

ONE CAREGIVERS STORY

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Mar 5, 2011***

August 11, 1996 was a day that turned our family upside down - - - the day my wife, Sharon, had a hemorrhagic stroke. She survived her brain surgery, but was left with aphasia, which eventually lead to the loss of her teaching career. My family and I were now pushed into the unknown.

We already had big problems. I was an alcoholic. Our son was in drugs. On the good side of it all, our youngest daughter was a senior in high school, and our older daughter was just newly married and just had our first grandchild two months before Sharon had her stroke.

It was then that I realized that I had to change my ways quickly. Our adult children still had their own issues, and even though I was a “binge drinker” I still loved Sharon and our family, and I also knew that in order to help Sharon in her recovery I had to quit drinking. I had to take charge.

In my case, after Sharon’s stroke, I suddenly found myself not only being her husband but also being her caregiver.

There were tons of paperwork to do and lots of driving to do since Sharon couldn’t drive during those first few months after her stroke. Sometimes it was hard for me not to go crazy. When Sharon got frustrated or when her depression led her to her room for hours at a time, I found myself being frustrated and

angry. Dealing with all these emotions and changes in our lives was hard. But we dealt with it

one day at a time. Sometimes one moment at a time.

I found that in Sharon's case helping her to independence was the key to her great progress after stroke. If she thought she could do something, I helped her get started; for example, when she thought she was ready to start driving less than a year after her stroke, I helped by going with her the first few times like having her drive to the store for groceries, etc. Also, in Sharon's case, she didn't lose her driver's license, but that is not the norm for most I believe; so I do suggest that you check with the stroke survivor's doctor before starting something new like driving.

In not too short of a time, I had her pick up my paycheck for me and deposit it into the bank.

She was able to cook and make holiday dinners for the family.

We used to go for lots of day trips so that Sharon would get out of the house.

Sometimes when Sharon would talk she would say the wrong words or couldn't put together a sentence to explain herself, she would start to cry. Sometimes our kids - - - both adults and grandkids - - - would sometimes laugh when Sharon got all mixed up with her words; but, eventually, with lots of hugs and lots of patience on both sides, Sharon was able to laugh at her own "goof ups" because she knew that we loved her and that we were not laughing at her

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but with her.

Being a caregiver is not easy. I used to get very frustrated with Sharon, and a lot of times I used to get angry over our situation. I would wonder why this happened to our family. I got so

tired of repeating what I had just said to her that I would get ticked off.

It wasn't easy during those first early years of Sharon's recovery. I found out that you have to have a lot of PATIENCE which I was short of.

I had to learn with Sharon. Keep things simple; not complicated. I had to learn about patience.

When Sharon thought that she could do something I helped her get started. The big thing was that I did not treat her like a baby. I believed in her, and I wanted to support her desire to get better by allowing her to do as much as she could do on her own.

When I look at Sharon today, I can see how far she has come. I am proud of her and so are all of our children and grandchildren.

Yes, I was there for Sharon, but she did all the work that got her to where she is today -
INDEPENDENT!