



# Gary Zaporzan

## Partner In Care

### Submitted by Crystal Ahola

There are remarkable individuals in our community whose dedication to caregiving shines through in everyday acts of service and sacrifice. When considering the Partner in Care category, Crystal knew she wanted to recognize Gary, a devoted husband, who has consistently shown the truest form of commitment and unconditional love to his wife Valerie. Valerie was diagnosed with Parkinson's nine years ago which ultimately left her wheelchair-bound relying on continuous care for all her activities of daily living.

The striking thing about Gary, is he doesn't view caregiving as a duty but as a partnership; an extension of the vows they took when they got married, over 45 years ago. His dedication has become the very definition of "in sickness and in health". Despite the physical limitations Valerie faces, Gary works alongside home support to ensure his wife's care needs are met. He purchased a wheelchair-accessible van, a true game changer in their daily life. His van allows them to take impromptu drives looking at the Christmas lights, the leaves of fall, and to outpatient appointments that would otherwise be impossible to attend.

Last summer, Gary planned a weekend getaway at an accessible cabin in the country where Valerie was able to enjoy the outdoors and embrace a change of scenery from their home. But his thoughtfulness doesn't stop there. Before Valerie became ill, they would drive from Thunder Bay to the Florida Keys every winter. This unfortunately became too difficult once she became wheelchair bound to do. So, as a way to reminisce, Gary often plays YouTube videos of a dash camera of their exact drive through the Florida Keys, reliving the joy and adventures they shared together many years ago.

His actions are not driven by obligation but by a genuine desire to ensure that his wife continues to live a fulfilled life with dignity, happiness, and love – even continuing to honour her love of fashion. Whether it's tending to her needs, or simply being her emotional support, he lives out the promise he made to her. He is nothing short of an incredible caregiver, but an amazing husband that has touched my heart since the day I met them.

Kate to close on camera - In speaking with Gary, he simply remarked, "She's everything to me. Her thoughts are always with others, and she never complains." While some days are more difficult than others, it is their shared sense of humour, and a good laugh that gets them through.