

## Unforeseen Happiness

By Kim Huggins, October 2013

The past two years have been filled with unexpected sadness, pain, challenges, and new friends! My daughter, Christine, 26, had just passed the Ohio Bar Exam and had landed a fabulous job as a Federal Bankruptcy Clerk. She and her fiancé were planning a Christmas wedding. She saved money from her first paychecks to buy a beautiful satin gown! The date was set & deposits paid. Jim and I were so excited for our family. Nick had earned a golf scholarship at Northern Illinois and would be leaving for college. We were about to become "empty nesters" . I would teach second grade and Jim would practice law for a few more years and then we would retire. Perfect plan...

Then in March, I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. New plan...I would wear a wig to the wedding!

However, two days before my surgery, Christine had a massive stroke! Unbeknownst to us, she had a PFO or hole in her heart. A blood clot went straight to her brain stopping the oxygen flow. When Ryan returned home he found her on the floor. While his quick action and the expert medical care at the Cleveland Clinic saved her life, she was left with global aphasia, severe fatigue, and neuropathy (the feeling of "pins and needles") on the right side of her body.

Our new plan... Rely on our family and friends!

The next year was a blur of chemo & radiation for me; speech & occupational therapy for Christine!"

Our friends sustained our existence with prayers, texts, visits, support, information, advice, cards, gifts, meals, money, love & encouragement!

During the first year "post stroke," the wedding was cancelled. Christine and her Black Lab, Keats, moved home with us to continue her recovery. Nick survived his first year of college. Jim worked hard to support us emotionally and financially. (Luckily, he has a delightful sense of humor and effective distracting strategies to ease the stress of our daily challenges.)

We were fortunate to find Bill Connors, SLP, of AphasiaToolbox. Christine's insurance covered online, tele-therapy. Which was a wonderful option! She could practice her speech skills from the comfort of our home.

Bill introduced Christine to others with Aphasia. At last, we had new online friends: Sharon, Shirley, Mary, Carol and David!

During the second year post stroke, we planned a trip to Las Vegas for a National Aphasia Association Conference in June 2012. The San Martin Hospital "Aphasia Lunch Bunch" led by Carol welcomed us with open arms; friends with similar experiences and goals!

In July, 2012, Christine and David started Aphasia Recovery Connection. It is an online Facebook group, where people can meet, share positive support and information.

Christine was so excited to make friends in Vegas that we attended another NAA Conference in Pittsburg where Ellayne shared more "Aphasia Awareness" information. Christine was

invited to attend on-site training at the AphasiaToolbox home office with Bill Connors. A great experience...more friends and training with insightful therapists and clients.

Melody and Jackie of the "Dazy Aphasia Center" in Toledo invited Christine and David to share their inspirations; more friends! The following months were a whirl-wind of new faces: Jean and the MMH Stroke Support Group, Adler Aphasia Center in New York, and the ARC Cruise to the Bahamas!

Carol has been instrumental in helping David and Christine expand and improve Aphasia Recovery Connection (ARC) on Facebook. She planned another successful ARC Conference in June 2013. Christine designed a new ARC website! David published a book, "Brain Attack". Sharing information about stroke and aphasia is important to us as we conduct our online support groups, conferences & cruises. We now have aphasia friends and supporters from around the world!

In this life, we never wish for cancer, strokes, PFO's, brain injury, surgery complications, PPA, or aphasia! These events unfortunately happen...

However, for our family, we have been given this opportunity to bond with a strong group of positive individuals. People who love and encourage us during our family's struggle to find a purposeful life and end this isolation of aphasia. We are grateful for our many new friendships!

**This is a new day of Aphasia Awareness! It is time to tell your family's story of silence. Hopefully, others will listen; really listen, and begin to understand that there is a universal communication among humans that does not include words. Then, and only then, can they enter our silent world of aphasia!**

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