

January, 1997

A Journal Compiled by Wilma Foster, Wife:

In the Fall of 1989, George began having problems with falling, with no apparent reason. He would take his dog, Tuffy, for a walk, and would come home and tell me he fell down. When I asked if he had tripped or something, he would tell me he didn't think so. After about the third time, I asked him if he would see a doctor, and he agreed to do that.

Early in 1990, he was diagnosed as having Parkinson's Disease and was told there was no cure for it. He was put on the drug, Sinemet, but was sick at his stomach each and every day, and it really didn't seem to help his condition, as he shuffled and stumbled when walking. He decided to stop driving our car because he told me he was afraid his reflexes were not up to par. He wasn't very happy with his condition, but I could take him out in the car and we managed O.K.

In October of 1990, we decided we should put our large home at 1541 W. Governor Street on the market because with George unable to do very much it would become too much of a burden to keep. In the meantime we began looking for a smaller place and found our duplex at 521 Mountcastle Road. This meant less for me to be responsible for and seemed to make George feel less agitated about its upkeep. We had a lucky very quick sale of the Governor Street property, and an auction sale to rid ourselves of the excess furniture, etc., and moved to our present location (10-9-90).

After being treated for the Parkinson's for about a year and not making any progress whatever, we asked for further evaluation.

In June of 1991, He was admitted to Memorial Medical Center for tests including some at the Imaging Center, which showed excess fluid surrounding the brain. A Neurosurgeon, Dr. David Morris, was called on and explained what he thought ought to be done. He felt that George did not have Parkinson's and that his whole problem was the excess fluid. The procedure was quite involved and we asked if it was urgent. Dr. Morris told us he would prefer to wait six to eight weeks and then re-evaluate George's condition. We discussed this with George, as he was still able to make decisions, and he told us he wasn't happy with the way he was doing, and thought he should submit to the surgery to remove the excess fluid.

On August 5, 1991 the surgery was done. A shunt was placed behind George's right ear, with a very minute tube extending from it, under the skin, and draining into his abdominal cavity, where the fluid would be absorbed.

The surgery appeared to be successful, but the next day George had a small stroke and then a heart attack. He was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit at Memorial, but while there developed pneumonia, and we were given little hope for his recovery. After four days in the ICU, he was moved to Secondary Care, where he remained for three weeks.

He came home and after a week, he began showing the same symptoms as before (stumbling, falling, etc.) Additional Cat Scans showed fluid had accumulated in the front of his brain, so additional surgery was done. Two holes were made in the upper front of his skull and drains were placed on either side of his forehead to clear out that excess fluid. This time he was in the ICU for three days and Secondary Care for two weeks. These two episodes/surgeries cost \$47,000.

After being home for about ten days, another Cat Scan determined the valve in the shunt was not performing as it should, so again he was readmitted to MMC for a valve replacement, and hospitalized for four days.

On December 30, 1991 he was taken to MMC Emergency Room for a possible stroke. The Imaging Center test showed no brain damage and the fluid flow through the shunt appeared to be O.K. He was terribly confused and unable to sleep. After a week of this behavior he again had surgery on January 8, 1992. The shunt was replaced because we were told the valves are man-made, and so to be sure, he received a new one. Again, dreadful confusion, hallucinating, weird behavior, etc., and begging to go home.

On January 15, 1992, he came home, but could not keep his balance when standing or walking. Annette and John got him a cane, and later replaced it with a walker.

1993 brought more problems, with pneumonia, fatigue, and inability to walk without help, and at this time I realized I would have to have help in caring for him. After trying to get help through several advertised agencies and miserable

luck with the help not showing up when expected and when I had to have it, because I could not handle him alone, I was becoming very discouraged.

By early 1994, Annette and I decided to place an ad in the newspaper, and a very competent lady (Joyce Gresen) came to our aid. She was very helpful and caring of George (and me as well) but by the end of 1994 it had become evident that even two women could no longer handle the care George was requiring, and that it would take the strength of a strong man to do what was needed. This was when a young man (Dean Kirk) came into our lives. He truly had to be sent by God, and he gave George excellent loving care.

By now George was incontinent, could not walk, even with the walker, spoke very little and his voice had become so weak, it was very difficult to understand him when he tried to talk. His condition continued to deteriorate.

1995 found him using a wheel chair and Dean had to push him in it because he didn't seem able to get the knack of propelling himself around. He also began to have great difficulty swallowing and choked on all food and even water. Dean ground his food; then pureed it, and still he choked. He lost a great deal of weight, and was looking truly emaciated.

Finally, after much agonizing, the children, Dean and I agreed to getting him a feeding tube on June 2, 1996. This meant a major change in our lifestyle because we no longer were able to have family meals. We felt uncomfortable eating in George's presence. His discharge for this surgery was June 15, 1996.

On July 30, 1996 Dr. O'Brien made a visit because he knew George was not able to go to his office. He recommended a Duragesic Patch (Morphine) because by now George had monstrous sores on nearly every part of his body. He was so extremely thin, unable to move on his own, and being immobile the sores just seemed to multiply overnight. Finally, on August 8, 1996, and again having difficulty accepting it, I did agree to the Patch.

