

Piece by Piece

By Pete Clark

From July 18, 2012 until January 31, 2013, I visited my daughter Lori and my granddaughter Christy at Craig Rehab Hospital on every viable occasion which presented itself. With the passage of time, Christy was able to travel by wheelchair. On days off, I would accompany them on journeys through the hallways to the lunchroom and other places of interest and treatment. Weather permitting, we would go outside, around the building, to the garden. During the rare instances when it became necessary for Lori to leave us for a short time, an avalanche of fear would fill Christy's eyes. She was trapped in a damaged body, with limited abilities to process information and to communicate. She had no idea who I was, or what my intentions were.

When Christy left Craig Rehab, still in her wheelchair, she went to a facility in Omaha, Nebraska, specializing in care for young adults with brain injuries. There, she began the slow process of relearning to interact with other people and at the same time began developing skill with the most basic learning tool her mother could provide, a toddler's puzzle consisting of pieces of wood cut into different shapes with the same shaped cuts in another piece of wood. When Christy had mastered the wooden block puzzles, she graduated to jigsaw puzzles of less than ten large pieces. Late in the spring of 2013, Christy was able to release herself from the bonds of her wheelchair.

Christy left Omaha September 1, 2013 going to a nursing home in Laramie, Wyoming. Her time in the nursing home was a bit rocky. The staff at the nursing home had few means to control Christy as she is five feet, eleven inches tall and was very muscular before her ordeal began. At mealtime she would steal food from other patients: the problem being that much of that food was medicated. She would be locked in her room at night but would escape and get into mischief. Lori became an advocate for funding of the state hospital in Lander, which at that time had a waiting list of more than five hundred people needing care due to damaged or impaired brains. She also campaigned for more Medicaid-provided home care. Finally a woman who had contacts within Wyoming Medicaid pulled strings to get Christy homecare.

Christy arrived home May 10, 2014, being provided eight hours of care, Monday through Friday, so her mother could work. The care time was eventually cut to six hours per day, with Lori paying for the other ten hours per week out of pocket.

Christy can now dress herself with little help and she can feed herself, but food must be cut up if necessary and prepared. Christy helps her mother shop, always selecting the same items, grapes, candy, milk and pizza. She puts things away, not always the correct things. She knows I belong when I can visit them and Christy can now do a two-hundred-piece jigsaw puzzle.