

## 'No Way to Live': The Cost of Nursing Home Isolation

*Featuring  
Melody Taylor Stark, Advocate  
for the Essential Caregivers Act*



### *This time on Code WACK!*

*What role do family members and friends play in the lives of nursing home residents? **When COVID hit, how were residents impacted when their loved ones were no longer allowed to visit them?***

**Today we share the story of Melody Taylor Stark**, who became an advocate for the Essential Caregivers Act after her husband, a retired dentist and nursing home resident, dramatically declined, then died, after being denied her daily visits during the dark days of COVID.

Melody is a founding member of Essential Caregivers Coalition; a member of Caregivers for Compromise, and San Gabriel Valley Disability Collaborative; and Facebook co-administrator for Aging Enlightened, a group that was begun by a prominent reporter for Kaiser Health News. She works diligently to advance positive system changes in disability rights and long-term care.

This is part one of a two-part series on the **Essential Caregiver's Act**.

# SHOW NOTES

## WE DISCUSS

*Before COVID struck, you saw your husband on a daily basis. But you were more than just a visitor. You provided physical, emotional, psychological and social support essential to your husband's care and quality of life. How did Bill react when your support was suddenly cut off?*

**MELODY:** "The first time that I heard him, probably toward the beginning of July, ... I heard just a very weak voice saying *'this is no way to live,'* and hearing him cry.

And that's kind of the one moment among many, but that's the one that was particularly, and still is, heartbreaking for me ... *to see the crushing, destructive effects of isolation.*

And here was a system that was not responding, and when I say system, it wasn't just the facility he was in, but it was the facility, it was the corporation that oversees that facility, it was public health, it was all the way up on the line, not giving acknowledgement to the person."

So to [see] someone going from this upbeat, optimistic *'play the cards'* to ... *I don't want to say it was giving up, because he always said he would never give up, but it's like ... 'I can't do this anymore.'*

# Helpful Links

[HR 6766: The Essential Caregivers Act of 2025](#), *GovTrack.us*

[Caregivers for Compromise](#)

[How did COVID-19 lockdown impact the health of older adults in nursing homes? A scoping review](#), *Springer Nature*

[Social isolation takes toll on Southern California nursing home residents during pandemic holidays](#), *USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism*

## Guest Biography - Melody Taylor Stark

Melody brings over 10 years of advocacy and family caregiving experience. Her late husband, who had Post-Polio Syndrome, was in a nursing home.

She is currently a Designated Support Person for two chosen families who are residents at a nursing home. She works diligently to advance positive system changes in disability rights and long-term care.

Melody is a founding member of Essential Caregivers Coalition; a member of Caregivers for Compromise, and San Gabriel Valley Disability Collaborative; and Facebook co-administrator for Aging Enlightened, a group that was begun by a prominent reporter for Kaiser Health News.

She also served at the Convalescent Aid Society as a volunteer and recently was a presenter for the Gray Panthers NYC Transformation Tuesdays webinar. Furthermore, Melody was a member of the team that developed

the first iteration of CA AB 2075, the Resident-Designated Support Persons Act, and the bipartisan, co-sponsored HR 3733, the Essential Caregivers Act, which was introduced to U.S. Congress in June 2021, reintroduced as HR6766 Essential Caregivers Act of 2025 in December 2025.

In her professional life, Melody was an Electronic Health Records (EHR) Specialist for a large mental health agency. In addition to her work with EHRs, she has a background in quality assurance and quality improvement with Department of Mental Health (DMH) contract agencies; has served as co-chair for an LA County DMH Quality Improvement committee; has provided case management work with at-risk youth; and has served as a family mediator, a peer mediation trainer, and a mediation case coordinator.

Knowing firsthand the value of psychosocial support to residents of long-term care, along with the challenges consumers and their biological/chosen families face in navigating long-term care systems, Melody views her service on the LTCFA Workgroup as a chance to be the voice of and support for those in long-term care now as well as in the future. She is also raising awareness in support of strengthening the role of biological/chosen family in health care settings.

## Host Biography: Brenda Gazzar

**Brenda Gazzar**, the host and co-producer of **Code WACK!**, has produced over 300 weekly podcast episodes, topping 400,000 downloads. A skilled interviewer and storyteller, Brenda brings nuance, curiosity, and clarity to every conversation.

Brenda has worked as a multilingual and award-winning reporter with more than two decades of experience in California and the Middle East.

Her work has been published by Reuters, Ms. Magazine, USA Today, Los Angeles Daily News, the Orange County Register, The Wrap, The Jerusalem Post, Cairo Times, and numerous other publications. She speaks Spanish, Hebrew, and moderate Arabic and is the recipient of national, state, and regional awards.

Brenda also enjoys being a life coach, helping people align with their purpose so they feel fulfilled while achieving their boldest dreams.

Brenda's work is grounded in a belief that systemic change and personal growth go hand in hand — and she's here for both.

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## Episode Transcript

***Read the episode [transcript](#).***

## Keywords

*Code WACK!, HEAL California, Melody Taylor Stark, Brenda Gazzar, Essential Caregivers Act, essential caregivers, nursing home isolation, long-term care, family caregivers, caregiver advocacy, nursing home residents, elder care, disability rights, healthcare justice, Medicare for All, single payer healthcare, nursing home reform, COVID lockdowns, aging with dignity, social isolation*

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