

From Cor Pulmonale to Getting a Second Chance

Sara Fainstein, San Diego, California, sarafain18@sbcglobal.net

My husband Jaime's story with polio began in 1949 in Mexico City when he was 4 years old. The poliovirus affected his legs, right arm and diaphragm. After Jaime's diagnosis, he was hospitalized and spent some time in an iron lung. He doesn't remember all the details but Jaime has always had difficulty yelling loudly or coughing hard.

A week after having received his flu vaccine in December 2010, Jaime had what we thought was a simple cold, with some phlegm and coughing for several days. He was unable to cough up all the phlegm and became congested to the point that on the afternoon of December 23, he was so short of breath that we called the paramedics. When they arrived, Jaime's oxygen saturation level was 70 percent. He was rushed to the nearest emergency room and was placed on a ventilator. Jaime spent the next two weeks in the ICU at Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego where his team of pulmonologists diagnosed cor pulmonale. (See page 5.)

Given Jaime's history of polio and the probability of needing a ventilator for some time, he had a tracheotomy and was transferred to Kindred Hospital-San Diego, where he spent the next five weeks being successfully weaned from the vent and able to speak and swallow following speech therapy. At this point, he was released to Sharp Memorial Rehabilitation Center for physical and occupational therapy before he was able to come home by mid-March of 2011.

While at Kindred, Jaime was evaluated for sleep apnea, and the results of the sleep study showed that Jaime would stop breathing 40 times out

of the hour. It was recommended that he use a bilevel ventilator, but Jaime was not able to adjust to the ill-fitting hospital mask.

Jaime's situation became complicated at home because the swelling in his ankles became worse and his oxygen saturation was lower. He was re-admitted to Sharp in mid-July for a few days for stabilization and strong use of diuretics, and then spent the next four weeks at Kindred. This time the goal was to use the bilevel successfully, in order to assist his weak chest muscles, which could not get rid of the carbon dioxide that was accumulating in his system.

In mid-August, thanks to the support of the staff at Kindred and our guardian angel, Jill Minch from Sleep Data, Jaime tried ResMed's Mirage Quattro™ mask, which worked well, but irritated the bridge of his nose. He switched to the Mirage Liberty™ and uses it with a ResMed bilevel unit throughout the night.

Now Jaime looks forward to sleeping and waking up well rested so that he can continue with his physical therapy. He is one happy breather! ▲