

My Mom's Story

written by Laura Batz Townsend

In April of last year, I was sitting with my Mom during a visit to my parents. We were in the family room watching TV. It was a Monday night, so we were watching Jack Bauer save the world on 24. We loved that show. It was a nightly ritual of ours when I came to San Antonio to visit. With my dad asleep and my two daughters tucked in, Mom and I had time to relax and just catch up. I always cherished those moments and even now they are some of my fondest memories. On this night in particular, while we were chatting and watching our shows, Mom was looking over all her paperwork for the hospital, getting ready for her knee replacement surgery the next day. She was so calm. Mom was so ready to have her surgery; she timed it just right so that she would have enough time to heal and be ready to welcome the arrival of her fourth grandchild, Riley Bruce Hamilton Batz.

We went to the hospital the next morning. My Dad, my aunt Joanne, and I were all with her in the Pre-operative room. She was still so calm and strong. I was so proud of her. The nurses came and got her and I gave her a kiss and told her I would see her in a few hours. Dad, Joanne, and I sat in the waiting room nervously for a couple of hours. I always thought that this was the scary part, the surgery. The doctor came out and told us everything went great and the surgery was a success. I cannot tell you how relieved we all were, especially my Dad. He had been a nervous wreck. The hard part was over now. Mom was on the road to recovery and focused on getting her new knee in shape.

After the surgery, my Mom was taken down to her hospital room. Mom had asked me to go get her night jacket because she was cold. I picked that up and my daughters -Ella and Mary Louise. They came back with me and brought her flowers and balloons. They loved her so much. Ella was four years old at the time. They had such a special relationship. Mom would take care of Ella at least once or twice a week. Their favorite thing to do was sit in the kitchen, color and play with baby dolls. When Ella was a baby, I think my Mom would change her clothes three times a day – each time a new dress and bonnet. Mom helped me so much. She was such a strong presence in my life and the life of her granddaughter. Our youngest daughter, Mary Louise, had just turned one. In that short time, their bond was already becoming very strong as well. Every time she saw my Mom she would kick her legs and reach her arms out trying to spring out of my arms to get to her. She had such joy in her eyes every time she saw Mom. Looking back, I am so glad they had one last time to see her.

I took the girls home and came back to sit with my Mom at the hospital. We were trying to decide if one of us should stay with my Mom overnight in the hospital. The nurse told us to go home because Mom really needed her rest. She had to get up at 5:00 A.M. to go to her first physical therapy session. At 10:00 P.M., I gave my Mom a kiss and told her she was doing great and that I loved her. I never imagined that would be the last time she got to talk to me or tell me goodnight and that she loved me. I will forever wish that I had not listened to the nurse. I will forever wish I had stayed with her.



I came home and my Dad arrived about an hour later. He was so relieved that everything had gone well that day. He was not excited about going to bed without Mom. They were always together; they never spent time away from each other. Mom and Dad had been together for almost 50 years. Dad and I sat up and visited until around midnight and then decided to go to bed.

The phone rang around 4:00 A.M. It was the hospital. The hospital staff informed Dad that Mom was having trouble breathing and that we should come down to the hospital. We immediately got dressed and raced to the hospital. On the way, I called my uncle Charlie, who is a doctor, and he was trying to assure me that everything was going to be okay. The nurses probably just had her on some oxygen. I was feeling a little bit better, but I couldn't get this panic out of my stomach. I wouldn't relax until I saw her for myself.

We got to the hospital and I ran to her room. As I turned down the hall, I saw a security guard outside her door. My chest tightened and my heart sank. Something was really wrong. Why would they have a security guard outside her door? I raced into her room, and at that moment I felt a pain that I have never experienced in my life. I thought my Mom was already dead. She was so white and lying still on the bed. The nurse was pumping oxygen into her. She could not breathe on her own. Now I know why they had a security guard. I started yelling and screaming, and it took every ounce of me not to start throwing things at them. How could this have happened to my sweet wonderful Mother? It is so hard to describe the emotions that I felt at that moment. It was like a thousand knives going straight through my body. Those first moments were filled with anguish and pain like I have never felt in my life. They told us my Mom had suffered from respiratory depression. I immediately called our dear friend Dr. Scott Campbell who was also an ER doctor. He was at the hospital within fifteen minutes and was the one responsible for rounding up the team of doctors that would try and save my Mom. For the rest of my life, I will be forever grateful for Scott. He tried desperately to save my mom and tried to help her so that our family and friends might have had the opportunity to be with her one last time.

