

Expectations Low, Hopes High *By Joan Johnson*

My beautiful, independent, smart 20 year old daughter had finished her second year of college in Colorado studying Mechanical Engineering with a 3.0 average. My husband and I had moved to our dream place on the river in California. I had the world by the tail and it all changed in an instant when the sheriff came out that Sunday morning. It was one year ago. Life changed forever in an instant. Drop everything, pack a suitcase, and fly to Colorado. Kat had been in an accident and suffered a severe brain trauma, the worst the trauma surgeon had seen — survival was questionable — (organ donor?).

I have been a physical therapist for over 25 years. It worked to my advantage and against it. I could understand and relate to the medical jargon and staff but I also knew the worst possible outcome. I was and am a Mom first. My mothering instincts were in full force and the staff at PVH allowed me to stay on a makeshift bed in my daughter's room. I understood the importance of a familiar face/voice and also that I could not get in the way or interfere. I could use my knowledge to smooth the way for both my daughter and the staff.

My folks, both in their 80s traveled from California to Colorado, dropping everything to offer their support to me. They stayed in their camper van and provided relief and respite and meals. They provided me with a 6 week long invaluable support which gave me strength to make the necessary medical decisions and to face the unknown outcome.

My husband was able to come out for several weeks and deal with paperwork for insurance and attorneys but he had to return to California. We definitely dealt with the experience in very different ways, which may or may not work to bring us closer. Time will tell.

Kat was in a coma for about 6 weeks. I watched every nuance, every twitch. I watched the tubes draining substances out and pumping substances in as I lay

on my bed in ICU. I played music to her and talked and read to her. Her many friends came to visit and signed the visitor log writing special messages. Many left in shock and pale-faced. Some never returned and I could not blame them. My first view of her on that hospital bed will be with me forever. I was in disbelief and had a screaming desire to escape. There is no way to soften the blow. I feared the worst, expected nothing, and hoped for the best. I wasn't sure what defined the best.

She gradually became aware and I could see her gradually working her way from infant to terrible 2s to 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. She got stuck at emotional age 10 for many months. It was enjoyable but worrisome.

I now know I can never sincerely say, "I know how you feel." A parent's worst nightmare gone bad and I'm numb and in shock, but we all bring different strengths/weaknesses to the experience and so feel differently. What works for one may not work for another. We have to be aware and open to what we are comfortable with and do our best hoping it will be enough. If it is our best it is enough!

PVH gave us such great care throughout our more than 10-week stay and then we were blessed to be accepted into the CNS family. Truly a safe place to fall for both of us. The entire experience would have been so different but for the wonderful staff who have helped us adjust, grow, accept, and challenge.

It has been a year. I have remained transplanted in Colorado because it has been reported that familiar places, routines, people help with recovery. My husband is still in California. I am isolated here. It's hard to attempt a social life with the new baggage I bring but I also need to focus my energy on my daughter's needs. She is improving and I am proud of her positive attitude and the determination she displays. I was able to

REMEMBER THIS DATE:

The Brain Injury Association of Colorado's Annual conference is Sept. 30-Oct. 2, 2004

Also, a one day conference on Mental Health and Brain Injury is September 29, 2004

For info and registration call: 1-800-955-2443 or go to www.biacolorado.org



FAMILY EDUCATION SEMINARS:

For persons who support our clients with TBI. 4th Saturday of every month. 9:30-11 am Call to reserve a spot (970) 493-6667 Facilitator: Monica Malcien Toros, Ph.D.

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