

Raising my Wife

By

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The reconstruction of Shirley Ann's life depended upon many individuals stepping forth to give us aid in the time of our special need.

It is impossible to name all of them so I will just say a heartfelt thank you to all of them. Those individuals include our children, my siblings, Christians, neighbors, my employers, doctors, nurses, rehabilitation staff and care givers.

PREFACE

This book is a true story of a normal middle class family suddenly facing a daunting task of how to proceed after an auto accident changed their lives forever.

I, the writer, give sincere thanks to my children and the individuals that reluctantly resurrected the unpleasant memories in order to make this book possible. Each one of us have had to relive the moments that so affected our lives in a negative way.

This story is intended not only for the casual reader, but especially for those that have had or currently face a life altering event for the individual and their family. The book is also to give hope and resolve to those affected by an unfortunate event in their family should they occur.

It is the authors hope and desire that you the reader will gain enough knowledge to know that the support one receives often means the difference to a better recovery or if they do in fact recover.

FORWARD

One moment my wife was all a husband could ask for, but the next moment she was practically lifeless sitting upright in a seat while staring straight ahead.

I was ill prepared for the task at hand, but I didn't dare fail my wife or my children.

It only took a moment for our lives and our children's lives to be changed forever.

We had no clue what lay before us, but as a resilient family should do we placed one foot before the other opening one door at a time.....

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Chapter 1: Our Family

The morning of January 27th 1985 changed our family forever. My pleas to turn back had gone unheeded; therefore, all that I could do was be a passenger while waiting patiently for whatever might befall us. She was determined to reach the goal, but I feared the worst would happen. The roads were in terrible condition following a large and far reaching blizzard that had come roaring through the entire area two days earlier. Additionally, wind had made the roads much worse by creating snow drifts across the highway. My fears came to fruition as the truck failed to properly negotiate the snow drift on his side of the highway. The accident occurred which tragically changed our lives forever.

There was nothing I could do except be a bystander as our car was demolished. It happened so quickly, but the accident seemed to last for a long time. Everything just seemed to be moving in slow motion.

The accident changed our family forever. It affected us from various angles while threatening to pull our family apart and leave us in financial ruin. We, as a family, understood that tragic events happen, but it is hard to visualize yourself as being one of the victims.

We had risen from poverty to become a middle class family. Shirley Ann and I began our lives together with very little income and very few assets. It was during the

bleakest of our financial moments that I became very ill and almost died with a ruptured appendix. The rupture happened when our son was only two weeks old.

An appendix rupture is extremely dangerous even if caught quickly, but it took the military fifteen days to diagnose the malady. I really can't say what saved me, but the ensuing convalescing took a long time. She had been there for me in my time of need and now it was to be my turn to be there for her. I would need every ounce of strength I had to keep our family together. I had no training for what lay before me/us, but I was willing to try. She would need an unwavering hand from below and guidance from above for several years.

Every family and every individual in that family is unique unto themselves. Every circumstance within each family leads to another in an unending chain of events that ultimately will decide how successful the family will be. Success, of course, is measured differently by each situation, family and community in which they live.

Our goal for success was seemingly within our reach. We had attained suitable income with stable jobs. Our children were doing well in school, and we were active in the church and community. We were happy while working hard and reaching for the goals we had set for our family.

Lowell was the oldest of our three children. David was the middle child and Sonya was the youngest child.

They were very normal siblings I suppose, because they spent a lot of time arguing and fighting. We felt blessed by our children because they were healthy, intelligent,

friendly and engaging to others. We encouraged them to voice their opinions and they did.

We were strong disciplinarians with our children and perhaps too much so. We came from families that had fought through tough financial times before, during and after the depression years of the infamous 1930's. Our parents had been tough with and on us as children which also affected how we disciplined our children.

They made us work long hours while yet a young child. I am not complaining, because that was the way it was for many rural children during the time of our childhood. The discipline taught us, Shirley Ann and I, how to get things accomplished in tough situations.

Shirley Ann had been raised on a ranch in Montana until after her father passed away. She had been the only girl born to her parents and was seven years younger than her youngest brother. She had five brothers. The family raised cattle and sheep.

