

*VOCAL25 - Pat*  
perspectives after caring



My memories of being a carer are still vivid, although my partner John has been dead for over 5 years. I was plunged into the role without warning. We had come back from enjoying winter sunshine in Tenerife, enjoying the luxury of that choice in retirement. We had drawn up a 'bucket list' of further destinations that evening but it was not to be. Very early the next morning, John had a massive stroke which robbed him of speech and mobility. I became a carer for the next 6 years.

The acceptance of the role was not easy and I went through the recognised stages of denial, anger, bereavement and acceptance. Being a carer meant that my life altered in a myriad of ways and I felt constantly under stress. Since he was in hospital for the first 8 months, it meant being on alert for a telephone summons, collecting laundry and taking him little treats on my daily visit. He had subsequent

mini-strokes which created a 'locked-in' syndrome and rendered communication a constant challenge. It was not what we had planned for our retirement. I did rail at the injustice of life. The experience of being a carer knocked me sideways and it was only through counselling that I was able to rebuild my own life. It was hard to accept that the future we had planned had been deleted by a stroke, never to return.

VOCAL's support proved a lifeline. I no longer felt alone in my battle to do the best for him. Finding solace in research, writing and friendship meant that I survived. I have moved on, still mourn what might have been and miss him every day. Becoming a carer was an experience without preparation or parallel but it has helped me empathise with others. Resilience is not a given. VOCAL is there and no carer need struggle alone. It is a difficult journey and we all need understanding and support.