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Marriage that Blooms in Tough Times is Magic

In a world where you can dump a mate quicker than you can find one, I am truly inspired by love.

I'm not talking about the rush of feelings that can overtake you when the air is fresh with the scent of spring. Or even the free fall into a relationship that lands in marriage.

I'm talking about the magic that molds two individuals into one for as long as they both shall live. I'm fascinated by the bond it takes for two people to stay together when their relationship is crossing over troubled water.

Many people want to love, but staying together isn't easy. I know. It doesn't take much to promise to stay with someone for life. It takes immeasurable faith to actually do so.

When tragedy strikes one spouse, and the other doesn't flee, I am in awe.

Real-life examples of both famous and ordinary people suggest that it is this kind of mystical love that gives people the strength to keep their vows even when they are in the deepest valley.

When Christopher Reeve was paralyzed in an equestrian accident in 1995, the tragedy also paralyzed his wife, Dana Morosini. She may not have suffered physically, but her life would never be the same. Reeve has since become a symbol of hope for the disabled. I can't imagine that happening without the faithfulness of Morosini.

Or, when Chicago police officer Jim Mullen was struck by a bullet last October and paralyzed, the bullet might as well have struck his wife, Athena, as well.

At 32, Mullen is a young man. We feel the pain of his loss. We also feel the love his wife must hold in order for him to have made it this far.

My friends Susan and Bill have taught me what it means to really love.

Before 1993, Susan was the kind of person who seemed to enjoy everything. Whether we were shopping for hats, or dancing around the sensitive issues of race and religion, I would always leave her feeling renewed.

But that year, she suffered a massive brain hemorrhage during childbirth. She lost the use of one side of her body and now has uncontrollable seizures. Her life is now confined to her home.

So much has happened. Soon after Susan's stroke, Bill lost his job and, for a while, the crucial medical benefits that she needed for rehabilitation.

Every day since her illness, Susan has depended on outside help to raise her growing son.

Instead of moping about, Bill started his own consulting business. He spends all of his spare time researching his wife's illness. He is undaunted in his task to find a treatment that will give his wife her life back.

I visited them recently, and again was amazed by their ability to cope with a situation that would send most people over the edge. They shared the same laughter and warmth that I've always remembered.

There was one small difference, however. They seemed even closer.

While I brought Susan up to date on all the changes in my life, Bill was at her side, doing things she used to do. "How about a sandwich?" "Something to drink?" He was just as attentive as Susan used to be.

After a while, he brought me up to date on the latest doctor Susan had been seeing, and the horrible time they've had finding adequate medical care.

"We are still struggling with seizures," he said. "Sometimes we have a hard time walking and standing up. We just found out that our brain is swelling."

"We," he said. "We."

Coming from his lips, the word didn't sound condescending, or out of place.

Nonetheless, it was strange. Bill wasn't just talking about Susan, he was talking about himself.

At that point, I broke the promise I always make to myself that I would not whine about their troubles. I had to know how they have survived all the tragedy.

"We're in this together," Bill told me. "You know what it is. It's love. Our love is stronger than what happened."

Susan fought bravely to hold back tears.

"There's always that fear," she said. "I've been in support groups where there are women whose husbands have left."

"But when I faced death, when I knew that I might not make it out of surgery, I looked at Bill and said: 'You're the best, very best thing that has happened in my life.' And I meant it."

"I'm here until the end," was the last thing she heard Bill say before her old life ended.

To love someone and know that that person will always be there, no matter what, is the very best gift that the world has to offer. I am grateful that is the gift God has given my friend.