

Ana's Story

Ana couldn't ask a family member to be there with her at the hospital when she went in for brain surgery. Her remaining family members live out of state or in Mexico. She couldn't ask one of her children. She doesn't have any.

But there was Henry. If only Henry could be there for her in the hospital. Henry knew how to take care of Ana.

For 14 years, Henry had lived with Ana, helping her live independently despite being legally blind and having a traumatic brain injury.

As Ana faced the surgery, it was the prospect of being apart from Henry that most filled Ana with dread. "We're never separated."

While service dogs are allowed in some parts of hospitals, a patient like Ana typically wouldn't get to see their dog for several days, from the point where they left for the hospital to when they moved out of recovery into a standard patient room.



Ana's doctor, Manish Aghi, could see how bonded Ana and Henry were. Isolation and loneliness are the enemies of healing. So Dr. Aghi worked with the hospital so that Henry could be at Ana's side all the way to the point when Ana went into surgery.

"I remember saying goodbye to Henry as they started rolling me to the operating room," says Ana. "Henry knew what was going on. He knew he wasn't supposed to leave me."

When Ana awoke several hours later she could feel a big oxygen mask on her face. She was disoriented from the drugs.

"Ana," said Dr. Aghi. "Take Henry's leash."

Ana couldn't believe it – there was Henry, with the huge floppy ears she loved so much, next to her bed. Her best friend and vigilant caretaker was already back at her side

where he belonged, where he stayed from that moment on. "We lived for each other," says Ana.

But even with Henry, Ana was more alone than she wanted to be after the surgery. "When all my caregivers left for the day," says Ana, "I would just sit in silence for hours, alone. I couldn't tolerate the TV or radio because of my injury and recovery."

Ana's social worker had told her about the Community Living Campaign and Ana decided to check it out. Henry lay on the floor next to Ana when she first sat at a computer at a training hosted by the Community Living Campaign.



Ana worked hard on her skills at the computer labs. She took one of the Community Living Campaign's social media classes. She started using Facebook and quickly saw a way it could be a much-needed resource for people like her.

So Ana started a Facebook group for people with a traumatic brain injury to connect online so they can then talk together one-on-one on the phone when needed to get through challenges, plus share resources – and just as importantly *successes* – with the group. It's now more than 200 members strong.



The Community Living Campaign helped Ana get a refurbished computer so she could be online at her apartment, too. She's since organized traumatic brain injury survivors online to send their stories to President Obama to raise awareness of this misunderstood condition.

Ana has spoken at Community Living Campaign events to get others excited about learning new computer skills. She's gone to City Hall and visited every single Supervisor's office and the Mayor's office to tell them how essential it is for seniors and people with disabilities to have access to computer trainings and labs. She's made friends, and calls Marie and Judy of the Community Living Campaign her sisters because, "They're so real, so generous, so caring."



"I have a circle of people now," says Ana. "I feel like Henry was somehow behind all of it, making sure I was going to be okay when he was gone."

Henry passed away about a year after Ana's surgery. But Henry's memory lives on in Ana's dedication to helping others connect with each other and in the words of Ana's beloved Bobby Kennedy, "seeking a better world."

