

Multiple Myeloma: Vicki and Randy's Story

The rigors of caregiving, rebuilding relationships: it wasn't easy, but Vicki and Randy now enjoy life to the fullest.



The end of this story will be first this time, in the tale of Randy and Vicki Williams. Theirs is a hero's journey, full of physical and psychological bumps and twists before the heroes get to their happy ending. Vicki is Randy's wife, but was also his caregiver from the time he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, through his transplant in 2009, and his road back to health.

The message that Vicki would like to convey is this: It was all very worth it.

Randy's diagnosis came after Vicki's earlier recovery from breast cancer.

"Someone of us, more than others, are made aware of how close the guillotine is to our necks," Vicki says, "And that made us know how we wanted to live and so we just got to doing it."

For Randy and Vicki, that meant travel, family, and meaningful work.

"We learned to sail and our sailboat was a dream that came true after Randy's transplant," Vicki says. "There was taking the grandkids to Disneyland, where Randy was the biggest kid of all! We've seen our son graduate from law school and get married, and are watching our grandchildren grow up."

Randy and Vicki are both nurses, and while Vicki still practices clinical nursing, Randy now advocates for nurses around issues important to the profession.

Vicki talks openly about how before the good stuff, there were the rigors of caregiving.

"It's a marathon, not a short sprint," she says, "A transplant is a very hard thing to watch a loved one go through."

Vicki talks about the need to take care of and pace oneself, while keeping track of medications, an anti-bacterial diet after transplant, Randy's cloistered life for a few months after transplant, the complications that can arise, far away support systems, and the long list of dos and don'ts on the road to recovery.

Some items on the list surprised her, like avoiding new construction where dust is stirred up.

"And some of the items aren't easy like trying to maintain the best germ-free environment in a germ world," she says.

What did Vicki discover to be helpful?

- A poster board in Randy's room with pictures of grandkids, Randy on top of Mt. Shasta, favorite friends.
- Limiting phone calls, in their case from anyone other than their children and Randy's brother and sister.
- A calendar and journal that she always had nearby with notes with instructions, medications, appointments, forms, advance directives.
- Appointing Randy's brother to be a daily emailer to loved ones.
- Having her own support system.
- An occasional place to grab a nap.
- Relief of her duties from time to time when a trusted carer could come.
- A housekeeper when Randy got home.
- Getting fresh air everyday.
- Exercise.

"There's something so true about putting on your own oxygen mask first," Vicki says.

And then, when it's over, Vicki maintains that there's a whole new set of things that she and Randy needed to face that aren't talked about as much.

"We went into marriage counseling. The dynamics of our relationship had shifted during the whole experience," she says.

From issues that came up early in Randy's illness like the part of Vicki that whispered, "I could lose him so I'm going to back off now," to the relentlessness of care, they needed to recreate a relationship.

"I think it's important for people to know that their relationship is going to change and to get as many tools and resources as they can to put in their toolbox," she says. "It was very beneficial to go to marriage counseling."

Always a strong marriage, Vicki describes it now as even sweeter.

Today, Vicki and Randy have milestones to celebrate and projects to do together, like subdividing their farm.

"There's no doubt about our commitment to each other," she says. "But we live our life in a different way. This was all hard. But it's a heart-felt YES!"

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Language

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