

# For Better or For Worse

By Alf Todd, VEPC Member

Such a romantic set of words! It was nearly 36 years ago that my wife and I recited that well-known phrase. We were in love, young and naïve. At the ripe old ages of 18 and 20, we had all the wisdom, maturity and health needed to get us through the next 60 odd years. For the following 25 to 30 years (though the wisdom and maturity often lacked as we raised 3 kids) our health was invincible. We worked together on house building projects, played team sports, did long distance cycling and lifted weights, along with many other physical activities. (I often joked that I wanted to die while bench pressing 300 lbs. on my 100th birthday.) We had our health, a strong Christian faith and a rock solid marriage.

At the age of about 53 I was aware of some changes taking place in my body; then in June of 2007 I was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Though my health had begun to fail, my faith and marriage have remained firm, neither of which I will ever take for granted. When my wife vowed to stick with me through thick and thin, having a man

with functional changes around the house was the farthest thing from her mind. Now that it seems to be happening, how is she handling it? That's largely up to me. How is my attitude? Am I doing all that I am able in



order to lighten the load while she works to make ends meet? (Disability pensions don't pay that great.)

I refuse to be a complainer as it will only serve to alienate myself from others, including the one person I need most. For now, I do my best to keep the house clean and do most of the meal preparation, simple things which now take a lot longer to do than they used to.

Communication is absolutely essential and presumption is a huge no-no. Don't get me wrong; I'm not suggesting there will never be trying times. Any debilitating condition will test the best of relationships, but testing does not have to weaken. Any weight lifter will tell you that in order to get stronger the muscles need to be pushed or stretched beyond their comfort. Though it is not uncommon for marriages to fall apart in the midst of sickness, it certainly does not have to be the case. Working together through the darkest times (especially during times of depression) can and will strengthen the union; but it takes team work. Never being presumptuous and always showing appreciation are on the top of the priority list.

Things happen in life that don't seem fair; but fair or not, life goes on. Having Parkinson's in our family was not my choice nor was it my wife's; what we make of it is our choice. When she said "for better or for worse" in June of '72, she meant it, and I will do all that is in my power and ability to make it "better".