

One Great Love Story

I was a teenager, trying to find a job to get some money for school and maybe enough to buy a used car. My goal was to go to college, although I wasn't sure how I could ever afford it, and my parents couldn't help much.

A close friend went to work at a service station, and I hoped that the owner might just need another part-time employee. So I got up the nerve to walk in one day, and asked him if he needed some help. He smiled, assured me that he did, and put me to work the next day. That was when the word *service* meant something to gasoline stations. Working there included more than just pumping gasoline. It involved cleaning windshields, checking the oil, putting air in tires that might be low in pressure, and otherwise making each visit by a motorist a pleasant and helpful one.

The owner (we'll call him Harry; not his real name, and you'll see why shortly) was as hard-working as any of us. He was kind and always upbeat in his attitude. Where there were problems, he found a way to fix them without complaining. He showed us by example how to treat customers.

His wife (we'll call her Linda; not her real name, for the same reason as above) would drop by often. There was always magic between the two of them. You could know instantly how much they loved each other, by the way they looked and smiled at each other, the considerations one for the other, and the joy that engulfed them. Harry became a mentor for me, and Harry and Linda provided a picture for me of what a happy marriage should be.

Years passed, I graduated from college, found a job that required me to leave Cookeville, Tennessee, and move to Cleveland. I lost touch with Harry and Linda.

A few years ago, I learned that Linda had developed Alzheimer's disease. She is now a patient at Life Care Center of Sparta. She no longer recognizes anyone, even Harry.

But the love story continues.

Cathy Howe, the executive director of that facility, keeps me updated on the couple. For nearly two years since she was admitted to Life Care Center of Sparta, Harry has come to see Linda – every day, seven days a week, from 8 in the morning to dark. He spends all day with his beloved wife.

He eats his lunch before noon in the ice-cream parlor so that when Linda is brought to the dining room, he can sit with her and give her his full attention while she is fed.

Howe marvels at the depth of Harry's love for his wife. When asked about his faithfulness in attendance, he replies, "This is my home. Wherever she is, that's my home."

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Recently, Howe said, when an ice storm made it impossible for Harry to get to the center, he called to apologize and to see how Linda was doing. “I assured him that she was just fine, that we’re taking good care of her. He was back here to see her – all day the next day.”

Howe said she worries about Harry because he sits with Linda so much that he doesn’t get enough exercise, so she has begun finding time to get him to walk with her around the building for his own health’s sake. When they walk, the conversation always revolves around his unfailing love for Linda. Harry speaks of her selflessness, courage through the years, and the incredible strength she possessed when they were told about this unspeakable disease taking over her mind and body.

When the news was given, she provided comfort to him when all he wanted to do was cover her in a blanket of protection against the struggle to come. Harry stated, “(Linda) loved me unconditionally throughout our marriage and I intend to do the same – until the very end and beyond.”

“Theirs is such an inspiring love story – one that anyone would want – to know that someone would love you that much,” she said.

In a telephone conversation recently, I told Harry how much I admired him all these years, and especially for the way he faithfully cares for Linda. “She would do the same for me,” he replied.



And, indeed, she would have. I could have guessed that way back in the 1950s.

Alzheimer’s is the only cause of death in the top 10 that cannot be prevented, cured or slowed.

And Harry and Linda have shown that it cannot defeat love.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter