

The year was 2013 and I had been seeing a very special person off and on for quite some time. We've been enjoying girls nights out for supper with my sister and somewhere during September, we started dating.

The next months were a mix of fun, confusion, serious discussions and an amazing openness I had never been able to achieve with any of my previous wives. Date nights included dinner, movies, bowling or just visits at my place. We played cards with sis, watched movies in the living room and ever so slowly, moved closer to each other emotionally. One night, lost to time now but vivid in memory, she put her arm, rather tentatively, around me. I was elated and held her hand just to keep her arm in place. My own heart skipped a few beats and the world spun happily around us as if we were the only ones in it.

During all of 2013 and into 2014, we had many girls nights out with and without my sister; we dated; exchanged emails and written letters (in person) and had a great many serious discussions. There is nothing so important to relationships as those discussions. We shared our past even when things back then were difficult to bring up, but bring them up we did. I exercised, what was for me, great patience because I so wanted this relationship to work.

I encouraged her a lot and let her know how I felt about her and that I was willing to wait for things to happen when she was comfortable with them happening.

On July 14, 2014, we had a date, dinner and a movie, and after the movie, in the parking lot as she opened the car for me to get in, she ALMOST kissed me. As tempted as I was to kiss her though, I knew I had to wait for her to be ready. I did not want her to kiss me as a reflex because I kissed her. For me, it had to be because she wanted to kiss me. The moment passed but not without marking us both.

November 4th I ordered some special things for her personal use and gave them to her on one of her visits, and on the 11th, it happened. Another date, dinner, movie and as we stood there by the car, she kissed me for the first time. I haven't come back down to where the clouds actually have numbers since. My heart soared and the world became more beautiful.

In an email Dec 17th, I declared my love for her to her.

2013 and 14 were good years for developing our relationship with lots of dating, visits, discussions and all the things that make relationships grow strong

and then came a new year. (funny how that happens)

2015 was a busy year with many ups and a few serious downs.

The year started out well. Feb 18th my gf slept over for the first time. I was elated and we had a great night together.

April 16, sis gave me my birthday present early and on the 9th, my gf turned 59. Among the things I gave her were 5 yellow and 9 red roses. Artificial so they would never die and an Owl necklace and earring set. After she opened the jewelry, she told me she loves owls. A good intuitive choice I made when I saw the pieces and knew she would look good with them on her.

On the 28th, we celebrated my birthday and we had a truly wonderful fun experience together.

We had another sleepover May 18th.

June was the worst month ever although it started well enough. On the 5th I received a Jury Duty Summons and duly called in to verify it. When I called in to verify it I was supposed to report for duty, I did not get the response yes come in or no you have been excused so, not wishing to have a problem, I went in. This was all put forth in an earlier history chapter on jury duty so I won't re-hash it here.

It was the 7th of June. Karen fell and I could not get her up so we had to call emergency services. I arrived at the ER just before the ambulance about 10 pm and was there until she was released at 4am on the 8th. Another fall on the 9th and another trip to the hospital. I did not go in then because things were serious and I knew I would only be in the way. Besides I was too tired to drive safely.

When I arrived later in the morning, Karen was all hooked up to breathing and other apparatus and it was clear she would be staying at the hospital for a while. I called her son, John, in Phoenix and he came up on the 11th.

By this time she was off life support and some of the other equipment and breathing on her own, albeit with oxygen but for a while it was seriously in doubt whether she would stay with us. We started making plans for whatever eventuality would present itself. John and I visited her daily and she was able to take phone calls.

On the 10th (backing up a bit here), I had to deal with her bank as some fraudulent charges appeared on her account. I found out there was a problem when I could not put gas in the car using her card. Luckily the Bank was able to block those and return the funds. It was also necessary to process a new card to prevent more fraud.

While Karen was in the hospital, various friends, including a neighbor, my gf and I and Karen's bf, visited her. I visited her every day while she was in the hospital. On June 12, Karen was transferred OUT of ICU and we all got to breathe easier. Unfortunately, largely as a result of her COPD and not using her home oxygen, which is what ended up with her in the hospital in the first place, she has some memory issues. By the 12th she was talking but I had to explain, several times, why she was there at all. Also she was feeding herself again and determined to get well enough to come home. John stayed until the 16th but had to return to his work in Phoenix.

Karen was transferred to a rehab facility on the 15th. We expected it on the 14th but that did not happen and we were not called when it did happen. We weren't happy about that.

By the 21st Karen was able to move herself in the wheelchair. I had been cleared by her rehab manager to assist her from the bed to the wheelchair and the bedside comode. She wanted me to help her use the walker but I said no as I had not been cleared for that assist yet. She was making good progress but still had to have oxygen all the time and assistance to get out of bed and back in again.

To help her get stronger I insisted that she move herself in the wheel chair a certain distance each day by her own power before I would push the wheelchair out to the lounge. Now that she was mobile we were able to go to a table and play cribbage for a while before her exercises. Even there I was able to help and when they felt it was ok to do so, they showed me how to help her with the walker and cleared me to help her use that.

On the 22nd, my gf slept over again and we showered together the next morning. It was comforting to have her there for those 2 days. Ok so it was a lot of fun too. Then we went in to visit Karen and played cribbage. She won one game. It was looking like Karen could come home on Friday the 24th of June, slightly in advance of the July 4th insurance deadline after which Karen would have to pay for each day still in rehab. We actually sprung her on Thursday the 23rd. Although it seemed like it might have been premature, we survived and Karen has been very good about using her oxygen overnight. As long as her O2 sats remain good, and she checks those daily, we dispense with it during the day unless she goes back to bed for a nap and overnight.

The only serious concern at home was her bed. The original mattress was much too high off the floor to be safe for her to get in and out even with the step stool we kept there. I was able to buy one about half that thickness and her bed is much safer to get in and out of now.

The rest of the year progressed smoothly. More girls nights out, more dates, more sleep overs, and, after much work to bring our laptop computers up to the proper level, free win 7 to win 10 upgrades.

Many firsts and milestones were reached from July through the end of the year. I have glossed over, or skipped, much of a highly personal nature.

September saw the start of another leg of my personal journey but that is for another chapter.

One of the highlights of the year was Oct 25th when I met a couple of facebook friends, Veronica and her wife, in town to celebrate her wife's birthday, and her friend Alicia. We wandered about the Strip, met people, did some minor slot play and had lots of photo ops. It was a great time and a lot of fun.

On the 27th, Karen and I met with other friends and Alicia at Bahama Breeze for supper in celebration of Alicia's birthday. Then on the 29th, another GNO with my gf and Karen. By the 31st, it was cold enough to turn the heat on.