

## **In Sickness and in Health**

### ***February's Caregiver of the Month provides care for the love of her life***

Patsy Ponder Dalton began caring for her husband, David, in 1994 when he was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease at the age of 44. Both active members of their community, David, a certified public accountant, and Patsy, a former Boone County Commissioner and marketing director at Boone Hospital, continued their normal routine as much as possible and learned everything they could about the disease during the first five years after diagnosis. "The first five years weren't so bad," says Patsy, "The next five years got a little worse, and now it's picking up speed."

Always athletic, David enjoyed golf, racquetball and traveling. He was able to continue his career for six years after diagnosis; however, as stress worsened his Parkinson's symptoms, Patsy took on more and more daily tasks. His needs vary day by day. When necessary, Patsy assists David with getting around on his walker, getting ready for the day, ensures he eats well and has social interaction. She accompanies him to doctor appointments and ensures he can be heard (he has a very soft Parkinson's voice). She is his constant companion, every day, all day long. When asked how she dealt with the increasing daily tasks she said simply, "Thankfully it's been gradual. We have had 25 years to get used to it and it is one step at a time. There is one thing, then the next thing, then the next. Gradually, you get used to it being your life."

Patsy and David started a Parkinson's Support Group at the Lake of the Ozarks where they resided for 12 years. "It's important to educate yourself and get to know others who are in the same situation so you have some valve for relief," she said. "In talking with others, you relieve your own stress." Eight years ago they moved to Columbia, where they found there was a need for a Parkinson's Support Group. In 2011, they assumed leadership of a group that had been previously organized. Patsy and David are still very active in leading both support groups today.

Their four children all live out of state; however, Patsy says she is fortunate to live in Columbia with wonderful access to doctors, nursing care and companion care services. She feels it is important for other caregivers to know that you need to take care of yourself and ask for help when you need it. "We all like to think we can manage everything and can continue to be what we have always been, but sometimes we just can't go it alone," she says. Another piece of advice Patsy shared was to "keep things in perspective." She says, "Life has surprises. It has good things and bad things, but it is all life. Some of us have twists and turns we don't expect, but we look back and say those were valuable years. Caregiving lets us show our love to those we care for."

As a caregiver, Patsy has learned that during the rough times if she just waits a little while, her strength and positive outlook will return and her spirit will be renewed. Her one wish for herself is to have internal peace when she has been given a challenge knowing that she gave it her best effort.

Born in Doniphan and raised in Warsaw, Patsy is a lifelong Missouri resident whose hobby of decorating her home brings her both pleasure and an artistic challenge. She also enjoys volunteering with her church where she helped establish CareLink, a program that merged ten ministries under one umbrella.

Patsy doesn't remember a time when she wasn't a caregiver. First to her children, then through volunteering, caring for her parents, her father-in-law and now caring for her husband. "It's one of the most challenging and most rewarding things you will ever do," she says. It has made her think outside

herself and understand people better. She adds, "When you care for other people it makes your life so much better!"