

April Caregiver of the Month: Mike Crew!



A Brother and Sister Act

For 25 years, Mike Crew has been a caregiver for his older sister, Anniece, 80.

“She had my back when we were growing up,” says Mike, 67, “and now it’s my turn.” “We came from a dysfunctional family, and she protected me from my father, who was an alcoholic.”

Mike’s occasional caregiving started when Anniece was first diagnosed with multiple sclerosis around age 40. It was a blow for a woman with a liberal arts degree who loved to joke, hike and camp.

“I started bringing over food to her occasionally, and then I did handy man chores around her house,” Mike said. By that time, Anniece was divorced.

At the time, the two lived in Alabama, where Mike worked as a maintenance man for an apartment complex, and Anniece worked in clerical positions—until her condition worsened.

Soon Mike had to quit his job, due to the caregiving demands. His girlfriend convinced him and Anniece to move to Poplar Bluff, Missouri, where her family lived, so they could help. But a year later, Anniece developed dementia, and Mike was the lone caregiver again.

“I don’t blame my girlfriend for leaving,” Mike says. “It’s a big responsibility.”

But it is a responsibility Mike embraces. “I’ve been a caregiver for so long, it’s who I am,” he says.

These days, social workers and certified nursing assistants have gotten involved in Anniece’s 24/7 care, which involves feeding, dressing, bathing, toileting, and medicating Anniece, who is in a wheelchair but no longer has the cognition to wheel herself. The time has come for a nursing home, they think.

But Mike says people don’t understand how invested he is in Anniece.

“What will I be if Anniece goes to a home? It’s very scary. I can be selfish on one hand, and say, ‘Yes, I want to be free’; or, I can be selfish and say, ‘No, Anniece gives me a purpose in life.’”

The choice is heart wrenching, and Mike shares his story with other caregivers in southeast Missouri. He donates his time to give speeches and presentations to let them know they’re not alone.

“Don’t try and do it all by yourself,” he says. “Ask for help. You end up being an island when you do it all by yourself.”