



Testimonial: Care Receiver

Marylou's "Walk in Faith" Leads to Hearts and Hands

I have been very blessed with a wonderful husband, Donald, of 62 years--my husband and I were childhood sweethearts from the time I was 15 years of age. Now we have 5 children, 16 grandchildren, 2 extended grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. And of course, our biggest fan, Molly McGuire, our loving dog of 5 years.

Donald was diagnosed with Parkinson's syndrome and dementia and is living with chronic pain. His conditions require me to be his primary caregiver 24 -7 as his diseases progress. A while ago, I was diagnosed with fourth stage ovarian cancer and then breast cancer. Donald and I at one time led a bible study group at church; the bible study was important to Donald to continue as long as he could, and I supported him in this. This work, however, revealed to me that Donald's symptoms were progressing. When we were both ill, I needed to follow up with both of our medical appointments while continuing to maintain day-to-day activity. Donald and I just couldn't manage doing both, so I saw to Donald and made sure that he was getting what he needed. The unfortunate part of this is that I was not tending to my own needs, and soon exhaustion had set in so severely that I was too weak to manage driving. I was also not able to leave Donald alone, but I wasn't always able to take him with me, so I stopped going to my doctor appointments.

Then a staff member from our church, who was aware of some of our concerns, asked me if I have ever heard of a wonderful service called "Hearts and Hands." She told me it was a free service, a "best efforts" program of neighbors helping neighbors.

She encouraged me to call the Hearts and Hands office in Clarence and I did. I was so glad that I could just call and tell the coordinator at Hearts and Hands that I was in need of transportation to get myself to the doctors' appointments that I hadn't scheduled, since I was not able to keep them. The coordinator scheduled an "intake"--a home visit to meet with me and discuss my needs--and she said she could arrange to have the Clarence area volunteers to transport me as soon as possible. It wasn't until the home visit that she realized that I was the primary caregiver for my husband, and also struggling with my own health problems.

The volunteer coordinator recommended other services Hearts and Hands provides. She set up Donald with a respite volunteer that would come to our home and visit with him while I was transported to my doctor appointment by yet another Hearts and Hands volunteer. I said, "This is too good to be true!"

A short while ago, I learned that I was cancer free! Since Hearts and Hands came into our lives, it has relieved me of such stress and allowed for Donald and me to acclimate to the changes in our lives with assistance and to manage our challenges more easily. It was in May, 2013 when a friend from church approached me and said "Marylou, what is different about you?" I said "Hearts and Hands."