

How Carol Pociecha-Palm became a Health Care Advocate

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Carol Pociecha-Palm with her husband Joe

MILWAUKEE - Nothing can motivate someone more quickly than the health breakdown of a family member or a loved one, and the subsequent care they need. For Carol Pociecha-Palm, a 1990 [Unification Theological Seminary](#) (UTS) graduate, it was two family members - her sister and her husband - that propelled her to find out more about the health care and hospice systems in her native [Wisconsin](#).

It also motivated her - along with David, her 20-year-old son - to become more politically active and knowledgeable about which politicians and/or political parties are pro-life and which ones are pro-choice, or pro-abortion.

In December 2017, Carol received a phone call from her ex-brother-in-law in which he explained that her sister had suddenly been diagnosed with cancer of the brain three weeks prior. He stated he was the Health Care Power of Attorney and decided to allow her to die at home.

The hospice company he hired for her sister completed the end of her life within a week. Hospice workers and her ex-husband administered numerous doses of opioids and withheld food and water, resulting in her death. Carol was able to visit one time, but despite frequent requests she was not allowed to see her again. Without consulting anyone, he decided on cremation, foregoing any memorial service or burial plot.

"It was a real wake-up call for me," said Carol. "I didn't even know she was sick, I was in shock; I couldn't believe she was dead. There was no opportunity for me or my family to say goodbye before she was placed [on hospice care](#). There was no memorial service for remembering her life.

"Carol is an occupational therapist, whose current job includes working one-and-a-half-days a week at a men's medium security prison and a women's minimum security prison near her home in Milwaukee. However, even though she works in healthcare, she knew little about current day hospice care, and soon began educating herself.



Carol with her son David

After seeing a presentation on the internet by Ron Panzer, founder of the [Hospice Patients Alliance](#) and brother of former UTS president Dr. Richard Panzer, she gave Ron a call.

"He told me the kind of thing that happened to my sister (in hospice care) goes on all the time," said Carol, "and it's been going on since 1998. When you say 'hospice' that may mean something entirely different to somebody else." The more Carol delved into hospice care, after her sister's death, the more skeptical she became... and the more concerned.

Carol's husband, Joe, was first diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2003 with subsequent surgery in 2004. After that, he received twice-yearly injections to help keep the cancer from spreading. In November, 2016, however, the cancer had advanced to Stage 4 levels. This resulted in increased pain and decreased functional ability. Throughout 2017 Carol encouraged Joe to receive not only traditional medical care but other innovative therapies so that his cancer could be treated more like a chronic disease.

Through a combination of traditional and complementary alternative therapies, along with hard work, strong faith and Carol's support, Joe has rebounded to the point where he's able to do many everyday activities on his own. He remains independent in activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, toileting, medication management, etc.), and he's able to drive to and from his part-time job at the post office three days a week.

Prior to her work in the prisons, Carol worked for five years in a community health program taking care of the predominantly African-American population in Milwaukee's inner city. When her job was eliminated, Carol was forced to go on unemployment, until she was hired as an occupational therapist for the [State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections](#). Her job involves rehabilitation for the upper extremity, specifically the elbow, wrist and hand.

"I was very well-prepared with my seminary training, where we were 'stretched,' and the final 'stretching' for me is working in a prison," said Carol. "I've had exposure to just about everything, but not that. Not everyone has been exposed to something like that, and some people just can't do it. I never imagined I would work in a prison."



Her husband's increased independence and mobility enables Carol to spend more time with her son David. David has had a lifelong disability, which Carol described as "[autism spectrum](#) and [hypotonia](#)." Since David has a strong interest in politics, volunteering for the [Milwaukee County Republican Party](#) is a perfect match. This is also where Carol sees her time spent in the [Unification Church](#) paying off.

"Approaching strangers and asking them to sign nomination papers for potential candidates is something I could never have done without my experience in the Unification Church selling flowers or kiosk items," said Carol. "I'm not asking for money, just a signature."

"It's very easy for me now to have a conversation with people. Father Moon ([Rev. Sun Myung Moon](#)) taught us that we need to relate to everyone at all different levels."

For Carol, getting involved in the political system was something she believes she has no control over, much like finding solutions to her husband's health problems. "I really have no choice, and I'm inspired to do this," said Carol. "I feel this is how God wants to use me on this earth. I continue to feel great pain and sorrow for the way my sister had to leave this physical world. After what happened with my sister I have to do something."

She is concerned for the future of the United States and feels we must keep our leaders in our prayers. After the experience with her sister, Carol wants to make sure that any person she helps elect to office has a belief in the "sanctity of family, values, country and life."