

Defying the Odds

One man's journey to self-discovery and a renewed spirit

By all intents and purposes, it is a miracle Stephen Bock is alive. When he came to the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care, his health was quickly deteriorating from heart disease. Add to that, years of alcohol and cocaine abuse. Even a suicide attempt.

"I am broke," Bock said. "I lost my last \$60,000 to crack cocaine. I blew it in five months." But he was not only broke financially. His entire life was broken. "Everything went wrong," expressed Bock. "Divorce, jail, felony, theft, misdemeanor crimes, bad check writing, estranged daughters. I even failed at my suicide attempt."

A social worker with the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care, Barb Hassan, MSW, LCSW, remembers her first assessment of Bock. "When the primary nurse and I found him sleeping in his vomit-filled bed, mounds of unopened mail and no food in the home, I knew that intense intervention was needed.

"I first explained my various roles to Mr. Bock...that I am his advocate -- a resource person who will assist him in connecting with beneficial community resources. I explained how I would serve as his educator -- able to share information regarding his disease process, in order to help him develop coping strategies. Then how I will be his coordinator of services in his home as well as an empathetic listener -- one to whom he could tell his life story without being judged."

Hassan worked closely with Rudy Gourdine, an Oaklawn Community Case Manager, who had been assigned to Bock for more than seven years. "One of the most important aspects of our care," she noted, "was our pledge to honor Steve's wishes regarding his care setting. As deplorable as his apartment was, he wished to remain there. Thus, I worked with Rudy to identify a cleaning service, then with Real Services for in home assistance with laundry, next with Meals on Wheels for home delivered food, and finally with the Medicaid office to determine his eligibility for services.

"As Steve became accustomed to me, his trust grew and he began to disclose more of his life story. The spiritual and emotional angst due to his alcohol and drug addiction was quite apparent. Involvement of the Spiritual Care Counselor was paramount to his ongoing story. Marge Braden, Spiritual Care Counselor with the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care was able to gain his trust quite early in his care."

"I believe very much in the work of Hospice," Bock expressed. "I have nothing but praise for their work -- The Center for Hospice is a wonderful organization. I would see Marge about every week to ten days. We would just talk about how

I was doing. She'd ask me if I was troubled (I often was troubled). Sometimes she'd give me advice and others she would just listen and let me draw my own conclusions.

"Barb (Hassan) is the person I would always call at CHAPC. When I needed something, she got it done. She's a doer. And Jessica McCourt, (home health aide) is just a neat person with a great sense of humor. She'd see me about twice a week. We're good friends. She means a great deal to me."



A Changed Man

The transformation which occurred for Steve was one of the body and most importantly, of his spirit. According to Hassan, he changed from a surly, egocentric man filled with anger, to a man at peace in his soul, with compassion for others, and an enthusiasm and appreciation for life he had not previously experienced.

After his discharge from Hospice House, Steve moved into his new home at Valley View in Elkhart, IN, where he has developed meaningful relationships with both staff and residents. "I am thriving here," he proudly stated. "I came in at only 137 pounds and the nurses were taking bets on how long I would make it. Most didn't think I'd live past two weeks.

"I truly believe that God has been good to me. He has some purpose for me and I believe he's not finished with me yet. Today, I am fine with God. I know He loves and accepts me as I am -- including my faults. He lets me be angry with Him and allows me to question Him. I know God can take me at anytime, and that's OK...I don't fear death.

God has given me purpose. I feel I have more to do."

Bock made up his mind that if he stayed sober for five years he would start making contact with special people in his life with whom he lost touch. "It's been a slow process, but I've started reaching out," he explained. Bock started with his own grown daughters, Lisa and Allison. He then purchased an alumnae directory from IU Bloomington as well as his high school. "I have found that in doing this, I have been able to do one small good thing myself and my family, and friends have been there for me. God puts people in our lives from time to time for different reasons. I have received such an outpouring of love and affection. If this is what dying is..."

Hassan believes the catalyst for Bock's change stemmed from the unconditional love and respect afforded him by members of the Hospice team, the Valley View staff, his family (with whom he reconnected), and his fraternity



It takes a village... is true at the end of life as well. This is just a portion of Stephen Bock's Care team.

A Volunteer Connection

According to Dale Kern, a volunteer with The Center for Hospice who has worked with Bock since the spring in 2008, Bock rallied when he moved into Valley View. "Moving into Valley View was a very good thing for Stephen," Kern noted. "The Valley View staff were key to his turnaround. He even spent Thanksgiving with one staff member -- they have really gone above and beyond with Stephen." As Kern reflected on his time with Bock, he remembers his initial contact with him as the most worthwhile. "We talked about some of our life experiences and we realized we had some things in common. Once that happened, it helped Stephen solidify his acceptance of me. He didn't feel threatened. For the most part, my visits weren't extended. I would pop in, stay for a short while, and be on my way. We were just two guys hanging out and that helped build our relationship."

brothers. "To be loved in this manner allowed him the ability to explore the meaning of love and self forgiveness," she explained. "He was able to ask for forgiveness from his family, with whom he had many past wounds."

Donna Leatherman, RN, his primary nurse also saw the effectiveness of the entire care team. "What Stephen found at Valley View was more than he ever dreamed of," she said. "He became a functioning person again. He has developed an ongoing friendship with several of the staff and was even invited to the graduation party which he attended. Steve now has a reason to live, and enjoy life. Our ability as an agency to make this journey with him was very helpful. We were the part of his life that remained stable until he was able to establish himself at Valley View."

A Spiritual Journey

The African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," is true at the end of life as well as early in life. Marge Braden, Spiritual Care Counselor at the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care has discovered that it also takes a village to surround and assist a patient at end of life.

"Steve now has a 'village' of support, compared to the isolation he was experiencing when he first entered the program," she noted. "He is supported by CHAPC nurses, aides, doctors, social worker, volunteers, and spiritual care. He also has nurses, aides, social work, and others from Valley View, as well as his family, friends and fraternity brothers supporting him in the larger community."

Marge met Steve within 36 hours of his admissions to CHAPC. She remembers that from their first meeting that Steve was able to state his desire to explore his spiritual path. "As his spiritual care counselor, it has been my privilege to accompany him on this journey," exclaimed Braden. "I focus on listening, sometimes redirecting, and offering observations, while Steve explores his journey from agnosticism to faith, from despair to peace. Mr. Bock's often speaks of experiencing a deep spiritual peace that he felt might elude him all of his earthly life."

CHAPC's former Chief Medical Officer, David Tribble, MD., utilized the art and science of palliation skillfully. Bock's past addictions had raised his tolerance level for pain. This resulted in huge dosages of morphine. More importantly, since Bock's goal was to remain at home, and since he had limited usage of his left hand and arm due to a childhood injury, Dr. Tribble developed a plan for morphine dosing that required a morning and evening nurse visit to draw up the medication in syringes. The Syringes had no needle, but this was the only method Bock could use to ingest the morphine. "This is the ultimate example of the patient-driven service Hospice provides, including the total individualization of needs," Hassan said. Jon Kubley, MD, interim Chief Medical Officer, continued caring for Bock after Tribble's departure.

