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Section: Editorial Page

Technology arrived too late for my mom

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Almost three years since my mother's passing, and believing I did the best I could as her daughter and as her health proxy, I still occasionally feel a twinge of sadness that I couldn't do more. It's not that I didn't carry out her wishes to the letter. I did that. But still, every once in a while the responsibility of those dual roles in her life haunts me.

Being her daughter was easy -- she taught me well. But I learned on my own that it's not just at the "end game" that the proxy role comes into play. It's the months, sometimes years, before that time that you find yourself stepping into those shoes. The role to make a life as comfortable and fulfilling as possible.

A few weeks back, CBS' "60 Minutes" had a news story on Steve Jobs followed by another titled "Apps for Autism: Communicating on the iPad." I watched as autistic children communicated with teachers, friends and family by touching pictures on the screen, which were then translated into complete audio sentences; all customized to the individual user. It broke my heart. I was happy for them, but so sad for my mom.

Until Jan. 19, 2006, my mother was a vibrant and active woman. On that day, she became a traumatic brain injury victim. She passed away three years later on Feb. 2, 2009. Every day in between was a struggle to communicate. While my mom was able to speak somewhat, her injury robbed her of everyday conversational speech, as well as the ability to write and read; two of her great passions. Losing all three made it very difficult for her to communicate her daily thoughts, feelings and needs.

Family and friends developed creative ways to communicate and sometimes they worked; but never fully effectively or easily. She was patient with us but often became frustrated with herself and abandoned what she was trying to say with a shrug and a smile. No one loved a good conversation more than mom, and it was painfully evident how ostracized her inability to communicate made her feel.

She spent hundreds of hours at the dining room table, working with pictures from her speech therapist, trying to

write or speak the correct word for the object pictured. She was tireless in her efforts, sure that one day she'd regain her abilities. I made a calendar with pictures of her children and grandchildren on days where birthdays and anniversaries fell. She recognized the pictures -- it was getting her mind to process them into a form she could relay that didn't work well.

What joy it would have brought her to simply press a picture and have the iPad speak for her, customized to her life. Simple, everyday things. Do you want to come for dinner? Can I get you a cup of coffee? I love you. The names of her children, grandchildren and friends.

The iPad was released the year after mom passed. The next year, various apps were available that contained text-to-speech, symbols, a default vocabulary and so much more she could have used. The marketing for the iPad today specifically mentions traumatic brain injury victims in the list of who the apps are beneficial for.

It was released **too late** for mom, but I'm grateful the **technology** is here now and available for others facing similar obstacles. I think back to the ways I tried to help her and how wonderful it would have been to provide her with this communication tool. It's been said Jobs was a man ahead of his time. I wish for mom's sake he'd been a year or two sooner.

Amy **Morgan**, who lives and writes on Grand Island, wishes the iPad had come along sooner.

---- INDEX REFERENCES ---

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