

**Keith and Roberta****980307**

I want to tell you about one of the greatest couples I know; their names are Keith and Roberta. Now, this is not one of those romantic situations like Romeo and Juliet, but it is a story of love like you don't hear very often. Roberta is Keith's mother, and Keith is a quadriplegic.

Just a few days ago, a tribute was held in honor of Christopher Reeves, the actor who played Superman in a recent series of movies. Christopher enjoyed riding horses, but broke his neck in a freak accident and is now paralyzed from the neck down. He who once played Superman now cannot move his arms or legs. He even has to have assistance to breathe. But the reason that he was being honored was his indomitable spirit. He had not lived with an attitude of feeling sorry for himself, but had emerged from this tragedy with the type of character that is an inspiration for others.

Keith also lost the use of his arms and legs in a tragic accident. He continued in school, however, and eventually earned his doctorate degree. He controls his wheelchair with movements of his chin, and he uses a mouthstick to type into the computer and even to draw. He works at the same place I do, and I have the privilege of seeing him almost every day. I can't help but wonder how he does it: getting up everyday, cleaning up, eating, getting dressed, and coming to work. He is obviously highly motivated, but he has to have a lot of help.

This is where Roberta comes into the picture. She helps him at home and at work. She is also employed with us as an aide and helps Keith whenever he needs anything. What impresses me is that she is one of the sweetest ladies that you would ever want to meet. Always friendly, she makes you feel like you are someone special. And I know that she has to work very, very hard to keep up with Keith. She has a tremendous level of dedication.

I was at a dinner meeting with him a few years ago, and my friend David helped him eat. It made me realize what Roberta has to do everyday, how time-consuming it is and how patient she must be. It also made me think of how isolated Keith is, a great mind and emotional being trapped in an uncooperative body. I'm afraid that most people have trouble dealing with him in this situation. The other day we were in a meeting and I offered to help him with a doughnut (from a box which he had brought, incidentally). He said no thanks, but later I got an email from him that read as follows:

*Thanks for offering to help me yesterday with a doughnut. Not too many people think to offer, much less offer. I really appreciated it. Thanks, Keith.*

I have never known a doughnut that meant so much. I was really touched by his gratitude, and it gave me a little more insight into his isolation.

When I was much younger, I used to practice jumping over a string stretched between two trees in my back yard. It was sort of an Olympic thing. One day as I was striving for greater heights, I didn't land properly and jammed my neck. I walked to the local doctor's office and told the receptionist that I thought I had broken my neck, but she told me to come back in an hour when the doctor would be in. When I finally saw him he called the condition a 'wry' neck, and gave me an ultrasonic treatment that nearly killed me. Nowadays, when I see how they immediately immobilize a possible neck injury, I think about how close I must have come to serious injury. Maybe I was just a few ounces of force away.

I might let myself think, "There but for the grace of God go I," but when I look at Keith I see that he has a special grace of his own that abounds around him. I watch he and Roberta embrace life with not a single trace of bitterness whatsoever about their "condition." And it shows me that perhaps to experience this kind of love is the greatest blessing in the world.

Recently Dr. Kevorkian assisted a young paraplegic in suicide. This is one end of the scale. But Keith and Christopher Reeves are at the other end. I am glad they chose to live and give us a lesson in true character and love. At the tribute to the former "Superman" someone mentioned that people who were paralyzed often dreamed of being whole again, having control of their body again. In heaven I know that these dreams will come true.