

I'm Alvean Lyons

And I'm Doug Weiss, and this is Love Life.

Doug

Alvean, we have a very serious topic to take on today. And I don't mean to start this out on a low note. But on a serious note, our topic is about sickness and health. You know, we take those vows as part of our marriage ceremony that we will be there for each other, in sickness and in health. But in that wonderful moment, when we're looking in the face of the person we love, we're not really thinking about what that commitment means, right? And sooner or later, you know, we're going to be called on it. It may not be hopefully, for a long time, nothing more serious than as it was the other day for me, when Peggy said, having come down with a sinus infection, sweetheart, I need some chicken soup.

So, I made a big pot of chicken soup, not a big requirement. But there are other times in our lives when we are called on to do much more than that, I know that you have been through that, not so much with that, but with your son.

Alvean

Absolutely.

Doug

And I lost a wife to leukemia and was her caregiver for many years. So I think we've both had the personal experience of what it means to be with someone who is seriously ill. And when it's your significant other, your spouse, the person you're in a loving relationship with, it changes the character of your relationship. It can, in a positive sense, deepen it, absolutely. But let's be honest, it's not, easy. And it can be the end of a relationship also.

I would imagine you've probably been around this, counseling on this subject

Alvean

Well, what's interesting is, I've actually been on the other side of it myself. I have not had to care for Matthew, while he was been ill, I'm very fortunate he is strong as an ox, super, super healthy individual, thank God for that. I, on the other hand, had chronic anemia years, and as a byproduct of some feminine related issues, and not being able to get a handle on that. And so the blood loss from those really made the anemia significantly worse. So I had to do iron infusions. And the fatigue was significant. And it really does take a toll on you. And, it has the potential to affect the relationship. And to your point, in terms of the fact that we're all at some point or another going to be called on that you do find out what your relationship is made of, when all of the things that might have been true when you first got together for reasons beyond your control may not be true right now in your relationship. And you don't always know when or if it's going to be better, and what it's going to require for it to be better. And I

remember the kind of guilt I would feel about being exhausted. And Matt is naturally very social. Not that I'm not, but because I do people for a living, I tend to enjoy my quiet time when I get home, Matt does technology for a living. So he really enjoys being social. And so sometimes I, you know, already feeling tired would look forward to just having quiet time at home, not having to do anything. And he would be ready to kind of ramp it up. And I would feel guilty about the fact that I was too tired to go sometimes and used to quietly be concerned, I will go so far as to say worry, but quietly be concerned that if this doesn't get better, what will this mean for our relationship, if the things we've enjoyed most together, I can't really participate in on the same level. So it really, sickness has a way of really kind of taking us to the Crossroads inside of our relationship and begging the question, Who are you going to choose to be there every relationship comes to a place where it has to answer that question, Who will you be? Is it just love when it all works? Or is it love even when it doesn't? You know,

Doug

I was struck by the fact that when my late wife was diagnosed, initially with a precursor to leukemia, but we knew that that leukemia was inevitable it was only a question of how soon will that occur? Is it weeks? or is it.....As people learned of this, and for a long time, Susan didn't want to talk about it to anybody
But when it became known, a lot of people said to me and said it to me over the years she was in and out of the hospital, that they were surprised at the fact that I made it the business of my life to see that she was taken care of.. I quite literally put that first

My reaction was, really, you're surprised by that? Why should that be? Why should anyone be surprised that someone loves another person and puts their welfare first. There wasn't anything in my mind that was particularly noble about it. And in fact, I think I may have said this before in one of our episodes, when it first happened, we were not together, we were kind of on a pause in our relationship. And the idea of, of having to step in wasn't one that I relished. In fact, I said this openly, I prayed about it, I thought about it and kind of said, I hope I don't have to do this, I don't want to have to do this. But I got a pretty clear message that this was my responsibility to take on. And I learned only years later from a very close friend of Susan's, that one of the reasons she reached out to me when she learned that she was terminally ill was that she knew I had the will to help her. She knew something that I did not know about myself. I didn't know that I had the will to do that. In fact, if I had known what I was up against seven years of caring for her, I don't know how I would have dealt with it, but you put one foot in front of the other, you know, sort of accepting and in the beginning, it was all about, can we cure her. And we thought we had, by the way, you know, after two years of unbelievable horrific treatment, we thought she had reached that point where she was healthy and we didn't, didn't see coming, the return of the disease, which ultimately cost her life.

