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Jeffrey S. Sieben - Press

Lost and Found

by Rae Kruger, September 26, 2007

A near-fatal car crash left her in a coma, and she wound up in a hospice. Then, Elise Capp did something few can claim to have done: she left the hospice. Then, she got on with her new life.

Elise Capp was lying in a bed in a nursing home more than a year ago when it happened. Capp began to remember her grandchildren.

"I woke up at 5AM and thought I had grandchildren," Capp said. "I couldn't remember their names or birth days." Capp hadn't been gradually forgetting names or dates. After a serious car crash on Dec. 30, 2005, Capp had remembered nothing.

"It was terrible feeling," Capp said. "I felt so lost. I didn't even know who I was." Nearly two years later, Capp is at home again in Green Valley. "It was wonderful to get home," Capp said. Capp said there are still frustrations and some pain these days. Yet, she has been given back her life.

"I really learned a lot," Capp said. "I learned what life is all about. It's about making the most of everything and never giving up and keep moving up." she moved home this spring, but to do that she had to learn to dress herself, write and learn other skills she had mastered long before December 2005.

Capp and her friend, Eugene Capp, the cousin of her deceased husband, were traveling to the Minneapolis St. Paul Airport on their way to Pasadena Calif., for the Tournament of Roses Parade. Near Fairfax, Capp saw a vehicle in the other lane start to slide toward them.

"I said to Gene, 'something's coming here,'" Capp said. "Those were the last words I said. I heard the crash. I don't remember too much after that."

Capp was transported to the hospital in Arlington and then to a Twin Cities suburban hospital. Capp was in a coma, and not long after she was in hospice care.

"I was near dead and they had given me up for dead," Capp said.

"The doctors in Shakopee figured she wasn't going to pull out of it," Gene Capp said. But Capp rallied and was removed from hospice care and put into a nursing home.

"Not many people leave hospice care," Capp said. "My sister calls me the miracle person."

Capp's journey from near death to her home had just started. "I felt like I was dead and had come back to life," Capp said. "I had to learn everything all over. I would try to remember who I was, where I was..."

While she struggled to remember herself and her life, Capp endured surgeries, and physical and occupational therapy.

"I didn't even know how to put clothes on," Capp said. "It was frustrating." Capp began to make progress physically and mentally. "I laid awake more at night," Capp said.

It seemed pieces of her life returned to her as while she lay awake at night in the nursing home. "When things started falling into place it's a feeling so hard to describe," Capp said. "Gene really encouraged my," Capp said. "He stayed by my side, and if he hadn't they wouldn't have let me come home."

"Its been lots of adversity and pain," Gene Capp said. "The worst part was she couldn't talk or listen to anybody, especially when she was in a coma."

Capp had surgeries and therapy for more than a year and was in medical care for more than a year. As she regained her life, medical bills arrived, Capp said.



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She had worked in house keeping at Avera Marshall Regional Medical Center for nearly 20 years. The hospital held her job for three or four months but she wasn't able to return, Capp said.

"I lost my job, the whole thing," Capp said. Capp said that she had at least eight surgeries. "That all adds up into money," Capp said. She contacted lawyer Jeffery Sieben to help.

"Bills, I'd get all kinds of bills," Capp said. "(Sieben) told me I'd get all kinds of bills and that I should put them in an envelop and said send them to him and he said, 'I'll take care of them.' He was wonderful."

Sieben dealt with insurance and bills and now, an unexpected settlement, Capp said. "it took a lot off my mind, " Capp said of working with Sieben. Capp's hope during recover was that she could return home.

Although she can't walk as far as she used to, and she's dropped more dishes in the past few months than in her lifetime, she was painting the house with Gene earlier this month.

"She always tries to do too much," Gene Capp said. "She's slowed down some, but she didn't relax much before (the crash)."

"I think you appreciate things more," Capp said of how she's changed. "I know life is short, it was just about over for me. I don't feel like it has to be all done right away. It used to be it was terrible for me, I couldn't stand it if the floor wasn't swept every day."

Capp got her license back this summer, and a few weeks ago, she bought a car. "I followed Gene home from Willmar," Capp said of the day she bought the car. "I've been to Marshall two or three times. I haven't gone too far."

But in other ways, Capp has traveled much farther than most people.



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