problem:

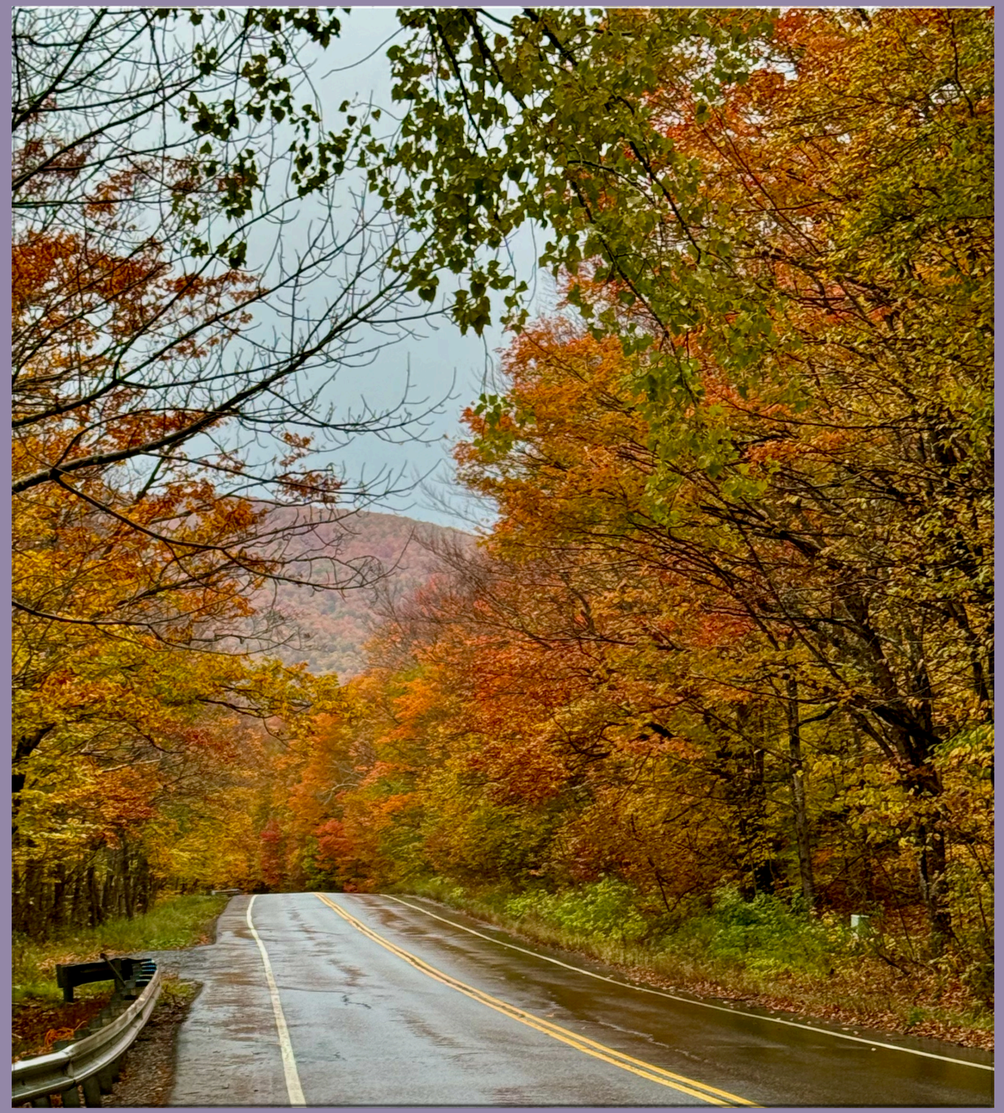
Estimates are that 30-40% of spouse/partner caregivers for the elderly die before those they are caring for.



Understanding Context:

- We evolved to care for each other in groups: the marketplace, the town square, the village hearth

- Our current context is individualistic. This puts tremendous stress on caregivers.



Multiple types of caregiving

Not all situations are the same.

