

## Old People's Bed February 1, 2006

Boy! Last month's ALS Adventures generated some interesting feedback. A few didn't like the death/coffin topic ... denial mode ... maybe. We received some heartfelt, warm and loving responses ... those were well received and very much appreciated. And then there were those who REALLY got into the red coffin thing.

One suggestion was that I consider adding racing strips. Now there's an idea. That got me to thinking. Maybe I could get that lazy white check mark like on the red car in the Starsky & Hutch movie/TV show. Naw, not Starsky & Hutch ... and besides some might confuse it with the Nike check mark logo. I want originality. Then I hit on it. I could have flames painted on the side like you see on hot rods. Second thought ... flames ... kind of suggests I'm headed in the wrong direction ... nope ... flames are out!

My friend Don, remember him, the Texas Police Chief who also has ALS? He had a great idea. He wants his coffin painted like it's wrapped in brown paper, then a big red stamp on the side that says, "Return to Sender." Clever don't you think?

Someone reminded me that COSTCO now sells caskets. (Is it coffin or casket? Maybe it's a casket until you crawl in, then it's a coffin. Hmmm?) Wonder how that works, buying a casket from COSTCO. (Kind of sounds like one of those red neck jokes in the making.) Anyway, I could drop by when I have time, choose the one I like best, and have them deliver it to Earl Scheib to be painted red (they won't have to hurry). Then we could pick it up, wrap plastic around it and store it in the rafters in our garage.

When the time comes, Susan and a couple of neighbors could wrestle it down from the rafters, dust it off and it's ready to go. Wonder how you get everything to the funeral home? I can see it now; Susan's got a U-Haul trailer hitched to the back of that '93 Vette. (I want to travel in style, you know.) Can you imagine the phone call Susan would make to the mortuary? This scenario definitely has *red neck* potential.

You may recall that I've been grumbling about the difficulty I have rolling over in bed. Weakened arms and legs just don't have the strength. Bright like a light bulb, one day we recognized the problem! We sleep on a waterbed. DUH!!!

But hold on here. I *like* our waterbed. Waterbeds have a sexual aura about them. I like that! Ours is VERY comfortable. It's not the kind with a wooden frame that you flop all over. Ours has the water bladder hidden inside a regular mattress. It looks like a regular old boring mattress ... until you lay down on it. Ahhh!

Susan said it's time we got a grownup's bed. But wait! We've had that bed for 16 years. It has served us well for many activities. Aside from those you can speculate about, we have watched world events unfold from there. The Berlin wall tumbled, space shuttle mishaps, the twin towers collapse, and recently a tsunami and Gulf Coast hurricanes. It's our special place ... and do the math, we've spent about 5 years asleep in that bed ... and we have to give it up! Sometimes life sucks!

So what'd we get? An "Old People's Bed!" I called it a hospital bed. You know, the head raises, the foot raises, it bends at the knee ... it's a hospital bed. I DON'T WANT IT! Susan assured me it's not a hospital bed; it doesn't have the side rails. Oh, no side rails.

Then Alicia, remember the oldest daughter who got married a few months back and made off in the Vette, she said it's a good thing I'm sick, or else I might be old ... she's talking about that damn "Old People's Bed!"

It's an old people's bed because old people are the ones you see in the commercials. You've seen them on TV. Ever seen a thirty something couple in one of those commercials? No ... they're all old!!!

But you have to check this thing out. It has two remote controls. One for each side of the bed. (Just what I need, another remote control to loose). And the bed, it even vibrates. Okay, maybe if I can find the place to insert the quarters, I'll use that feature sometimes. (Still won't be as good as the waterbed!)

So we're ready to try it out for the first time. Push one button and it automatically got into the position that reminds you of a deck lounge next to a swimming pool. Hmmm, not bad. Good view of the TV. Both Mia the dog, and Blacky the cat, have joined us for a snooze

Then it happened. My remote, it's lost in the covers somewhere. The bed started to move! (My side not Susan's.) The head and foot are both rising! What? How do I stop this thing? Can't find the remote! It's still rising! I'm being scrunched into a deep "V" position. Still can't find the remote! And with my weakened arms and legs, I can't just roll out of there!

Susan jumped up. She's running around the bed like she wants to do something. Mia jumped down and started barking. SHUT UP! Blacky, opened one eye and did that cat stretch thing. Susan's hollering at me, "Where's the remote?!!" Huh? I don't know, it's gone! PULL THE PLUG!!!

Found it ... Blacky was laying on it! I guess he knows how to push my buttons.



**Blacky with my remote ... he knows how to push my buttons.**

Okay, the old people's bed is pretty comfortable. In fact, I think I like it. I'm sleeping better, I can roll over all by myself, and that remote ... Blacky found another spot to sleep.

But I think the young folks may be missing something. Had I paid attention to those commercials we might have gotten this bed long ago. Young folks, listen up. Go check out one of those old people's beds. Then come back and call me old!

