

By Joseph Kufra (Lifespan client)

We were married for 63 years. She was a beautiful woman, both in appearance and heart. She'd had health problems for the last 20 years. Her second deep vein thrombosis was when the caregiving began – about 18 years ago. As events happened with her health, it became a constant adjustment to a new life. There was never a question in either of our minds. It was a matter of...we're just going to do this together 120%. We never measured our life against anything. For me, it was a commitment that went far beyond just saying that I loved her.

During this period of time, a nurse visited a couple times a week. We transmitted her blood pressure by phone. I learned to do infusions. A physical therapist came several times a week. More recently, a wonderful volunteer, Myrt, from Lifespan's Partners in Caring program, helped us.

This past January, June broke her ankle, and that became the beginning of the end. The realization of what was going to happen came slowly though. Because of her other health problems, they couldn't operate on her ankle, so we went to a nursing home for rehab. But, because she wasn't in the hospital for required three day admission, Medicare refused to pay for rehab. It ended up costing us more than \$300 a day.

Every time she was in the hospital, and while she was in the nursing home, I slept in a chair in her room. I would go home only to change my own clothes and to do her laundry. Watching over her, in hospitals and in nursing homes, I came to the conclusion that there are no such things as bad caregivers, it's just that some are better than others.

Everyone says that when they thought of one of us, they always thought of the other. That's the way I still think...because that's the way it was. My beautiful June died on June 3.

Because I've had my own health problems, two knee replacements and colon cancer, I asked if Myrt could be transferred from helping June, to helping me. She's absolutely fantastic, a big help to me. She is close to 60 herself. She told me she volunteered to do "something" for someone else, but now she says it was the other way around. She enjoyed June's company so much.

I look at my life in phases. First there were the kids with June, then retirement with June and now I'm in a third phase and trying to adjust. I realized the other day that in about four years I'll be 90 and it shook me, so I had to put that thought right out of my head. With help from Myrt and my sons, Con and Rick, I'm doing the best I can to adjust because that's what June and I always did.

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