

How MS Changed My Marriage



Our love story began as one of those “only in New York” moments. We met briefly at a lounge in the Lower East Side as I was on my way out, and neither of us got the other’s name or phone number. Like Cinderella’s glass slipper, I had only the description of a cute guy in a grey vest, but it was enough to find him through friends of friends of friends! We went on our first date 24 hours later, and we were married two years after that.

My husband quickly started a career as a graphic designer, and he encouraged me to explore my passions until I found the right career as a social worker. We moved to New Jersey to raise our two children in a quiet, suburban setting.

We started 2012 on a happy note. We had just celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary. We couldn’t have been happier with our jobs and with each other. We respected what each one brought to the table.

Unfortunately, 2012 didn’t end the way it started. I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in November. With the diagnosis, my long- and short-term plans were dashed. If not for MS, I would already have completed a doctoral program. I stopped working as a social worker just 5 years after I started. The clock ticks as I miss other opportunities. Meanwhile, my husband will celebrate 17 years working for the same company.

Slowly, I felt the equality in my marriage vanishing. I saw myself diminishing from partner to dependent, while my husband evolved from partner to caregiver.

Studies show that divorce rates due to MS (and even more broadly, chronic illness) are

slightly elevated. One study I recently read showed that divorces are more likely when the wife has a chronic illness than when a husband has a chronic illness.

This scared me, even though there has not been any evidence of my husband leaving me.

Later, I found myself searching online for the other side of the coin. I found encouraging personal stories of couples living with various disabilities, MS included. I found helpful articles with advice based on a solid foundation for any marriage, built with honor, trust, respect and love. Communication is also key.



Me and my husband at Bike MS

With all this in mind, I talked to my husband. I thanked him for everything he has done for our family and for shouldering many of my former responsibilities to the children and our home. I apologized for being a burden, especially when my MS symptoms are triggered. I also shared my disappointment and sadness at not being able to work and putting us in a financial bind.

My husband turned the tables on me and asked, "If I was the one who was sick, wouldn't you do the same for me?"

I was surprised, and I replied that, of course, I would do the same for him. I realized he has already been operating from the foundation on which solid relationships are built. He is honoring our marriage vows, he trusts that I will be there if he ever needs me, he respects my limitations and he is doing everything he can because of his love for our family.

As discouraging as divorce stats are, I should also move towards a more positive way of viewing my marriage. Despite MS negatively affecting other parts of my life, I will practice honor, trust, respect and love for the sake of my marriage.

For starters, I will stop calling myself a dependent. We have been, we are, and we shall always be, simply partners.