

The Story of Us



In the fall of 1976, I was a high school freshman. I took a radio class with some upper classmen that included a cute little redhead. She was a junior with beautiful green eyes, a pretty smile and a great laugh.

A few months later we were together on New Year's Eve, and we shared a short and somewhat surprising kiss at midnight. I had never kissed a girl before. I haven't kissed any others but her since then. That was January 1, 1977. How many men know the exact date and time of their first kiss?

We married while we were both in our early 20s. Children were not in our immediate plan, but within a year, we had our first. And within 5 years, we had a total of 2 boys and 1 girl. My beautiful wife worked full-time and raised our kids, while I went to undergraduate and then graduate school out of state.

We didn't have much, but we really thought our lives were perfect. We hadn't spent a lot of time as "just the two of us," but we always said that having our family early meant we would be empty nesters by our late 40's. By then, we would have all kinds of time and money to do whatever we wanted later.

Shortly before my daughter's graduation, my wife started experiencing some odd health symptoms. Over the summer of 2008, she developed a numbness that started in her lower legs and ultimately worked its way up to her chest. I convinced her to go to the doctor and drove her to the ER.

After countless tests and appointments, a neurologist believed she may have multiple

sclerosis. Further tests confirmed that Jo Ann had MS. My heart sank.

At the time, like so many of us, we didn't know exactly what MS was. But it would soon become a very big part of our lives.

From a family perspective, I can tell you that I worry about her more than she worries about herself. We are both still a little scared and worried about what the future may hold. She gets down and tears up when she feels really bad. I hate that, because other than being there for her, I can't really change anything. Sometimes she immerses herself with her computer and has to lie down or go to bed early. It can get a little lonely at times like that, even though we are together in the house.

I am probably a little too watchful and overprotective. Sometimes I get angry at the disease, but never at her.

At times I feel sorry for her... she senses this and doesn't like it.

Sometimes she apologizes for having MS... I don't like that.

Sometimes I feel sorry for me, as selfish as that may sound, it's true and I think pretty normal. I worry about our future. About our finances, and insurance. What if I get sick and can't take care of her if she needs me? She worries about all those same things. Your mind can be your worst enemy if you let worry take over.

But there is another side to this monster sickness. Dare I say, even a positive side? Our family is closer now than we ever were before. It has brought us together and given us a sense of purpose. We have met some great and inspiring people. Jo Ann and I took part in a couple's retreat sponsored by the Society in 2010. We made a wish list of things we wanted to do, and at the top were trips to Maine and Alaska, both of which we fulfilled.

I wouldn't wish MS on anybody, but I really do think our experiences with MS have made us better people, and I can't think of anyone I would rather go through this with than the cute little redhead I woke up beside this morning.