

# With I loving care

Peter Hemming is in his sixties and cares for his wife Lynette, who has osteoarthritis, polymyalgia and fibromyalgia. He talks to **Andrew Harding**

I start each day by bringing Lynette a cup of tea in bed. After half an hour, I help her to get up, bathed and dressed. I do her hair, but fortunately I don't need to put on her make-up because I would be useless at that. We rarely go out before late morning unless there are hospital appointments. You have to allow plenty of time for something like getting from the house to the car. We bought a car that is higher so it would be easier to get in and out of, and have a motorised hoist on the back to lift the wheelchair.

With arthritis you can never tell if you are going to have a good day or a bad day; it comes and goes, and a good day can turn into a bad day without warning. When Lynette's having a bad week there are times when I think "if only I could have 24 hours on my own to get things done". But I don't, so I just buckle down and get on with what I can. I'm very rarely away from her for more than half an hour. It's a good thing in a way. Not only do I need to be around to help if her leg gives way or if she develops a severe cramp, which could happen at any time of the day or night, but I miss her too much. Some nights I sleep with one ear open. We had some help from the council, but they left, and it's very hard to find someone new.

I was more or less retired when we met five years ago and I knew what I was getting into, so to speak. If someone had said to me that "in five years this is what you are going to take on", I would have said yes. I would never change it – never. We have been married for three years now and are like any married couple. We have our arguments and of course as a man, it's my fault, but I've learned to read her signs and how to respond when she is

having a bad day and things are getting on top of her. I can see by the look on her face and expression in her eyes that she is in pain. That's important because being in pain, so much she can hide it very well. I have developed an instinct for when she needs help and when to come running if she falls or has cramp.

“

I can see by the look on her face and expression in her eyes that she is in pain. That's important because being in pain so much, she can hide it very well.

”

I don't have much "playtime" but in the afternoons when Lynette is resting I can do what I want, at my own pace, often finishing housework, or getting things ready for dinner. That's fine with me because as long as I'm doing something, I'm happy. Later in the evening after watching a movie together I have time to do some research on the computer or play a game of cards.

Our two young grandchildren sometimes visit and the eldest has reached the "terrible two's", so if I have to look after them and do the housework it gets a bit tiring. But that's life – you just get on with it. I always look for practical things to help. The cooker guard on the stove that stops our grandkids burning their fingers on the hotplates is very useful. This is because it also prevents Lynette from getting splashed when she is using the stove to cook dinner, while sitting in a chair.

I have now developed arthritis in my knees and am experiencing some of what Lynette is going through. At the moment it slows me down a bit. I just take each day as it comes. Sometimes I have a bad day if my back or leg is hurting. You just look after each other and cope the best you can – without any help from the Government, I may add. We're no different to any other married couple. The love between the two of us creates that extra bond which just carries you through. There's just a bit more work involved, that's all.' 