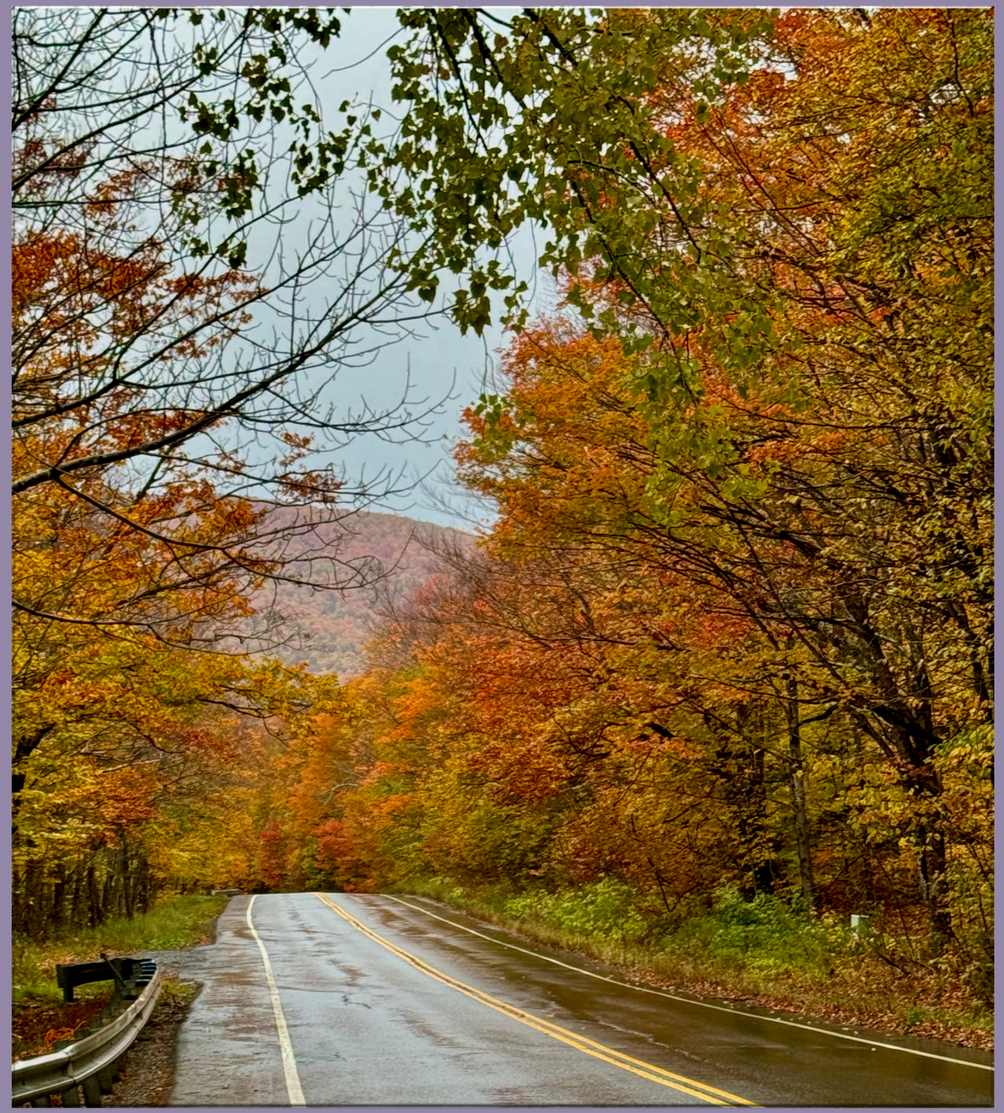
Child Care

Developmental disabilities

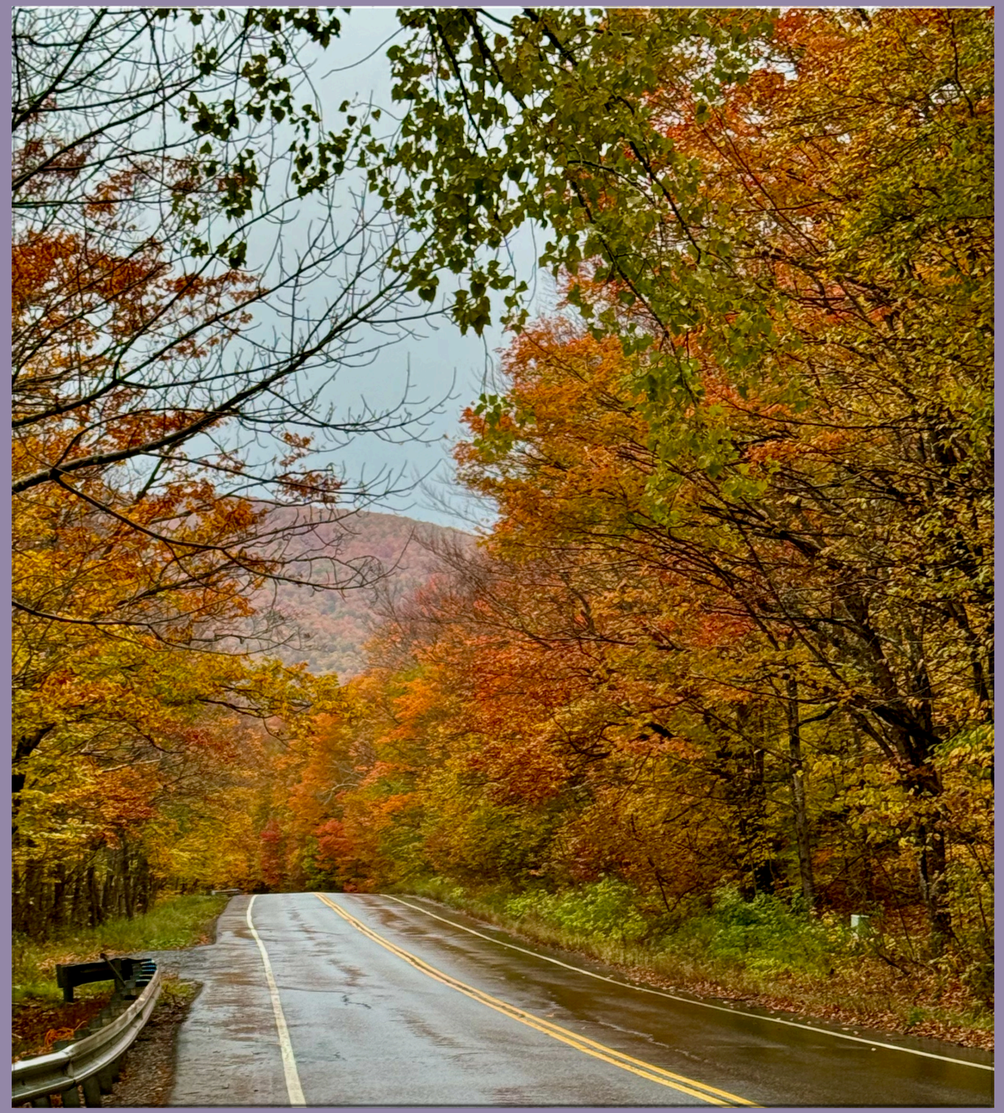
Accidents

Mental Health crises

Aging (many scenarios)



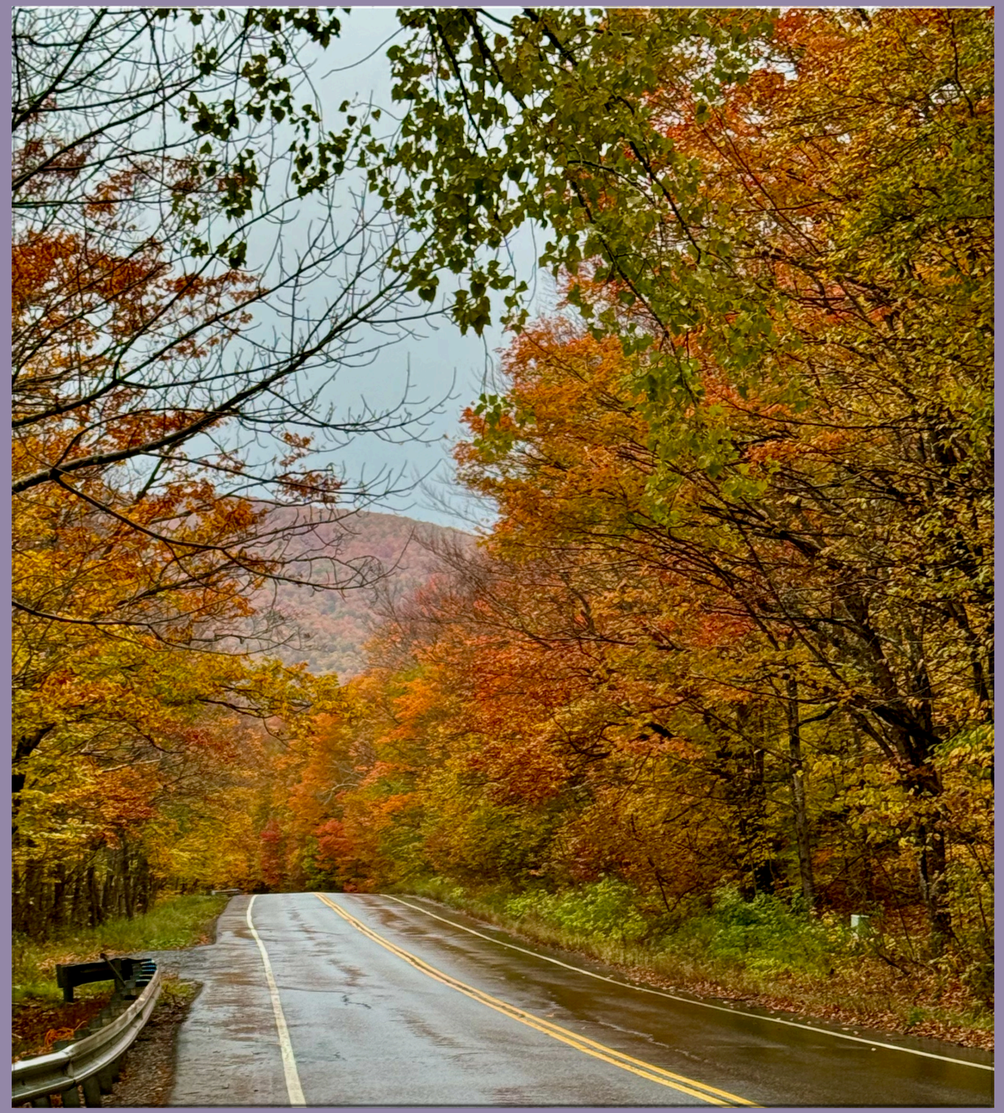
We cannot cover all of these different scenarios and situations today. So what I want to focus on are some general issues related to care for adults, particularly older adults. Some of these principles will relate to other situations, some will not.