Her grandparents were from England and Norway. Her grandparents from both sides of the family settled on a homestead in Fergus County, MT. Her mother's parents settled on the plains while her father's family settled far up a valley in a serene setting nestled among the trees. They could see for miles from the homestead as they looked upon the prairie to the north and east. They had seen a lot of tough financial times and they had a strong desire to succeed.

It was unfortunate that her father passed away when she was fourteen. They were very close, and his death was devastating to Shirley. Everyone had good things to say

about her father when I enquired about him after joining the family. If he had still been alive there was a good possibility I would have never met Shirley Ann, because she would most likely have still been on the ranch or married to a rancher.

When Shirley Ann was very young her mother was not well. The subsequent difficulties she faced helped to mold Shirley Ann into what she would become later in life. Her mother was very ill for a number of years and was sent to a renowned medical facility in another state to see if they could find what her medical problem was and help her recover from the ailment.

During her mother's absence other ladies helped to fill the void for Shirley Ann and her family. Two of her aunts acquired a special place in her heart because of what they did to help the family. The stress of not having a mother and the death of her father at such a young age make her a little insecure, but very determined in her actions.

Her mother taught her how to sew. That skill was to be an immeasurable aid she would use in her rehabilitation after the accident. If not for that skill I don't know how we would have succeeded so well in her rehabilitation process.

I arrived in Lewistown, Montana on July the 4th, 1966. The temperature on the bank sign read 104 degrees. The landscape was very dry along with the searing heat. The countryside was brown from the lack of moisture. The small amount of green color was rather pale in comparison to the dark and lush green of the Kentucky bluegrass to which I was accustomed.

I had been spoiled with those lush green meadows and countless varieties of trees in Kentucky. I was also very opinionated. I had a lot to learn. I don't think it is a fault to be opinionated. I think everyone should believe in what they do, where they live and so forth, but they also need to be able to accept change in their lives.

I sort of had a chip on my shoulder, because I didn't really want to be there. I was in the Air Force and stayed home on leave until the last minute. I was looking for reasons to not like the military and also Montana, but it wasn't long until I was captivated by the northwest.

I didn't meet Shirley Ann until exactly 6 months later on the 4th of January 1967.

I remember the evening very well. I was walking toward a friends' home in Lewistown. I had no car and very, very little income at the time. I was fortunate to have met a young man and his family. I loved his mother almost as much as my own. His mother treated me like a son. I would come to town almost every weekend to spend the weekend at their home which gave me an opportunity to get away from the military atmosphere.

That fateful January day Shirley Ann was driving around town in her new Mustang car. My friend and his cousin were riding in the car with her when they spotted me. They said, "There's Rod"! She said, "Who is Rod"? They quickly explained all they could to her about me. She stopped the car and I got into the car with them.

I sat quietly in the back seat and watched her intently as we cruised around town. I was really taken by her. She was so pretty and intelligent.

No date had been set, but I had been engaged to be married to my childhood sweetheart and definitely not looking for dates. She and I had an on again off again relationship for years. The first time we broke up it was my fault that she decided to call it off. The second time was because of distance since they had moved to Ohio. The third time I was successful in gaining a yes, but the agreement was that she still wanted to be able to date, because I would be 2000 miles away. I agreed to the arrangement, but it showed a lack of real commitment on her part and perhaps desperation on my part.

If not for that dating agreement I would have never obtained Shirley Ann's telephone number.

I quickly informed her that I was engaged to be married and wanted to go through with the marriage. The problem for me was the letters from my intended had stopped coming without any warning or explanation. I didn't tell Shirley Ann they had stopped coming at the time, but they had. I was reminded of the previous breaks to our relationship and how I never wanted any of them. She had been my first love and held that special place in my heart.

Each passing day without a letter made the situation more difficult for me. I was slowly accepting the fact she had decided to break the relationship which kept my relationship to Shirley Ann active.

Even then Shirley Ann accepted life the way it unfolded. That attribute has really been at the forefront of her rehabilitation post accident. She was understanding and accepted my predicament. It was obvious the feelings she had for me, but she was very patient and never

pushed me to make a decision between them in any way whatsoever.

After three months of our being constantly together she moved to Kentucky and it pushed me to act. I missed her so much and I still hadn't received any letters from the other. I finally decided to write a letter breaking off the engagement. It broke my heart to do that, because I really was very sincere. It seemed that she didn't care anymore. I then told Shirley Ann that I wanted her to be my wife and she accepted my offer of marriage.