On August 10, 1996, George again had pneumonia and upon release from MMC, Dr. O'Brien urged putting him in a nursing home for 24 hour a day 'Skilled Care'. So, on August 14, 1996, with heavy hearts and apprehension, we entered him at the West Abbe Nursing Home, just a few blocks from our home. I kept

Dean and Jason on the payroll, because I felt if they could spend some time with George for a few days, it might not seem so hard on him.

On August 19, 1996, Jason (another fine caring caregiver who alternated with Dean and who also love George and was so good and kind to him – and to me) called to tell me George's feeding tube had come out overnight. I had not been notified but called Dr. O'Brien's office immediately. He advised taking George to the MMC Emergency Room and he would arrange for it to be replaced. (I paid for the ambulance to transport George there and back to the nursing home.)

On August 20, 1996 when I went to visit I found George's oxygen tank empty. And had to ask several times for a replacement. At that point I realized the 'Skilled Care' he received at home would be far superior to the care he had received there.

I went to the administrator and informed her that I planned to take George home the following morning. We had to reorder his Kin-Air Mattress, oxygen, liquid food, etc., so I knew it would be morning before all that could be accomplished. She was not at all polite to me and informed me I would receive a 'hefty' bill because I did not give their customary 30 days notice. In about three days I did receive a bill for \$1500. Doug asked me to let him handle it. I insisted that I would prefer to try to negotiate for a more reasonable fee for the six days he was there. Doug told me he had no intention of paying it and wrote them a letter telling them that his attorney would consult with them regarding the neglect his father had received in their facility. In two days I received a phone call telling me we didn't owe ANYTHING. On August 21, I brought George back home.

We were now being pressured by George's doctor and our Visiting Nurse to put him in the Home Hospice Program. The mere word 'Hospice' put icy fear in my heart and I didn't want to face that George's condition had reached that point.

Finally, after discussing it with Annette, Doug, and his care-givers, we made the decision and on September 4, 1996 we had our first visit with our Hospice Nurse, Kris Bolt. She made it clear from the beginning that they would be here only to prepare me for the inevitable of the final outcome. The Hospice Chaplain, Ted Harvey, also called on me regularly and was very comforting and easy to talk with. There was also a Social Worker involved, and so along with Dean and Jason, we had much coming and going here.

On December 17, 1996, George's dosage was increased from 25 to 50M and changed every third day. He slept much of the time and was unaware of most (which had been discontinued for sometime) and brought him to his recliner chair in our living room. Doug sat beside him while the grandchildren opened their gifts and told me he felt George understood most of what went on. I believe he was determined to give us one last Christmas to always remember and cherish.

On December 28, 1996, George developed a case of hiccups which were present with every breath, and he could no longer get out of bed, even for the short periods daily that he had been able to do. With medication he finally tapered off and by January 8, 1997 the hiccups had stopped. Chaplain told me about 70 percent of Hospice patients develop them. I didn't quite understand the significance of that statement at that time.

On the evening of January 13, 1997, George's breathing was very labored and his pulse very rapid. I still did not realize what was coming.

At 8:55 A.M. on Tuesday, January 14, 1997, George died, with both children and I beside him, but we don't believe he knew we were here.

We had his visitation hours from 4:00 until 7:00 P.M. on January 15, 1997 at Bisch Funeral Home. Ironically, we had the worst snow/wind storm that night, and on January 16, 1997, when his funeral was scheduled his burial had to be postponed due to blizzard and wind chill factors at 40 degrees BELOW Zero and very dangerous conditions.

I firmly believe we had that very unusual weather sent by God because He felt I simply could not watch George put in his grave.

Finally, on Saturday, January 18, 1997, my precious life's partner was buried in the Auburn Cemetery. Annette (George's and my loving and caring daughter) and her husband, John, accompanied the funeral director to the burial -- and I stayed in our home -- and wept.

Now I need to acknowledge several important parts of this very long and trying period:

1. The brave and courageous way that George handled this nearly unbearable situation. The active, vibrant man that had been, became one who could not tell us his feelings, could not walk, and in fact could do absolutely nothing for himself. How difficult that had to be for him and NEVER ONCE did he complain.
2. The love and support of our two children, both for George and to me, was a sign of the kind of adults they are, and I feel so very proud of them. They have been right here at all times to show their love and handle responsibilities and help make his love and pride in claiming them as his children. The grandchildren, Molly and John Beck, and Cory and Alex Foster, were so caring, never failing to give their Grandpa a hug and a greeting.
3. Now I come to Dean Kirk and Jason Jilg, who cared for George and without whose help I could not have kept him at home, where he so wanted to be. They are both unusually good and kind young men, who loved George as part of their family. They gave love and support beyond what their jobs could have expected and were a source of comfort and love to me as well. They are just as sad at losing George as we in his immediate family are. I can only pray that God will be kind and comforting to them, because they so deserve it.
4. My sister, Velda, and her husband, Lindo Fafoglia, were, and still are, so very kind and caring and supportive of me. I don't know how I could have coped many times if it hadn't been for them. They patiently listened and waited when all I could do was cry when George was so desperately ill, and then later after his death. I surely was not the best of company, they never acted like they noticed that.

I know the true meaning of a 'Special Sister' – I am blessed with one, as well as a very special brother-in-law. I owe them so much more than words can convey, but thanks just the same.