Healthy Development

By the time I'm an elder, what developmental challenge should I master?

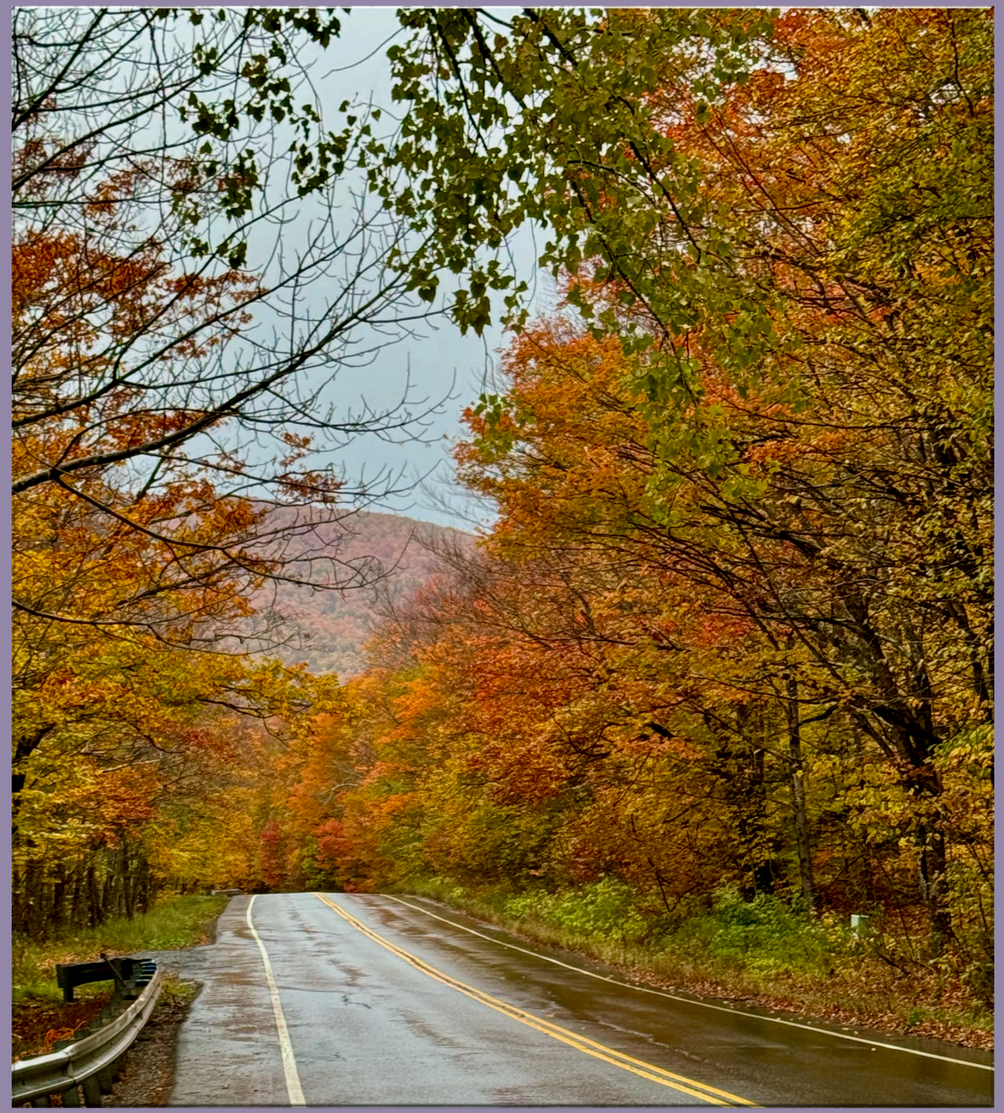
Becoming a wise elder.



