

Death of a Champion

When an automobile crashed into a motorcycle stopped for a traffic signal on U.S. 41 in Port Charlotte, Florida, this past Saturday evening, it claimed the life of a champion of the elderly. Lori Bowers, 45, and her fiancé, Jim Lowmark, were dragged underneath the car, with tragic results.

Bowers, the certified dietary manager at Life Care Center of Punta Gorda, is dead. Lowmark has had one of his legs amputated.

Bowers was a passenger on the motorcycle, traveling northbound on the highway, when it halted for a red light about 8 p.m. A grayish-colored Saturn car, driven by an 18-year-old female, made a left turn onto Biscayne Drive and struck the motorcycle. Both victims were airlifted by helicopters to Bayfront Medical Center in St. Petersburg. Bowers, with severe head injuries, was kept on life support systems until her mother arrived from Ohio. The system was unplugged and Bowers was pronounced dead on Monday about 3 p.m.

The associates and residents of Life Care Center of Punta Gorda, where Bowers had worked since January 2, 2002, have been hit hard by the news.

“She was an incredibly compassionate person,” said Dee McCarthy, Southeast Division director of clinical services. “She was funny, had a big heart and strong character. She defined what the mission of Life Care is all about – the way she loved her residents.”

McCarthy recalled one incident when a resident who was dying wanted rice pudding. Bowers went home, made the dessert and brought it back to the patient.

Following Hurricane Charley, which swept over Life Care Center of Punta Gorda in 2004, “when we had to cut back, Lori came to me and asked if I could give her hours to her kitchen staff,” McCarthy related. “I told her that we needed a certified dietary manager more than we needed individual staff members. ‘Oh, I’ll be the CDM; just don’t pay me for it,’ she told me.”

“Her staff would do anything for her, because she would do anything for them,” said Jim Gilley, executive director of Life Care Center of Punta Gorda. “She was a team player, always volunteering to help wherever she could. She had a can-do spirit. She wanted to give back to family members and residents.”

Life Care Center of Punta Gorda, he said, “has had more compliments on its food than any facility that I have ever worked for, thanks to Lori and the staff that she has trained so well. She was a very valued associate, and we will greatly miss her.”

(more)

On September 21, a little over a month ago, McCarthy and Bowers were sitting on the delivery ramp at the back of the facility. Their conversation that day will stay with McCarthy for the rest of her life.

“It all started because she had played another practical joke on me. I had said something like, ‘You’re absolutely wicked! If you keep that up, you know you won’t go to heaven.’ That’s when she looked at me and said, ‘I’m going to heaven, all right. God and I have a deal.’ And then she got very serious, and we sat and talked about God, Christ and her faith and beliefs, and how God had helped her through some rough times in her life. I am so thankful to have had that conversation with her, McCarthy said. “When this accident occurred, it was so comforting to know that when she opened her eyes, she looked into the face of God.”

Among her survivors is a son, Eric Stromski. Visitation with the family is scheduled for Friday, November 3, beginning at 10 a.m., at Kays-Ponger Funeral Home, 2405 Harbor Boulevard, Port Charlotte, Florida 33952. The funeral service will be held at 11:30 a.m. at the funeral home.

Pray for the families of Lori Bowers – her personal and her professional families. At the same time, thank God for the legacy that she leaves – one of faith in her Lord lived out in passionate service to His children.

Can anything better be said about any life, no matter what the length it may be?

--Beecher Hunter