

Pride Comes Before the Fall



It happened on a Wednesday. We'd sold the house, and I was packing for the cross-town trek to our new specially adapted home. I was ecstatic. Finally, I'd have the necessary non-slip floors, grab bars near the toilet and a custom shower bench. And most importantly - no stairs. I went to the garage to retrieve a roll of bubble wrap and... I fell. Face-first, hard. The forceful blow to my abdomen robbed me of my breath. Panicked tears wet my face immediately.

My brand of MS includes spasticity, coordination problems and muscle weakness – symptoms that made it impossible for me to get off the floor without assistance.

And that day I was home alone. Stuck. Mannequin-still on the cold concrete floor.

All my life, I'd been fiercely independent. Pride led me to believe there wasn't a problem I couldn't solve. And ego – pride's evil twin – reveled in this pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality. But when my immune system nibbled away at myelin, massive chunks of everything that made me, **me**, got gobbled up. I struggled with simple tasks. Cutting food. Opening a Coke. Lighting lavender candles. Buttons. Zippers. And I needed help simply putting my boots **on**, never mind pulling them up.

At the time, my battle was a private one. My 15-year marriage threatened to be the first casualty of war. I wouldn't talk to my husband about the soul-crushing fatigue. Didn't discuss my leaky bladder, dared not disclose the blocked bowels that made it look like I was at the tail-end of my first trimester of pregnancy.

But, still, my husband was wonderfully supportive. He hired a home cleaning service, attended MS support group meetings. He stood flat-footed 24/7, waiting to help me when my pride wouldn't let me ask. You see, requesting help wasn't part of my DNA.

During this troubling time, I shut down. Tip-toed towards depression. My husband and I drifted apart. I knew the way I was handling things was the cause of my fractured marriage, but I didn't know how to fix it. Didn't know how to fix *me*. During an appointment, my neurologist asked a seemingly innocuous question: **How is your husband?** My hardened shell cracked. I confided that I was having difficulty coping with the physical changes brought on by MS. The internal struggles were wreaking havoc on my marriage. If things didn't improve, divorce seemed inevitable.

She referred my husband and me to an intimacy counselor.

Like many of you, I associated intimacy with sex. While a decreased libido may have put bedroom activity on the back-burner, I didn't see the need for **that** level of intervention. But to save my marriage, I committed to this focused counseling. I'm glad I did. I unearthed what lived at the root of my reluctance to share my MS experience with my husband: fear.

I was afraid my new neediness might be more than he'd bargained for. I was afraid that he'd leave me. It's never easy to say the quiet thing out loud but during a tearful therapy session, I shared my fears with my husband. He reaffirmed his long-ago vow to remain at my side, through sickness and in health. I believed him.

I'd love to tell you that our counselor waved a magic wand and **poof!** Our marriage changed overnight. But that would be a bold-faced lie. Therapy is an arduous process. It requires an openness that fosters the intimacy that is the hallmark of healthy relationships. Such vulnerability isn't easy for me, but I do it.

These days, I boldly request assistance with lacing up my boots. I also seek ways to fortify my independence. Handicap parking placard, cane, motorized scooter – I'm the proud owner of each of these devices.

When I face-planted in my garage that day, it was one of these practical devices that rescued me: my Apple Watch Series 5. In the event of a hard fall, it alerts EMS and/or your listed emergency contacts. I'd been reluctant to wear the watch when my husband gave it to me. It reminded me of those cheesy I've-fallen-and-I-can't-get-up pendants advertised on 90s TV commercials. But because I knew my husband was trying to be accommodating, I snapped the watchband on my wrist. And it's a good thing I did.

After I fell, the watch's screen flashed blood-red. A raucous alarm shouted. And I exhaled.

Help was on the way.

Editor's Note: Read more about relationships and intimacy on [**the Society website.**](#)