Two stories

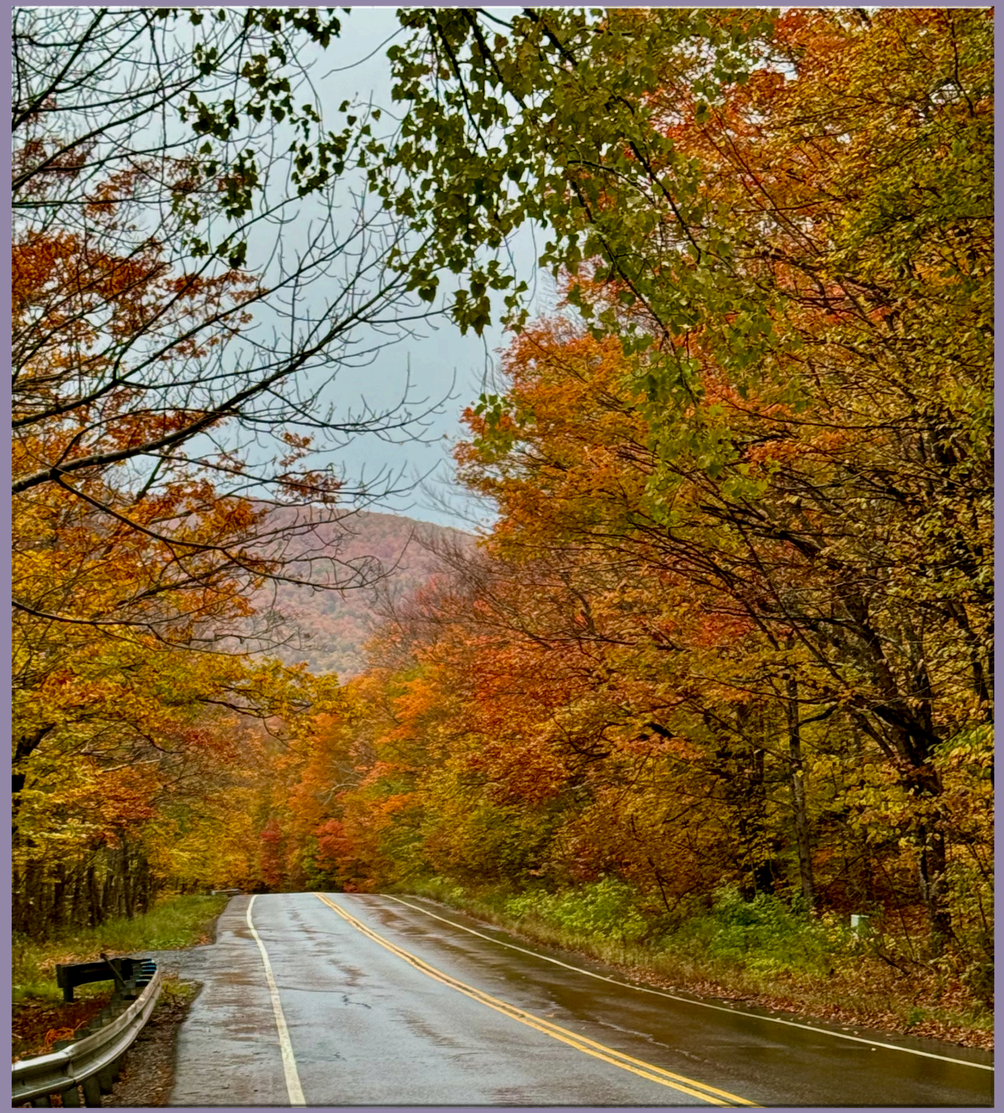
The goal is Wisdom

The degree to which a person meets this goal has a tremendous impact on both care and the caregiver.



