

The Things of the Day

Craig Shocklee, 10/8/2015

I was sitting on the couch in our living room. It seems like it was the first time I had been alone to think since before we were married. Things had been a little rocky between us for a long time. We had grown apart. I was thinking about when we were young. We were defiant. Everyone told us to wait but we stuck together. Looking back, I guess it didn't make sense for us to get married so young. I can't remember why it was so important to us. I suppose we were more determined to defy everyone else than we were really in love. Now here I am, sitting on this old couch alone in the living room.

It's not like we didn't have support. Sure, her parent's hated me. I hated my son-in-law before he married my daughter, but I don't think I was as tough on the kid as her parents were on me. We're fine now, her parents and I get along fine. And my son in law is still a knucklehead but he's growing on me. The wife's uncle Joe was on our side right from the beginning and he tried to help us. He found our first car, what a hunk of junk that was! He had good intentions but it put us in a real bind. She was mad at uncle Joe for a while. I remember watching the look on her face change from joy to anger to sadness to resolve. She forgave him pretty quickly and we learned together that life goes on.

Stubborn resolve got us through a lot. We rented our first house and we learned how to be a handy man together. Who knew that you had to change the filters on an air conditioner or that you could change the oil in a lawn mower? We figured out how to clear clogs from the drain in the kitchen and in the bathroom. We learned how to keep our worn out, secondhand washing machine from flooding the hall way. I even replaced a light fixture in the dining room while she watched anxiously, terrified that I would electrocute myself. We cut out a small garden in the back yard, it started out as a mud

fight and turned into a full fledged garden. One day we saw a neighborhood kid walking down the alley, he picked one of the tomatoes and started eating it and we were both proud of that. We really had fun at that first house but we had to leave when we found out there was a baby coming.

I had a pretty good job and she was working too. We had saved up a little money so we decided to buy a home rather than rent a house. What a nightmare getting all the paperwork together and timing our bills so we had the right amount of money in the bank at that magic moment. There was so much stress but we stuck together and we got the house and we were proud that we knew how to take care of it ourselves. She helped me put a sprinkler system in the yard and we planted a lawn together. We put a small green house in the back yard and I helped her put a bunch of plants in those little burnt orange clay pots. When the baby came we had a room ready for him and it wasn't too long before we had a second child. Before we knew it our house was a constant flow of friends and family dropping in to see the kids. We were running back and forth to day care and dance classes and sporting events. It was about that time that my boss pulled me aside and told me what a great job I had been doing and that he had more responsibility for me. My raise included me working some weekends and she started teaching a class two nights a week at the community college. We were both busy all of the time but we knew we could manage. At the time everything seemed like it was happening in slow motion but sitting here on this couch looking back it seems like it all happened so fast.

A million bicycles and dance recitals and teachers conferences later it seemed like our lives were starting to ease up. I joined a gym and she started a yoga class and we were both meeting new friends. She really liked her yoga classes and became a

yoga instructor. I used my down time to catch up on my favorite teams and watch sports with friends. I joined every fantasy league I could find and we were both having a great time. I don't know when we stopped talking to one another. We said good morning and good evening and we worked a lot in between. I'd get home late sometimes and she left early.

The kids were both off to college when things in the house turned a little cold. It was like I was living with a stranger. I didn't know what to say and I think we were both uncomfortable in our own home. It seemed like I couldn't say anything without breaking an egg shell. I have to admit that I was tough on her too. She'd give me the evil stare and I'd give her the cold shoulder. She'd go in her office and I'd go out to my shop. It got unbearable and it wasn't a surprise when we started talking about splitting up.

I'm reclining on the couch kind of floating. I'm half way between sleeping and deep thought and I'm asking myself over and over again what went wrong. It's eating at me and it's churning in my brain and honestly my stomach hasn't been settled since we had the big talk. She's already been looking for places! She hasn't been looking "seriously" but she has been looking for another place to live. My mind is drifting. I'm thinking about how much fun we had together fixing the clogged drains and putting plants in pots. We learned how to live together and we learned how to build a life around us. Gosh, how long has it been since we painted a wall or changed out a light fixture? What fun we used to have doing the things of the day together.

Suddenly I feel my face turn red and I'm having a hot flash or an anxiety attack or something. I catch my breath and I sit up and I look around the living room. I rush into the kitchen and I reach under the sink and yank on one of the hoses real hard, not really paying attention to which one. Water starts spraying out from underneath the sink. I run

into the office to find my wife. She's sitting there quietly and I can tell she's been crying. I tell her that I'm sorry for interrupting but we have a problem in the kitchen and I need her help. She collects her thoughts and she runs out to the water main with a wrench in her hand and she turns off the water while I grab some towels and a mop and start trying to contain the spill. We worked together for hours fixing the hose that I broke and cleaning up the mess that I'd made. We spent another couple of hours talking about how the island in the kitchen needs to be upgraded, and the paint, and the refrigerator. We laughed and we looked at each other for the first time in I don't know how long.

A couple of weeks later things had settled down between my wife and I. I was out in the back yard looking at the water sprinkler system, deep in thought. I had a plan to change some wires around in the sprinkler system timer clock and I was going to wipe out the watering programs. Then I was going to ask my sweetheart to help me fix the problem. I was in the garage looking for a screwdriver when my wife caught my hand. She asked me in a very sweet voice "Honey, please don't break the sprinkler system." I looked in her eyes and she was looking in mine and we both teared up. She said "Thank you for breaking the bathroom door, and the luggage rack on the car, and the shelf in the hallway closet, and the leg on the dining room table."

Standing there in the garage we had one of the longest and warmest hugs that I can remember sharing with my beautiful wife and I knew that we were going to be fine. I pulled her close to me and I slid my arms around her waist, I looked deeply into her eyes and I asked very sincerely, "Is the leg on the dining room table broken?"