But throughout all of that there was a process of learning at each step, what was required. And I have to say, not in a noble sense, but that I found strength in being her surrogate. I don't know if that's true for everybody. I can't, I only have an experience of one here. So I can't really extrapolate from that, whether this is true for other people. But I do know that we are capable of doing things that we don't truly know how we will handle until we get there.

Alvean

But I think that the reaction that you got from peers, associates and allies who were very impressed by your commitment to Susan is not at all an unusual reaction. And it's not unusual. I almost feel like the reason that it was written in the vows is because here's one of the things that could potentially tear your marriage apart. And do you love this person enough to do this thing that is going to run against everything that will come naturally to your flesh. The flesh is not designed to want undue pressure, pain, suffering selflessness, it's not designed that way. It's designed for pleasure, and happiness, and joy and ease and comfort. So marriage is about being able to love in spite of all of those things, being committed in spite of all of those things. And not everybody can do it, which is why marriages don't last per se. And unfortunately, and I don't make this a generalization where gender is concerned, but I will say to you that I have worked with several clients who have had chronic illnesses and many affairs began inside of relationships in their marriages when they were ill. And their husbands did not know how to respond to that illness, and were looking for the same kind of companionship they once had with their spouse that they couldn't have. They look for that outside of the relationship. And the women unfortunately, came to know that that was a reality and felt guilty that it was their fault that their marriages were no longer truly a commitment of one on one because they somehow had a breach of contract by getting sick inside of the marriage. And, you know, we have a, we have a celebrity example of that when Sheryl Crow was married, Lance Armstrong. I was so disappointed that, after she had been there for him, when she got cancer, he left her. So there's something about what that calls on the inside of us, that character seems to be very defining of whether or not you can handle it. And what you did, Douglas showed, despite the pain, the difficulty and the struggle that may have come with that character.

Doug

Well, be that as it may, I do want to say that when you go through this kind of experience together, and Susan was treated out in Seattle, at the Freed Hutchison center in and the Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, you get to know the other families that are going through what you go through, you see them in the hospital, you see them in the clinics and in the follow up to that you go through classes beforehand in everything from food safety, to administering medications, because when you're a caregiver, you are, you know, the first line of defense, right, you meet others like you and you get to know them. And we got to know a number of people quite well, one couple in particular, and it did not matter whether it was the husband or the wife that was the caregiver, I found, that quality of commitment was the same. So I was then, and I'm still very shocked and surprised when people seem to feel that it's the abnormal thing for one party in a relationship to stay committed to the other in serious illness, especially when going in you know that you're dealing with something where the odds not great. Susan

went through three transplants. The second one, which was the one that bought her some years, the doctor said, and I am quoting here, there's a 5% chance this is gonna work. So facing those kinds of daunting odds, something has to carry you through that. And your commitment, I think to each other is part of that.

Alvean

I would agree with you completely. There's so much to be said, for the realities that come with it. No one in any form or fashion is suggesting that it is not an incredibly large bucket to carry and carrying it on your own is a very intense process. But I will say for those who go through it, those who commit to it I have never met anyone who has regretted having been there for their partner and many I know, some wonderfully and wildly successful people, that it was actually the thing they are most proud of in their lives that they were able to be there for someone that they loved who desperately needed them, and it meant the selfless choice of committing to this to this way of loving kindness, love through service

Doug

I think you nailed it. I think that is when we have the opportunity to be our best selves

Well that's another episode of love life, in sickness and in health. We know this will happen in our lives but we hope when or if it does for you that perhaps this episode is some some help to you. We'll be back next week with another episode, hopefully a somewhat lighter topic. We want to thank our producer Kamaria , we want to thank Todd our recording engineer and you our listeners. If you'd like to write to us and comment on this show or offer a thought about another please do so you can reach me at Doug@lovelife.digital or Alvean@lovelife.digital. Bye Folks.