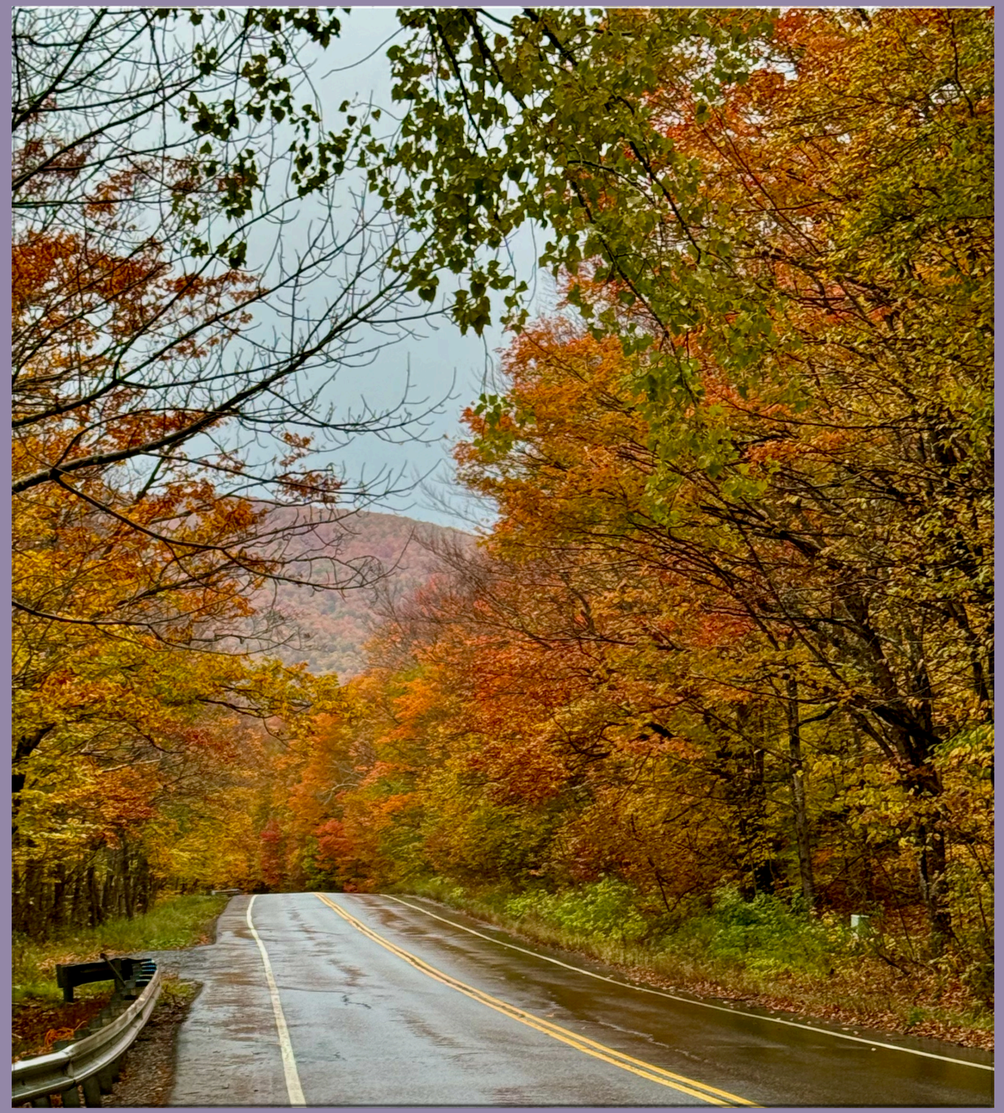
What forces influence our response to caregiving?:

Context
Societal/Cultural Norms
Gender
Social Class
Family Dynamics



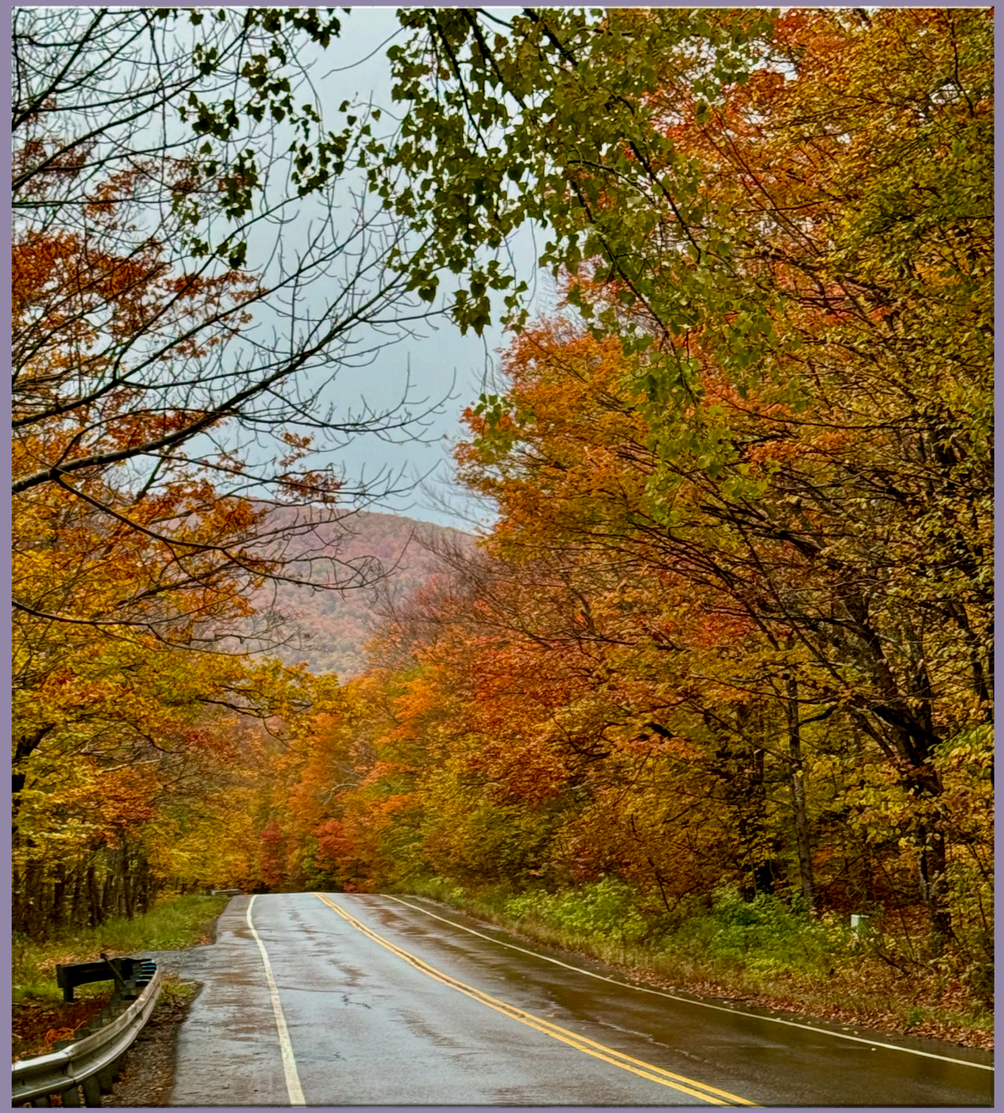
One way to describe healthy development is in terms of differentiation:

