

A LOVE STORY

It has been two and a half years since George died, and I still can't believe he won't be coming back. We spent so little time apart, always enjoying being together; it seems impossible that he won't come back again. A day never passes that I don't think of him several times, and nights are often spent recalling our life together.

I knew from the first time I ever dated him that I hoped I could spend my entire life with him. When he asked me to marry him, I was the happiest girl in the world. He was handsome, kind, gentle, caring, funny at times, and he seemed the perfect gentleman to me then, and lived up to my appraisal for the rest of his life. I loved him with all my heart and will as long as I live.

Since I spend so much time alone now, I spend a lot of it thinking back over our life together. I guess I just need to somehow let some of my thoughts loose. My brain gets so crowded at times, I have to slow down and sort out what's bothering me most.

George and I were married in 1944, at the peak of World War II. Of course, that was a very intense, yet romantic time in our life. He was sent to England, just six weeks after our wedding (in Brownwood, Texas) and was gone for one entire year.

I thought I would burst with joy when he was discharged (honorably, of course) at the end of the war, and we would be able to spend all of our time together. We did just that, and spent only two or three nights apart, until he became ill, and hospitalized many times.

I'm sure this will be a "rambling story" told just as my thoughts occur, but it may help me accept all these changes in my life.

Having a baby daughter first and then a son, in the first five years of our married life only made our love and commitment all the stronger, and we felt our selves richly blessed.

I am now 78 years old and feel I have aged dramatically since George left me. I have many aches and pains but loneliness is my worst enemy now. I suppose having George so close and comforting all of our fifty-two years of marriage is bound to make the parting harder. I could always count on him at all times and under all circumstances to listen and help me get back on track whenever I needed it. He loved me just as I was and didn't appear to want me to change, though I am sure there were many characteristics that could have been changed for the better. What a sweetheart he was.

Life seems so empty and nearly meaningless now and I have to frequently give myself a good "talking to" to count my many blessings and be grateful for all of them. Our children are fine, caring people but they have their own lives and families to consider. This is exactly as it should be, and I would feel very bad (and a disappointment to George) if I had any other attitude. I just cannot get used to living alone. I am thankful that since one of us had to leave the other alone, that it worked as it did. I would have been terribly sad to see George hurting so, and I know he would have. I believe we loved each other equally, and one would surely be nearly devastated at the loss of the other.

Not too many couples have the kind of relationship George and I had. We did everything together. My sisters have reminded me of that. They play golf, bowl and go out with girl friends often, but George and I enjoyed being together. We liked each other as well as loving each other, so we didn't seem to care to be apart. That has to be responsible for the awful loss I feel without him. He taught me so much about life, things I really hadn't given a great deal of thought to before our marriage.

He loved his country, his job, his home, his children ... and me.

George was a true gentleman, and a very gentle man. I remember so well one of the ways he showed me that. When my mother died, he and my brothers in law were all pallbearers at her funeral. After the service concluded at the cemetery, he turned to me, took me in his arms, held me tight and kissed me. I did not see that caring act from any of the other men there.

My mother once told me that when it came to choosing a husband, to look for a man who was kind and caring to his mother, and he would be a good husband. That proved right. George was the baby of his family and was very close to his mother. I did not get to meet her, as she had died before I met him, but he always spoke very lovingly of her.

George loved to tease, and he teased me a lot. One funny little event comes to my mind. Once when I told him not to tempt me with a dessert, because I was trying to diet. His comeback was, "Are you sure you are trying to diet, or dying to try it?" What a clown he could be.

When he was discharged from the military, we had no home and very little money but didn't think about being deprived. He had a buddy in Arkansas, who had a laundry, who offered him a job. With so many returning veterans, jobs were scarce. So, after taking a delayed one-week honeymoon in Chicago, we went to Little Rock. I got a job as a secretary to the VP of a large chain of department stores; we rented a small apartment, and felt great. Then he heard from a former boss at Community Bakery who was starting his own bakery in Warsaw, Indiana, who wanted George to come to work for him. Unfortunately, that fellow's business didn't do very well, so we decided to return to Springfield.

George got a real break when Interstate Bakeries Corp. hired him as a route salesman. He stayed at that job for twenty years until he retired. He worked six days a week, going to work at 3:00 A.M. on a rural route and driving sixty miles to Carlinville daily. After ten years on that route he "moved up" to a city route in Springfield. He still worked long hours, but with much less driving.

We bought our first home in Southlawn on the southeast edge of Springfield. It was a nice small four-room house for which we paid \$8,000, and George used his GI loan for the down payment and the interest rate of two percent. We felt very blessed. Annette, our little daughter, was thirteen months old when we moved there in 1948, and Doug arrived in 1949. Now we were a real family. We lived there until 1954.

George, being a country boy, longed for some space. We located a nice home between Springfield and Riverton with one and a half acres of land. Now the 'farmer' could plant all he longed to, keep all the animals he wanted, and believe me, he did. Our kids thought it was a great life too.

By 1960 our kids were 13 and 11 years old, and very involved with school activities. Living a distance from their school meant a lot of late night driving to pick them up. George was still going to work at 3:00 A.M. so it was becoming quite a burden. He didn't want me driving alone at night, so we sold our home and moved in to the town of Riverton, near their schools.

We moved several more times (George loved to move) but always agreed on where and really enjoyed wherever we were

George retired about three times, but always found something else to do. He had to stay busy. I didn't retire until ten years after he did; he was ten years older than me so he was waiting around for me to be able to retire. He was so good to also do things around the house – cooking, cleaning, and always “fixing” things. He was always such a dear person; so easy to love.

I retired in 1985, but worked part time in the same office, and George was working part time for Doug in his electronics store. Doug always reminds me that all the young men who worked there liked George and enjoyed his company (and stories).

We had four grandchildren and living the good life. We were planning on doing some traveling, but God (or Fate) had other plans. In 1989 George became ill and was told he could not get well. He was diagnosed first with Parkinson's Disease, but that was not the problem, and then diagnosed with Hydrocephalus. He handled that news with his usual calm and gentle way. I didn't do that well; I was absolutely devastated, and didn't want to believe it. How could that possibly be happening to my George?

After suffering what most men could not have survived, and always without complaint, he really hit bottom and could not walk, speak, swallow or handle himself at all. I hired a young man to help me care for him so I would be able to keep him at home. Eight long years he tried to hold on. He would hold out his hand to me and I would sit beside him, holding his hand and telling him I loved him. He would nod, so I know he understood at least part of the time. It was heartbreaking to see him slipping away. It nearly broke my spirit as well. Our children and grandchildren came often and would hug him and tell him they loved him too.

Finally, on January 14, 1997, George died, and left all of us so shattered and sad beyond description.

My life is so wrecked, but I try to remain normal. I think of him many times every day and at night I lie and recall our lovely life together; how very much I loved him. Still do, and always will. How truly blessed I was to have had him as my loving husband for fifty-two years.

I cannot figure out what Life is really all about. If there is a Heaven, I know George is there, and if it is as wonderful as we are taught to believe, then how can he be happy there, when I am still here. But IF Heaven is real and we find it to be perfect, I will get to be with him again. I know he will wait for me.