My Mom was on life support for ten days. During those ten days in the hospital, we asked a million questions about how this could have happened to my Mom. It didn't take long to realize that she was in this condition because of a **preventable** medical mistake. I felt like my Mom had just gotten hit by a drunk driver. It was all so sudden and could have been avoided. How could this have happened? My Mom's father, brother, son, daughter-in-law and sister-in-law were all doctors. I started doing some research and quickly realized what a huge problem patient safety is in this country. I had no idea so many people died each year from preventable medical mistakes. The few hours each day that I was not at the hospital with my Mom, I kept diving into research and learning as much as I could about patient safety.

Over the next week, so many friends showered us with love and support. It was truly amazing, and a tribute to how much people loved her. I am not sure the hospital had ever seen anything like it. I had a chance to take care of Mom. Growing up, she was never sick. I can only remember one or two times my



entire life that Mom was too sick to take care of us and even then it was only for a day. So, I sat with her during the days and nights. I held her hand, massaged her feet, and would put ice packs on her forehead when her fever would get high. I just wanted to try to take care of her the way she always cared for me. Yet, I knew that I could never come close. I told her over and over again how much I loved her and what a wonderful mother she was. I kept hoping for a miracle. Hoping that she would wake up and just look at me and tell me everything was going to be ok. But, the damage to Mom's brain was too massive, and eight days later we were told that she would never be able to recover.

On April 26th we made the terrible decision to take her off the breathing machine. I held my Mom's hand and stroked her head while she was fighting, unconsciously, to breathe. I begged her to stop struggling; I wanted her to stop suffering. I told her that we would be okay. I told her that it was time for her to go to heaven and that she could take care of us from up there. My aunt Joanne was holding her other hand and telling her the same thing. My brother paced the halls. He couldn't bear to see her struggling to breathe. My brother's wife, Ginger, sat at the corner of the bed her head down and crying. My husband Michael was in the room standing behind me rubbing my shoulders. He never left my side. My Dad was sitting in the chair next to her in shock. His eyes were glazed over. He was a man with a broken heart. I looked up at the monitors. Her oxygen finally read zero and the heart monitor had "flat-lined". My Mom finally passed away. I went to the hallway and sat on the floor, crying. I was terrified because I couldn't feel my Mom anymore. We always had a very special connection, and for the first time I couldn't feel it. I was so scared that I wouldn't get it back.....

I went home to tell Ella that Grandmother went to heaven. She cried and couldn't understand. She asked if she was coming back. I told her no, but she would always be with us no matter where we go. After asking if she would be at school, in the car and various other places, Ella asked, "Will she be with us even if we go to Mexico?" . I laughed through my tears. Children are wonderful and they are an eternal sense of joy. I realized that was how my Mom felt about us. I was blessed by her love for 35 years. I will always have those memories and moments in my heart. Even though Ella only had four years with Mom, she will be able to carry those blessed memories in her heart as well. She talks about her all the time. She will laugh and smile at something funny they did together and she cries a lot too. I asked Ella one day what one of her favorite memories was about Mom. She said, "I loved coloring with her. She always colored with me when I asked. Now there is no one to sit with me and color in the kitchen and it is lonely." This is when my heart breaks into little pieces. At least she has those memories. The greatest tragedy is that Mary Louise won't remember Mom. I will have to tell her how excited she was to see her, but she won't have the memories that Ella and I have. That is when I think to myself over and over again, how could this happen? She didn't die from a terminal illness or serious medical condition; she died from a **preventable** mistake. Why?

From that moment on, I had a new sense of purpose and focus. My life took a new direction that night. I got up the next morning and wrote the mission and objectives of the Louise H. Batz Patient Safety Foundation. I was not going to let my Mom's death go unnoticed. I couldn't imagine other families



having to experience this pain. My Mom would never want other families to suffer the way we have. Over the past year, with the help of so many amazing people, we have established and laid the groundwork for my Mom's foundation.

In just a few months, we have accomplished so much. I can feel Mom with me. I know that Mom and God have been guiding me through this journey. I try to think what she would have done. She always believed there was a solution. When friends called to tell her they were sick or having a problem she would immediately get to work calling our doctor friends, researching the internet, or referring back to interesting articles she had read that seemed helpful. I recently discovered that she kept index card files labeled with helpful tips just filled with information for those moments when someone needed to know things would be okay. It is amazing. I feel that I am merely working on her behalf. I am doing what she would have done.

I am thrilled that the website is going to launch this April. We have developed patient care packets for families and advocates to use while their loved ones are in the hospital. I know that if I had known the RIGHT questions to ask, my Mom would be with me today. If we could have all worked together with the nurses and doctors as a team, the outcome could have been different. We would be having our quality time together watching Jack Bauer save the world one more time. She helped and supported so many people during her time with us. I hope that her foundation will leave a legacy of helping families for many years to come.