Differentiation describes the process of becoming free from familial habitual patterns and reactions.



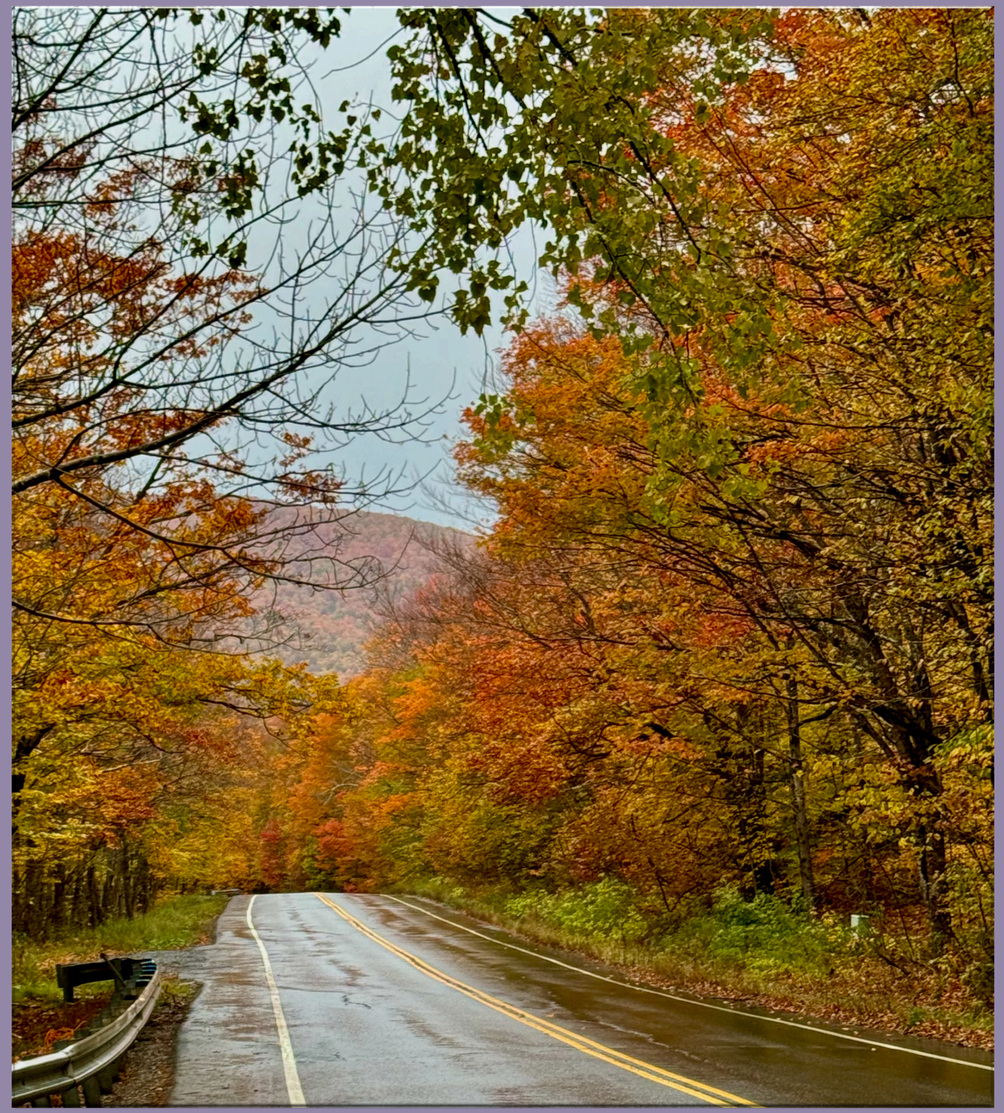
Am I becoming differentiated from the systems of my upbringing?

