



I'm thankful for: a great love story and valuable grief support

I met my late wife Diane in a crowded Toronto pub. After I drove her home in the rain, she invited me in for coffee and we stayed up the whole night talking. In the 37 years that followed, **I never got bored of listening to what she had to say.**

Diane and I were married on a Tuesday afternoon at City Hall. We went on to have two children together. Diane was the most patient and loving mom and our children idolized her completely. Saturdays were our date night, and we spent most of them simply sitting at home, sharing dinner and watching the British sitcoms that I liked more than her even though Diane was born in England. She always humoured me, and I loved her company.

We spent a lot of our time together going on long walks, strolling for hours on end and chatting about our lives. On one of those many walks in 1982, Diane mentioned, "I don't seem to be walking the way I used to." She said she feared she had Multiple Sclerosis. As the years went by, I'd feel her tugging on my arm because her balance was off. When the doctors confirmed her diagnosis, we buckled our two young kids into the car, went for a long drive, and just cried together. Diane stayed as active as she could for as long as possible. One day, I came home from my school board job to find her lying on the floor in a pool of blood after falling down the stairs. That was the day I submitted my resignation at work.

I then spent 14 years as Diane's primary caregiver, with her MS eventually advancing to the point she became like a quadriplegic. She often joked that her illness made me a better husband, and I don't disagree. **Those years together meant the world to me.** When others questioned how I could do it, I felt myself getting angry. I often think I got more out of that time than she did. Heartbreakingly, Diane's physical and psychological pain eventually progressed to the point we both understood she would die sooner rather than later.

As a therapist for students and adults myself, I knew I would need additional help to make it through the darkness of my grief. I called Margaret Bahen Hospice who connected me with caregiver support staff via Doane House Hospice. My first appointment was only two days after Diane died, and I cried my way through the session. It was the space I needed to let myself *just be* after losing her.

I was then referred to a peer support group, where I made invaluable connections with people who understood what I was feeling. We all had our own stories, but we were bonded in our grief. **The support of Doane House Hospice gave me the opportunity to move through my immense sadness, and take the next steps into a future that had once felt unbearable.** Now, I sing their praises any time I can. One of my most special possessions comes from a Doane House Hospice program: a memory bear made from Diane's old clothes. It sits in my living room where we used to watch TV together.

My wife was truly one of a kind, and I like to think we shared quite a special love story. For anyone else experiencing this kind of profound loss, I can only hope they are fortunate enough to access the care and support I found at Doane House Hospice. I remain so thankful for the help I received. **That's why I believe it's so important to give back: to enable others to find hope on their most heartbroken days, when they need it most.**

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'D Blackwell'.

Drew Blackwell