About a week later I was ready to leave on a trip to Kentucky to bring her back with me as my wife. We were not financially ready to be married, but I didn't want anything to keep us apart.

The last thing I did before departing the air base was to stop by the mailroom. Sure enough there was a letter stating why the letters had stopped, but it was too late. I wasn't going to change again. It hurt me terribly and I felt like a loser. I felt awful, but then again if not for her insistence on being able to date in my absence it wouldn't have happened. If she had found a way to write it wouldn't have happened.

I had made the right choice.

I left on a trip to KY and brought Shirley Ann back with me.

We were very happy and she was a good wife to me. She made me feel special when I was so very ill. I had thought I was going to die, because I was passing out on the X-ray machine just before the military doctors

operated on me. Fortunately my appendix was located in an area that kept a lot of the poison from entering my blood stream. My body had been quickly breaking down fighting through the infection, pain and delirium those fifteen days before the operation.

There was a rehabilitation period to just be kept alive, but through the entirety of the ordeal Shirley Ann was positive and there for me. I will never forget the warmth and aroma of the basement apartment when I finally made it home from the hospital. She had the basement apartment decorated nicely for the Christmas season.

She had somehow managed to save enough money to purchase a really nice wool sweater for a Christmas present even though we had very little money, but I was unable to even go shopping for her.

Our paychecks were very, very small when we were first married. It was a miracle that we were able to make it financially. Many couples break up during that difficult period of their lives, but we only grew stronger. We accepted adversity as a normal part of our lives.

She was also patient with me and helped me to mature.

Marriage vows speak to the possibility of tough times during a marriage. From the beginning of our marriage we had experienced tough situations; therefore, she had every right to think that I would stay committed to her.

Our relationship would be tested severely in the coming months and years. It wasn't on my end, but rather on her end. I was going to have to be the good guy, but I would have to be the bad guy as well and she would have to

accept some tough love from me. It would always hurt me terribly to be the bad guy, but it had to be that way.

There was never any thought of my leaving her in that condition and walk away from the responsibility to care for her. Her mind was so damaged that she had very little brain function for a long time. When she did gain more brain function she was so reliant on me that I couldn't let her down by walking away like many do.

I was never tempted to walk away and leave her without hope. I simply had to be her hope.

Her brain was so terribly damaged and needed special attention. She desperately needed someone she could trust completely for many years during the arduous reconstruction process. She had earned the expectation for it to be me.

Chapter 2: The accident

Lowell was turning seventeen when he asked us if he could graduate a semester early from high school to attend a Christian university in Nashville, TN. We didn't want to hold him back since he was an excellent student so we agreed to the proposition.

David had turned 14 and Sonya was soon to become a teenager.

I left on a delivery run to Sidney, Ohio about 2 A.M. that Friday morning and had a clear sky before me. I would usually be chatting away on the citizens band radio (CB), but that morning I hadn't been listening to the CB radio or the AM radio. I was lost in thought and enjoying the trip after having made the journey through Dayton, OH when suddenly without warning the skies darkened. In fact the skies from the northwest were ominous looking and kind of made my pulse quicken. Shortly afterward my unit started being buffeted by a fierce wind and almost immediately a fierce snow blizzard was upon me.

The temperature had been just above freezing, but it began to fall rapidly. The interstate highway was being quickly covered in snow. Visibility had been reduced to a minimum. Traffic slowed to a crawl and automobile wrecks began to occur as the work traffic was attempting to get to their destinations. A leisurely trip had suddenly turned into a nightmare.

My delivery destination was only sixteen more very dangerous miles ahead. When I arrived at the factory they were still operating, but they were making plans to close soon. I was very fortunate they even unloaded the freight from the trailer. I think I was the only truck that arrived that morning.

I had to make a decision whether to attempt the return trip home with an empty trailer in all that wind and snow. The temperature was falling so fast and was forecast to be well below zero before the day was spent.

I knew with all the wind, ice and snow the electrical power would most likely fail. Therefore, if I rented a motel room I would very likely have no heat perhaps for the weekend. The same would be true for food so I decided to attempt the trip home. I was thinking that if I could just get to Cincinnati that I may be lucky enough to get ahead of the storm.

