

BROKEN HEARTS

Husband makes best of wife's last days

BY LORI KURTZMAN

The Hutchinson News

His love won't fix her broken heart. He knows that.

He could plant a million smooches on her lips and send her fresh flowers every day, and still that pain will sit in her chest like an unwelcome visitor. Still she'll have those oxygen tubes snaking out of her nose. Still she'll be left wondering whether the next attack will be the one that kills her.

His wife's heart disease doesn't care how much he loves her.

Ron Hatfield knows that.

Today, on Valentine's Day, as couples across the country are sniffing red roses and toasting their relationships over fancy dinners, 54-year-old Hutchinson resident Ron is going to escort his 50-year-old wife, Robbie, to the doctor's office. She'll get a check-

up, and he'll spend another day trying not to worry.

Trying, anyway. Turns out Ron doesn't have much control over his own heart, either.

The road

He met Robbie almost 30 years ago in a Maryland bowling alley. She was the plump red-headed waitress at the snack bar. He was the local garbage man who gave her a big tip on a ham sandwich. They ended up bowling together, and one night at her apartment, he surprised her with a kiss.

They clicked right away. He had finally found a woman who could keep him in line. She liked him without knowing why - "There was something about him. Something different."

They hadn't been dating long when Robbie and her mother got into a big



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Ron Hatfield, right, sits with his wife, Robbie, and grandson Edward at their South Hutchinson home. Ron has stepped up to do all the cooking, cleaning and other housework because of his wife's weakened heart.

fight. Robbie, who was separated from the husband she'd married in high school, grabbed her clothes and her baby son and told Ron she wanted to leave.

He didn't think twice about following her.

With \$60 between them, they piled into her Pinto station wagon on Easter Sunday and drove to Arlington, where Robbie's dad lived.

Ron, a lifetime workaholic, got a job

