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BUSINESS online print edition



Ill spouse led to new normalcy

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A year after Kate Dillon Hogan married her dream man, Jim, in 1997, doctors found a tumor in his brain. Though it was removed during surgery, three years later Jim began having seizures. The tumor was back. "And now," Hogan said, "the world starts to be different."

Damage to Jim's brain impaired his short-term memory and planning functions. He endured eight weeks of radiation therapy and a two-year regimen of chemotherapy. To simplify their lives, the couple in 2004 decided to give up their big house in Tempe and move into a townhouse. Jim, who worked for decades in Arizona political circles, including a stint as chief deputy treasurer for Maricopa County, volunteered at the neighborhood school. Hogan called him on her way home from work every day.

But, on Oct. 5, 2005, Hogan thought Jim sounded funny over the phone. He had suffered a stroke.

As director of transfer and articulation for the Maricopa County Community College District, Hogan was putting in 50 to 60 hours a week and loving it. Her passion is helping get students into college. But, she said, "When you are trying to sustain a positive, healthy relationship, it's important to stay in sync. It's difficult to stay in sync when you're on the road to aspiration and your spouse is on the road to desperation."

Two events in spring 2006 gave Hogan the strength to make a change. As a board member of the Girl Scouts Arizona Cactus-Pine Council, she was invited to attend leadership training in Prescott. There she found herself up a tree, standing terrified on the end of a plank. Forty feet below her, the other women shouted, "You can do it!" She did. The women were also asked to examine their lives using symbols. Hogan brought pictures of her five grown children; a medication bottle of Jim's; and a T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Maricopa County Community College District" to represent her work. The facilitator told her to place her watch where she spends the most time. Hogan put it on the T-shirt.

"You own this life," the facilitator said. "What is it that you would do with this life?"

Hogan folded the shirt in half and moved the watch to her family.

Hogan, 50, quit her full-time job in December and took a part-time post at Grand Canyon University as a senior policy adviser for university relations and student success. Now, Hogan and Jim, 58, cook together, go to lectures and do the *New York Times* crossword: "Neither one of us has ever been smart enough to do it without the other," she said. They spend Fridays with their granddaughter, 6-month-old Abby.

"I'll never have another husband like the one I have now. If this is your treasure, take care of it," she said.