I had to make a stop in Tipp City, OH and did so quickly. The trip South was fraught with danger. Accidents were happening everywhere as factories let their workers go home, but the flow of traffic kept thinning as the morning progressed.

I was somehow able to cross the river into KY and the snow was not nearly so deep; however, there was ice covering everything.

I didn't dare stop fearing any delay might prevent me from making it home. Danger was everywhere and my trailer was almost empty. The weight I had in the nose of the trailer made it even more dangerous if I needed to stop because of the imbalance of weight nose to tail.

Everything was going well and I had almost made it to Lexington, KY when suddenly I saw emergency lights flashing around a curve fully $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away. I starting trying to slow down, but as I eased off the accelerator the tractor would start turning around with me so I would have to accelerate once again. That same procedure was repeated many times as I slowly, but surely lost momentum. I was very fortunate that I didn't have to completely stop the unit. If I had been required to fully stop I would have had an accident.

The road suddenly changed from ice to mostly dry road surface making me think I had perhaps gotten ahead of the storm. However at the Mountain Parkway exit just east of Winchester I ran right into the blizzard once again. This time the snow was about a foot deep and the tracks was severely rutted. The snow was very saturated with water which made the road a nightmare to travel.

My truck was seemingly shaking to pieces, but I didn't dare stop. I just prayed that nobody would be blocking the roadway the next fifteen miles and home.

The blizzard occurred on Friday. Late that evening the blizzard ended and the skies cleared. Saturday morning came and the road cleaning crew was busy cleaning the roads and streets. The sun was shining brightly and the nightmare had seemingly come to an end.

We were out and about in town checking the highways to see if they were clearing them well and they were.

On Sunday morning Shirley Ann suggested that we go to Carlisle, KY (about an hour away and North of Mt Sterling) to visit our preacher friend and his wife. His

wife had undergone an operation and we wanted to support them especially since they were special friends.

I agreed to make the trip with her.

Lowell was home for the weekend from college. David and Sonya decided that they wanted to stay in Mt Sterling and worship there so we contacted some friends to give them a ride home from worship.

We dropped them off and headed north out of Mt Sterling, but as soon as we left town the roads became treacherous. My memory recalled what lay ahead for us. I told Shirley Ann that we should immediately turn around (I had decided to let her drive), but she wouldn't hear to it. Her mind was made up and she was heading to Carlisle.

She had driven on hazardous roads many, many times in Montana so she wasn't worried even a little bit. She was a very good driver so I wasn't worried about that. It was the snow drifts and other drivers that had me worried.

The temperature was well below freezing with a fierce wind building snow drifts across the highway. The weather and blowing snow spelled danger if we were to encounter any problems. I was kicking myself for not remembering what we could be facing on the journey. It had been so easy to forget because of the bright sun.

We owned a small Chevrolet Chevette. David would normally be sitting in the back on the driver's side with Sonya in the middle of the back seat. Lowell would be seated on the right side. Shirley would be in the right front seat with me driving, but that day with her driving I

was in the right front and Lowell was occupying his usual seat.

I kept telling her that we should turn back, but she just wouldn't listen to my pleas. I made one last attempt when we approached a crossroad about five miles out of town. She gave a retort that signaled her determination. There was really nothing I could do so I gave up and decided to keep quiet, but I was really concerned about our safety.

About one minute later we approached a curve in the road. It was very clear to me there was a snow drift in the other lane. I felt it wouldn't affect us, but suddenly appearing was an empty straight truck that was moving too fast for the road conditions. He was losing control of the vehicle and was beginning to turn sideways in front of us. Shirley Ann had no place to go. The road was very narrow anyway, but now there was a snow bank that prevented her from leaving the highway.

The truck kept turning sideways and then it hit our car. The rear corner of the truck bed came through the windshield of the car. It struck Shirley Ann on the left side of her head and tore part of the ear away. One inch more and it would have missed her, but one inch further and she would have probably been killed.

Had David been with us he would probably have been decapitated.

Lowell stated that he reached forward and pulled Shirley a little to the right which if true probably saved her life. I know that after we stopped she was leaning slightly to her right while still sitting upright in the seat.