

## **It's the spirit – not the food**

The first Christmas of my married life was supposed to be picture perfect. It was also *arthritis free*. Wanting to impress my new in-laws, family and friends, I started weeks ahead picking out perfect gifts, decorating our new home and, of course, finding the best recipes for what would be the "ultimate" Christmas dinner.

I stuffed the turkey with a fabulous stuffing - it took hours to prepare - not realizing that the bag with the kidneys, heart, liver and neck were still in the bird. I burnt the gravy! The mashed potatoes were chunky! And the homemade Chatelaine frozen dessert didn't look like the picture and it melted before dinner. At the time, I thought it was the worst day of my life.

Today twenty Christmases later, most of them living with RA, dinner is shared between the families. The turkey and trimmings are prepared the day before – shhh, nobody knows. Everyone jokes about my square potatoes, created by changes in my hands. Guests bring their favourite dish. Our Christmas dinner is not Martha Stewart approved but it is spent with the people in my life who mean the most to me and accept me for who I am. And every year someone will ask if I remembered to take the bag out! Happy Holidays!

*Corrie Billedeau and Family*  
*December 2003*

## **Good advice**

“Always wear clean underwear. You never know when you'll be hit by a bus.” My mother was full of such advice that still, unexpectedly, springs to mind. Like when Christmas was mere days away and the supply of everyone's underwear was down to the ones at the back of the drawer with the wonky elastic. The shirt and sock supply wasn't looking too good either. Clearly, I had washing to do.

The laundry was on the second floor, the washer was in the basement, and there were a great many stairs between the two. My knees didn't work, and neither did my hands, wrists, feet and ankles. And company was coming. And I had to vacuum and finish the baking. And nobody was home to help. The situation seemed desperate.

I emptied the hamper into a laundry basket, tied the ends of my husband's bathrobe tie to each side of the basket, put the tie around my neck, sat on the steps and went down two flights of stairs on my bottom with the basket of dirty laundry rocking on my lap like a cradle, dusting the treads and banister with a sock as I went.

While the clothes washed I perched on a trunk and tried to decide what to do about the baking. It had to be easy because of my hands, but nothing I thought of seemed easy enough. My laundry room is not one of those beautiful craft/play/laundry rooms featured

in magazines on newsstands everywhere. Mine is a laundry and storeroom, and the shelves are dusty. While the clothes went around in the dryer I looked across at the boxes and took inventory of the contents from memory. The old shoebox contained family photos. One day I intended to sort and put them in an album, but that day hadn't come yet. Removing the lid I pulled a few out at random. One was of my mother and me when I was about eight. Seeing that picture reminded me of a delicious dessert she had made that was quick, easy on the hands and would be perfect for Christmas. Now all I had to do was get back upstairs with the clean clothes - on my bottom, of course - whip up the dessert and vacuum while it baked. Everything was under control, and all because you never know when you'll be hit by a bus.

*Anne Dooley*  
*December 1, 2003*

### **The trials of pantyhose and rheumatoid arthritis**

A few years ago I gave up wearing pantyhose. I just wasn't limber enough for the acrobatics it took to get a pair all the way up past the thigh area. I decided to try a new product called pull-ups. They are similar to stockings, but have rubberized elastic at the thigh enabling them to stay up without the use of a garter.

One Sunday I decided to give them a try. I went off to church feeling so pleased with my ability to put them on by myself in a matter of minutes. Everything was fine until it was time to leave. As I was walking out the door, towards the minister, I could feel the pull ups slipping down - losing their "up," so to speak. I was praying, being in church it seemed appropriate, that they would stay up past my knees until we had greeted the minister. My prayers were answered, but as I walked through the parking lot, they ended up around my ankles, looking suspiciously like a pair of flowerpots. Luckily the teenagers who had gathered after the service were more interested in what they were doing rather than my pull-ups. Once in the car, I took them off and threw them in the garbage. I have since found a garter and stockings that my husband thinks are just great.

*Linda Wilhelm*  
*December 2003*

### **Some skills are non transferable**

I like Elvis Presley. I always have. I like his good looks, his sultry voice, his songs and the way his lips curl and his hips shake. I can sometimes sing like him, and I like that too, but I never wanted to look like him. Unfortunately that almost happened when I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) sixteen years ago.

Like so many others with RA, the disease seemed to hit me overnight. I woke one morning stiff and sore, and within days I was in agony and terrified. The meds prescribed by the rheumatologist just didn't have the desired effect. Within a short period of time I had lost all my strength and was unable to move without assistance.

My husband was great. He helped me with everything including showering, dressing, and styling my hair. What is it about some men and their lack of skill in styling hair? Timon approached my head the way I imagine a baker approaches frosting a cake. He whipped it, dipped it, spiked it, curled it and dotted it with gel and mousse. Inevitably he resorted to the Elvis swoop. Can you see it? A stiff sweep of over-sprayed hair adorned the front of my head while severe bed-head decorated the back. At first I didn't feel I was in any condition to criticize. He was doing the best he could. But as Christmas approached and my situation – and hair - showed no signs of improving, his technique showed no sign of improving either. I implored him to register for Hairdressing 101 stating that with this hairdo I'd have a "Blue, Blue, Blue Christmas". I explained that most of the salon tools operated on electricity or battery. I thought he'd like that. It didn't matter; he wouldn't take the course. I tried to like my 'flip', but many times over the holiday season, when I looked in the mirror, I lamented that he wasn't a hairdresser.

*Colleen Maloney*  
*December 2003*

**Martin Luther King**

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... and This life, therefore  
is not perfection, but growth in perfection  
not health, but healing  
not being, but becoming  
not right, but exercise,

We are not what we shall be, but we are growing toward it  
the process is not yet finished, but it is going on  
this is not the end, but it is the road

*Suggested by: Liza Lorenzetti*  
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