

Beyond Words

The editors of *AFP* welcome submissions for Close-ups. Guidelines for contributing to this feature can be found in the Authors' Guide at <http://www.aafp.org/afp/authors>.

Close-ups is coordinated by Caroline Wellbery, MD, associate deputy editor, with assistance from Amy Crawford-Faucher, MD; Jo Marie Reilly, MD; and Sanaz Sara Majd, MD. Questions about this department may be sent to Dr. Wellbery at afp.journal@georgetown.edu.

A collection of Close-ups published in *AFP* is available at <http://www.aafp.org/afp/closeups>.

On June 21, 1993, my husband, Mike, was in a devastating automobile accident. He was life-flighted to a level I trauma hospital and immediately taken to surgery with a severed mesentery artery and a collapsed lung. His most devastating injury was to his brainstem, leaving him a quadriplegic who could not speak. His brain simply does not tell his muscles how to function. He was in a coma for months, in the hospital for almost a year, and in a rehabilitation facility for another year.

From the first time I saw him in intensive care, hooked up to a ventilator and many other machines, I had one goal: we were going to be together as a family again. I was determined to bring him home.

The corporation where Mike had been an executive sent us home with state-of-the-art equipment: a hospital bed, a special mattress that turns him every one-half hour so he maintains his skin integrity, a wheelchair, and a power lift so I could transfer him from his bed to his wheelchair and back. I purchased a large van with a wheelchair lift, and the many medicines and supplies I thought I would need to take care of him. I had to learn how to monitor and treat Mike's diabetes, how to transfer him, and how to take care of his catheter, feeding tube, and many other things.

Over the years, Mike has stayed very healthy for his condition. I have often had people say to me, "I could never do what you do." I always want to say, "Yes, you can." I am not going to tell you that it is easy. It is a lot of hard work. It is mentally and physically challenging, but it is also immensely rewarding. We are like every other family. We have watched our daughters grow into wonderful adults. Mike has been a part of it all. He attended many of their school events, ball games, school plays, and other functions. He was there when they graduated from college. We have been lucky to add two wonderful sons-in-law and a little granddaughter and grandson to our family, and Mike delights in it all. We go out quite often, and have lots of company, too. He loves to go to the movies. Mike and I just celebrated our 41st wedding anniversary, and we look forward to many more years together.—M.S.

COMMENTARY

Mike always has a bright smile. He seems to accept his disabilities despite their severity. His wife, Marcia, has become remarkably adept in caring for him. Instead of bitterness and self-pity, she has shown creativeness, determination, and courage. I have great admiration for both of them.

RODNEY BISHOP, MD



RESOURCES

American Spinal Injury Association
Web site: <http://www.asia-spinalinjury.org>

National Rehabilitation Information Center
Web site: <http://www.naric.com>

National Spinal Cord Injury Association
Web site: <http://www.spinalcord.org>

Paralyzed Veterans of America
Web site: <http://www.pva.org> ■