



Jeff and Paula-an unexpected life journey

On March 2, 2024, Jeff and Paula Justus' lives changed forever. Jeff was going to take Paula out for lunch, but, found her in their basement breathing heavily and unresponsive. Jeff quickly called 911 and Paula was rushed to the emergency room. Testing revealed a deep brain bleed stroke.

Paula had surgery to relieve the pressure on her brain. When Paula awoke up the next day, the extent of the stroke was showing up. Her left side was completely paralyzed, she was having trouble moving other parts of her body, and she sustained memory loss. She also had to have a shunt permanently placed in her skull. Paula ended up in ICU for a month after the surgery. Jeff barely left Paula's side during this time.

During this difficult time, Jeff tried to navigate the healthcare system and figure out the best path forward. Every time a doctor came in to evaluate Paula, Jeff was there to listen and ask questions regarding her care. He also had to learn how to navigate the healthcare system, figure out who to contact regarding benefits, and try to learn how to live their lives in a very different way than they imagined.

Paula was not strong enough for acute neurological rehab and ended up a nursing facility that was 40 minutes from their home. Jeff was with Paula during this time also. He attended all her therapy sessions and stayed with her, helping when he could. The insurance company told Jeff and Paula that she had to leave the nursing facility, even though their home was not accessible, and she did not have a wheelchair to go home in. After negotiating with the facility and doing self-pay, Paula was allowed to stay. Paula worked at getting stronger during this time. During this time, Jeff returned to work-but continued to go to the facility daily to spend time with Paula and help with her therapy and other needs.

Jeff worked hard to get their home ready for Paula to return. He purchased ramps, got a hospital bed, put up bars where they were needed, and made sure she had the supplies she would need. Since Paula has returned home, Jeff has been Paula's primary caregiver. He takes care of her personal needs, helps her with her exercises,

takes her to doctor appointments and rehab, and to family events. Jeff pays out of pocket for someone to come in and stay with Paula for a few hours so he can go to work. He continues to be Paula's main advocate by working with the insurance company, figuring out next steps for her continued care, and giving her the emotional and mental support she needs. Paula does have friends that do come over to see her on occasion to give Jeff a much-deserved break. Jeff's sister also helps when she visits.

Jeff and Paula's story goes back over 35 years. They met in college in Wisconsin and moved to Missouri in 1995. Before this happened, they had plans to retire and travel. Although their lives have changed dramatically, they still feel that their lives are good-because they are together. Jeff states that one thing he has learned about caregiving is how to have patience. He also stated that one must always be prepared for whatever happens to you and your family-because things can change very quickly. He is very proud of Paula-she continues to be a trooper through this journey and fights hard daily.