

You are a carer.

But I'm only in my twenties

You are a carer.

But I work full-time.

You are a carer.

But, he's my husband...

"A carer is anyone who cares, unpaid, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support."

Oh. I suppose **I am a carer** then.

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I met him when I was 17. He was handsome, athletic, nerdy, intellectual and sensitive. He was passionate about martial arts, and his cat. Still convinced he loved that cat more than me. He was my first love, and my only love. We travelled New Zealand and Australia together when we were 21, he proposed, I said yes. We married each other when we were 24. All the while the Black Dog was biting at his heels trying to get his attention.

We'd been married for a few months when he had his first break down. The Black Dog finally got his attention, and it was all consuming. Six months later we were learning to live with the Black Dog, we weren't ignoring him anymore, we knew we had to learn to live with him or it would happen again. But then life took something precious from him, his cat. Two weeks later his Nan died. The two most important and stable beings in his life, gone. He was dealt the final blow; the Black Dog was well and truly let off of its leash... and made a bullying ally with Grief. Together they tried to take my husband from me, thankfully they failed, and it triggered the steps for him to finally get the help and support he should have been given long ago. But it has left an invisible scar on both of us.

His mental health was getting treated, by a caring nurse practitioner who understood and genuinely cared. I wonder if he knows he helped save my husband's life? Such a simple thing, a listening ear, but it makes all the difference. We were starting to learn how to live with the Black Dog again, and Grief faded away in time... but he was exhausted all of the time. We just thought that the Black Dog was dragging him down, it's hard work after all, having to carry it around all day. The listening ear suspected something different; the nurse practitioner referred him for some blood tests which showed something more concerning and less-understood. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or M.E as it's otherwise known as. 10 months of tests and hospital appointments we finally received a confirmed diagnosis; my husband has Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

In those ten months he has improved mentally, but physically, he has weakened. We've moved the TV upstairs to the bedroom, as he is unable to manage the stairs on most days. There are days where he barely has the energy to leave the bed. He is in constant pain, a dull ache all-over if he's lucky, throbbing pain every other time. If we have a hospital appointment, the next day or two he can barely move. He is exhausted all of the time, but can't always get the sleep his body is craving. His temperature gage is way off kilter, dripping pools of sweat in the middle of winter. And a whole host of other symptoms he has to deal with.

So each day I...

- Prep and make his meals for the day
- Work in an office for 8 hours
- Come home and take him for a drive just so he can get some fresh air
- Provide emotional support, helping maintain the mental health balance

Right now I don't have to wash or bathe him... he's not so physically dependant on me yet. But that day may come, or it may not. But emotionally it's draining. Coming home from a long day at work, head still buzzing from the days events, and I have to put that aside to care for him and his needs. This isn't how I thought my first years of marriage would be like.

But despite what he has been through, he's still that boy I met 8 years ago... (minus the athletic bit!) He makes me laugh every day, always asks me how my day was, and checking that I am coping. Yes, he depends on me, but I depend on him too. I've been able to cope because of my support system, from him, from my family, from my friends, and from my job.

What's helped me is that I have been completely honest with my personal circumstances to my manager. Because of this she understands me better, understands me as a person and as a worker. My manager has given me the opportunity to work from home one day a week, to save a day's petrol money (as I'm the only one earning) and to keep an eye on my husband and I have flex working to help me attend his many doctor and hospital appointments. I genuinely think if it wasn't for my supportive manager and work colleagues that I would have broken down from the pressure by now.

Telling my story is hard. But I am strong believer in honesty being the best policy. By me being honest and sharing my story of being a carer for my husband, and working full-time on top of that, I may help someone at work understand their own situation better and for them to come to the realisation they themselves are a carer, and that there is support out there within WCC.