

Loving Joe By Linda Randig



“Are you handy?” I hear this question many, many times a day. Just to be clear, my husband Joe is not asking me if I am handy as in fixing a leaky faucet or assembling an Ikea book case. He already knows the answer to those questions.

What he is asking is, am I close by and, yes, I always am, even when I am at the other end of the house or in the basement up to my knees in laundry. I try to be available for the myriad tasks he needs help with or needs someone to do for him.

I perform many tasks a day from filling the kettle for his lunchtime cup of coffee, to getting his jacket out of the closet (Since he is fond of beige jackets I invariably retrieve the wrong one on my first try.) to schlepping his urinal to the bathroom first thing each morning.

I have read our marriage license (“the contract” as he calls it) over and over trying to see just where it says that I am supposed to be the transporter of urinals. He assures me that it is there in the fine print and I suspect that he is right. It is probably covered by the “love and honor” part. (I made sure the obey part got left out).

Love and honor does seem to cover just about everything doesn't it? It takes on even more meaning when the person you are love and are honoring had polio and now suffers from post-polio syndrome. Loving and honoring a polio survivor means that you fill kettles, make two trips to the basement for tools because he forgot he needed two sizes of screwdrivers; get jackets out of closets or hang them up and any number of other things. Of course, you are doing these things while you are cooking dinner, talking on the phone, watching TV, reading a can't-put-down book that you have to put down or any of the dozens of household tasks that you are responsible for. In other words, your day is full of interruptions.



No matter how much you love someone, the interruptions can be frustrating. I struggle with that and sometimes wonder if occasionally getting impatient with his requests makes me a bad person, a bad wife. Most of the time I know that the interruptions have just the opposite effect. They give me the opportunity to be a good wife, to love and honor and take care of someone who needs me.

When Joe and I were married nearly forty-eight years ago no one had heard of post-polio syndrome. Pain and fatigue were seldom problems Joe had to cope with. He was capable of doing just about anything anyone else could do, just a bit slower and with a bit more effort. Gradually that changed.

Of course, part of it was the aging process but post-polio brought with it many challenges. We had no idea how bad things might get, how much help Joe might require but we did know that whatever happened, we would face it together and find ways of meeting every challenge.



When I took my marriage vows all those years ago I had no idea what would be required of me in the future. That was probably a good thing. Not yet out of my teens, I might have found the prospect of caring for Joe to the extent that I do rather daunting. We were fortunate that the challenges of post-polio did not appear until I was older, more mature and had a better idea of what loving and honoring him meant.

Now I understand what a great gift I have been given. I have been given the opportunity to be a better wife, a better person, the chance to show my husband every day how much I love him and what a privilege it is to take care of him and help him to get through his days.

Post-polio came with many challenges but also many opportunities and when I get a bit impatient with yet another interruption I just remind myself that I am being given another chance to show Joe just how much I love him.

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<http://www.papolionetwork.org/survivor-stories-from-the-keystone-state.html>