Love and MS: Love Always Wins

by LEEANNE LAPUM

Love Triumphs Over MS

Over the years I have heard being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) can be a death sentence to a marriage. I guess in some cases this is true.

In 1978 I had my first date with my husband — a Christmas celebration with his family. I had met his family at church, and had even sung alongside his sisters in youth choir.

In June 1979 we got engaged, while my husband was an art major in college. We designed our wedding rings at his parents' kitchen table, and he fabricated them where he worked as a dental technician.

He is a very traditional man, so he wanted to honor my parents and ask them for my hand in marriage. He filled a jar with my father's favorite, jellybeans, and stopped by my duplex so we could pray before he went to my parents' place.

When he went to their house he presented them with the jar (which is now in our family room), sat down, and the conversation began. He squirmed nervously inching closer and closer to the edge of the seat.

My mother finally said," Ron, why don't you ask us what you wanted to ask us before you end up on the floor." He took a deep breath and asked them for their blessing.

He officially asked me on a nearby beach. We were surrounded by little children who were dancing around us — it seemed appropriate since we both became teachers.

He silk screened our wedding invitations, and still has the silk screen ready to print at a moment's notice. Such a romantic!

Our Journey Changed

After we had been married 12 years, our journey together changed dramatically: I was diagnosed with chronic/progressive untreatable MS. It was devastating.

It changed our lives forever. It changed our love for each other in that it only made it deeper. A lot of men leave when faced with an uncertain future. Mine didn't.

I remember very clearly telling my husband I would understand if he chose to leave. He responded to me quickly without even hesitating.

He said he had made a vow before God, family and friends, and nothing was going to make him break that vow. I was relieved to hear those words but I really wasn't surprised.

The Power of Love

As my chronic/progressive untreatable MS continues to claim more and more of my abilities, we have had to learn many things concerning my care. Fortunately, we have had many home health nurses who have come alongside and instructed us very thoroughly.

Those instructions include a variety of procedures along with preventative treatment. They have worked in tandem with my doctors to determine how to achieve the best outcome.

Many of the issues we face aren't pleasant. Many can only be described as painful and unbearable.

Those instructions include bed sores, wound care and transferring using a Hoyer lift. They also include how to properly reposition me in such a way that injuries don't occur.

My husband is very careful to fill medication containers. He has two large plastic shoe boxes that contain all of my medications and supplements.

He knows all of them and is very careful to staying on top of placing orders when we're getting low on any of them. He never complains.

One of the complications I experience with my particular kind of MS is neuropathy. I burn from the upper torso down 24/7 — it's like having a first degree burn. For 24 years my sweet husband has massaged me every night in attempt to ease my pain so I can go to sleep.

He often does it until I do go to sleep. I have told him many times he doesn't need to massage me because he's tired. His response to me is always, "I love you."

Before we were given the Hoyer lift my husband used to transfer me manually — he never complained. Doing that for 24 years has taken it's toll on my husband's knees; he needs to have both of his knees replaced, but because of caring for me he is unable do that.

I volunteered to go into a care facility long enough for him to have this surgery and go to rehab. He absolutely refuses. I've done my best to convince him it needs to be done in order to ease his pain. He says that he loves me too much to subject me to that even for a short time.

MS Will Never Hinder Our Love

Today we celebrate 36 years of marriage. Only 12 of those years have been what could be considered "normal."

Because of my limitations we celebrate differently than most couples — ours are low-key celebrations. That eases the stress and busyness which tends to cause flare ups.

Over the years we have celebrated in our own quiet way. The man of my dreams has become my hero, supporter and caregiver.

We will joyfully celebrate every year together, day by day, side by side. MS will not hinder our celebrations — or our love.