

Transcript of patient's wife, Brianne Walker Monologue:

(rough voice due to vocal fold issues)

Some days I don't know if I can take any more. My husband, Bobby, has had asthma all the years I've known him. And now he's just been diagnosed with COPD. COPD! My grandfather died of COPD when he was 78 years old—he'd gotten a really bad case of pneumonia on top of the COPD one winter and just couldn't shake it. Now here my husband is, half grandpa's age, and now HE'S diagnosed with COPD.

I'm scared to death Bobby will lose his job. Bobby's the one who carries our medical insurance. I'd been teaching high school chorus until I had to go on medical leave for vocal fold issues. Unpaid leave. And I've been on leave almost six months and still haven't fully recovered. I don't know when I'll get to go back to work.

It's been one thing after another. But nothing was worse than losing Noah last year in that helicopter crash. He was so excited to start his training with the Army Rangers. When we buried him in that grave we buried my heart with him. It's just so hard to care about anything anymore. And my precious grandson Ty is going to grow up without his daddy. And Ty's just a preschooler so I wonder if he'll even be able to remember his daddy when he grows up. And we hardly get to see him. His mama, Ella, our daughter-in-law, works as a nurse in St. Louis and now with her having the sole responsibility for meeting hers and Ty's needs, she doesn't have any time to spare. Between work and childcare and more schooling so she can become a Family Nurse Practitioner and increase her income, she doesn't have much spare time for visits.

And now Bobby with his broken wrist and COPD. I worry about Bobby and me. Not just the risk to his job. With my vocal folds the way they are, my voice is so hoarse and unclear. Although sometimes even when I feel like I'm speaking more clearly Bobby still acts like he can't hear or understand what I'm saying. It drives me nuts! And it makes me feel ugly. Even though Bobby and me have always had a good strong marriage, I can't help but wonder if he'll start to love me less because I sound like a villain from one of those creepy movies instead of sounding like the woman he married. It doesn't help that since Noah died, I've been eating too much and have put on weight. I don't know why I do—it doesn't bring my son back to me. I can't even be any help to Ella. She can't leave St. Louis, and we can't leave Decatur because even though the railroad has a terminal in St. Louis, the jobs are very competitive.

I know Bobby feels bad about all this. He wants to take away our pain at the loss of Noah. And he feels ashamed of all those years he ignored Noah's pleadings to quit smoking and take better care of himself. He's trying to make it right, but I'm wondering if it's too late. What are his prospects now that he also has COPD, plus these other issues? I can't take another funeral. I just can't.