Speaking of old, for some unknown reason, I've been feeling less tired lately. That's a good thing. But I kind of *look* old. My stride has resembled a little old man shuffling along. And Susan has asked me many times if I intend to wait till I take a tumble before I get a walking aid. She has reason to ask.

You see, we have a friend who was diagnosed with ALS about a month before me. Ted is his name, and his symptoms started in his legs. That's a pretty common place for the symptoms to first manifest.

One evening we were all at a support group meeting when I asked Ted about his

“foot drop” symptom. I could feel my legs getting weak and I wondered how Ted would decide when it was time for a walking aid.

I asked if he had ever fallen and he said no. He then jumped up and offered to show me up close and personal how his left foot drops when he walks. He could not hold the toe up, so it tends to drop or drag creating a potential tripping type fall.

Well, you guessed it. Right there in front of me, no more than two feet away that left foot (toe) didn't clear the floor and down he went. (So much for not ever having fallen!) On his way down his head struck the edge of a table. Yuck! Blood everywhere!

And think about this. Had he been more considerate, he would have taken his first fall away from me ... so I would not be feeling like it was somehow my fault! ... (I should have never asked!)

Eight stitches later, and one hell of a shiner, Ted got a cane.

So I now have a cane, too. Got it a few days ago. I kept hearing Susan's words, “Are you going to wait till you fall before you get a walking aid?”

I'm surprised. It helps a lot. The “old man shuffle” is gone when I use the cane. I can take a regular stride. And I can keep up with Susan when we go for a walk ... Cool.

But here's the part I like best. Susan says I remind her of House. You know, that smart-ass doctor on the FOX TV network. He uses a cane and apparently, all the women think he's sexy. Okay, I'll take sexy. (Now, to work on my smart-ass skills!)

Ever been for a ride in an ambulance? I hadn't, not until this past weekend. Here's what happened.

We had been out doing one of Susan's favorite things ... shopping. (We put an area rug on hold for pick up later that day.) Most men need to rest following such activities, so when we returned home, staying true to the cause, I needed a short nap. So far so good.



**Ted & Mike with their sticks. Ted won't call it a cane. I think he thinks if he calls it a "stick" it's more like he's hiking the John Muir Trail ... sure Ted!**

To set the stage, this ALS thing has pretty much wiped out the muscles in my esophagus. Stomach juices come pouring out of my mouth sometimes when I simply bend over to pick up something. It's kind of like a throw-up, without the heave. (Note to self ... don't bend over!)

Okay, so what ... what about the ambulance ride?

As I was waking from my nap, stomach juices, those horrible burn-your-throat type juices, came racing up into my larynx ... my wind pipe, it responded by closing off! CHOKE-CHOKE! (I knew immediately what was going on. I've been there before.)

Standing at the dressing room sink, I displayed all the signs of someone who was choking on a piece of food or something. My mouth wide open, saliva pouring out, eyes bulging, and chest heaving as I'm sucking in with all my might, very little air is getting in, and agonizing sounds are coming out.

Susan rushed to my side and did the only thing she can, tried to keep me calm. But this time it was different. I'm thinking to myself ... is this it ... am I going to die? (Usually after two or three minutes, it subsides and I can catch my breath.) This time ten minutes went by

with no sign of relief. I could see in the mirror ... the look on my face was horror ... and panic. Susan asked if she should call 911. I shook my head no.

Ummm ... In a few minutes, we had a paramedic van, police cars, ambulances, and a big ole' hulking fire engine, all blocking traffic in front of our house.

Susan's talking a mile a minute trying to explain ALS ... I can't talk, my feeding tube, shortness of breath, choking, meds, blah, blah, blah.

As the door slammed, I heard someone shout, “Code Three!” Lights flashing, siren screaming, it's enough to scare the dooky out of you. Twenty minutes and I still can't breathe!

It was just like on TV. They were on the radio with some kind of Command Central, barking instructions, debating which wires to hook where! What?! Which wires to hook where?! I'm sitting up on the gurney, peering out the rear window. The world is whipping past in reverse! (It occurred to me that at least I wasn't seeing my life whiz by.)

Forty-five minutes, I was breathing again! The ER guys got it under control. Thank goodness!

Jessie and Cori, grandbaby Hannah's parents, rushed to the ER. By then I wasn't so concerned about me, I was distraught about the area rug we had put on hold. (They went to get it.)

Alan and Lorraine, next-door neighbors, showed up in the ER to see if I made it. I guess I did. The hot topic for Susan and Lorraine ... our harrowing experience ... NOT! No ... they're evaluating how cute those Paramedics and Fire Engine guys were. HELLOOOO! What about me? I almost kicked the bucket you know! Hunks, what hunks ... I didn't notice!

*Readers who want to learn more about ALS can log onto the ALS Association's web site ... [www.alsa.org](http://www.alsa.org).*