

## Life Comes at you Fast..... Caring for a Spouse - Lynn Coats

- I. What happened to us: In a freak accident, my husband, Bob broke his neck between C3 and C4. God spared him a severed spinal cord: it was bent and bruised and he was only temporarily paralyzed. Bob spent the next eleven months in hospitals, rehab and nursing homes and came home to more therapy. Today he sees a therapist twice a month to improve his balance and walking and to relieve shoulder pain.
  
- II. What we had done to prepare for surprises
  1. The basics: wills, powers of attorney, financial planning, insurance, Long term care insurance
  2. The Lists:  
All contact information (doctors, attorneys, financial contacts, insurance, repair people, family), all payments due, when and how rendered, how to get into everything from technology to safes- passwords, combinations, etc.  
Chronological to-do list covering car inspection, income tax prep, Home owner's fees, insurance payments tax payments, etc.
  
- III. What I had to learn
  - A. The System: your time in any health care facility is limited by who pays for it, whether insurance, Medicare or your resources. The person who knows how much time you are allowed is the Social Worker. Get to know them!
  - B. How to be an advocate for my husband with healthcare staff  
Build relationships with all staff. Learn and use names, make any personal connection you can. Help caregivers connect with your spouse.  
Be appreciative and helpful.  
Follow instructions.  
Save complaints for serious issues.  
Be prepared for hard questions- Do not resuscitate?  
Be observant, jot down questions and observations.
  - C. Managing communications with friends and family  
E-mail  
Caringbridge
  
- IV. TLC for patient and caregiver
  1. For your spouse
    - A. Know your spouse, what they want and need
    - B. Be their link with life in the real world. Hospitals are like jails.
    - C. Help them to communicate.
    - D. Be dependable and be there as much as you can as an advocate, companion and cheerleader.
    - E. Be tough if it is necessary.
    - F. Learn all you can from care planning meetings and asking questions.
    - G. If approaching a move, investigate and visit facilities or get a Professional care finder.

3. Know yourself and what you need

Feed your spirit, mind and body. Spend time in God's word, and in prayer. Eat well, exercise, clear your mind.

Seek the counsel of those who have experience as caregiver to a spouse.

Accept volunteer help or hire help if needed.

Be able to say good night or leave when you need to go. Your spouse needs you healthy.

V. Homecoming

1. Try short visits before the move if our journey was long.
2. Learn what you need to know and do when your support system is no longer there and you are THE caregiver.
3. Learn what may be provided for you through Medicare or insurance.
4. Don't expect too much too fast. Don't nag! Help your spouse accept and adjust to a possible "new normal".

Our journey was eleven months to the day when Bob finally came home. Without the constant, faithful presence of our loving God and the Body of Christ it would have been impossible. We owe thanks to so many dear friends, but special thanks are due to Emory McEuen and Sandy Yaklin who went above and beyond and to our children, Jennifer and John who were magnificent. I have never been so proud of them.