Practicing differentiation results in profound psycho-spiritual growth.



Practicing Wisdom/ Differentiation:

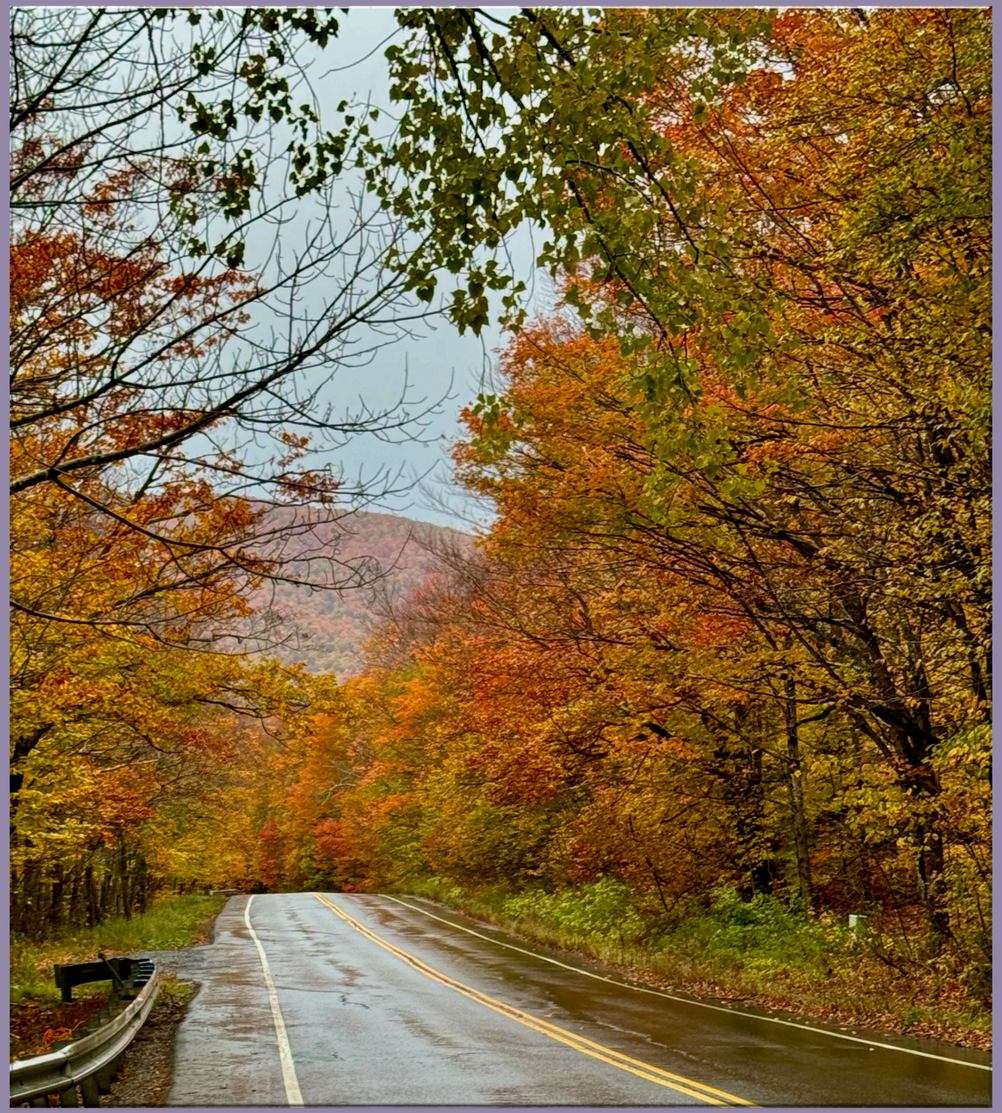
- Spiritual Practices
- Mindfulness (non-religious)
- Therapy
- Spiritual Direction
-Support Groups and Social Support
-Care for the Caregiver



Emotions like guilt in caregiving are diagnostic:

- my own level of differentiation

- the developmental level of the one I'm caring for



As we grow, as we differentiate, we are able to approach caregiving from a perspective that allows for both compassion and self care.

We are able to set boundaries that are healthy and promote positive and appropriate action.