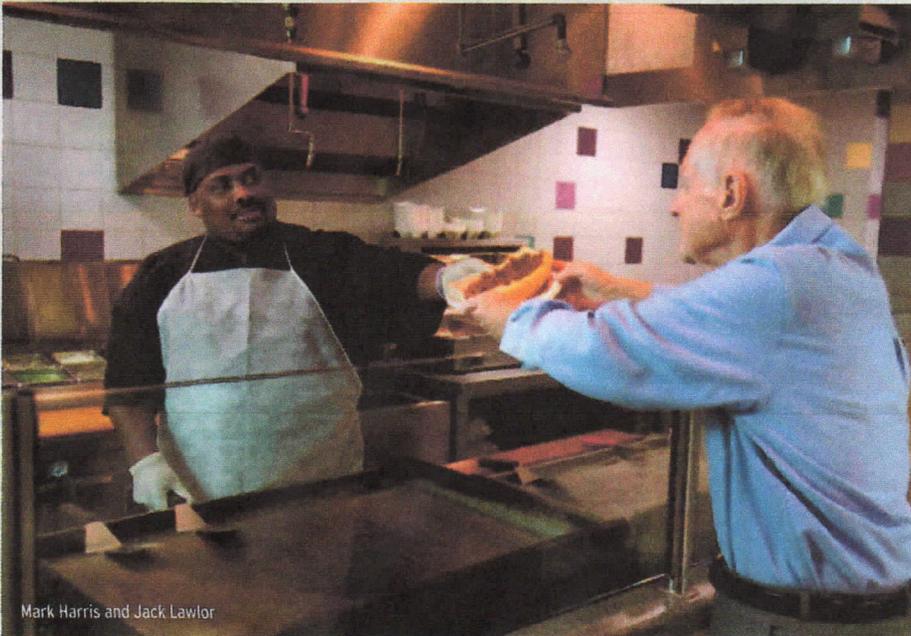




A Friendship Grows in Abington

A PATIENT'S HUSBAND AND A TALENTED COOK DISCOVER A COMMON, ENDURING CONNECTION



Mark Harris and Jack Lawlor

It all began over a steak sandwich in December 2005. Jack Lawlor, husband of a very ill Abington patient, was in line at the cafeteria and ordered a sandwich from the most impressive short-order cook he'd ever seen: Mark Harris.

Lunchtime can be the busiest time of day for Mark, who typically works through dinnertime, and is often juggling several customer orders at a time. But Mark's friendly disposition and seeing his talents in action actually helped Jack take his mind off his wife's condition for a bit. His wife, Elaine, had just suffered a second stroke in a year and was in grave condition. Each day he spent with his wife, Jack went down for lunch and ordered a steak sandwich from Mark.

Then one day on his way out, Mark saw Jack by the elevators. He approached Jack and said, "What are you doing here every day? It's Christmastime." Jack told him of his wife's situation and Mark welled up with tears,

relating very closely. Just two months prior, Mark lost his mom and was still raw with emotion. The two men talked for a while.

STEAK SANDWICH AND A HUG

From that day on at lunchtime, Mark would come out from behind the grill when he saw Jack in line and gave him a "big bear hug," according to Jack, and ask how things were going. If Mark didn't see him, he'd come up to the room to visit with Jack and his family. "He'd ask if there was anything I needed or wanted to eat. He brought up ice cream, candy bars and even balloons and cards from time to time," says Jack, who adds that Elaine was in the hospital for 22 days. Jack and his family were at the hospital over Christmas and New Year's Eve. And sadly, his wife passed on January 11, 2006.

"Mark was there, even the day she passed," Jack adds.

A LASTING BOND

But the friendship didn't end once Jack and his family left the hospital. In fact, Mark called Jack regularly to check on him in the months following his wife's death. "He's a very caring person," says Jack. "More than people know."

That budding friendship has blossomed into a steady support system for each of the men. When Jack came to the hospital to be treated for dehydration in April 2011, Mark was the one to check on him. "He'd say, 'Hey Pop, can I get you something?'" Jack explains.

It was then that Jack realized that he wasn't the only one who knew how special Mark is. "Everyone who knew Mark would say, 'Oh Mark, he's the greatest.' He's touched a lot of lives at the hospital [in his 13 years of service]," says Jack.

POP AND MARK

Over the years, Mark lost his beloved foster mom, his sister and his father and Jack was there for him through it all. "It's like a father-and-son type of thing. I call him 'Pop'," says Mark. "We always keep in touch." In fact, they call each other regularly, especially on their birthdays and holidays, as well as meet up in the Abington cafeteria for lunch.

When asked what Mark appreciates most about Jack, he says, "His personality: He's spoken and he cares. He's a really good guy."

Their friendship has been invaluable to each of them, they say. So much so that at the end of each conversation they have neither one of them is afraid to express themselves by saying, "I love you!"