

A Parting Gift of Motivation

Category: Getting Motivated

written by Sara Ann Conkling | October 16, 2024

Joe is deaf when he isn't wearing his hearing aids. So he didn't hear my crutches behind him on the floor at 2:00 a.m. when I got out of bed for a drink of water. We'd just returned from a beautiful Mediterranean cruise. The day before our flight back to the U.S., I'd slipped on a wet staircase and torn the anterior cruciate ligament in my left knee. Surgery was successful and my rehab was going well.

But apparently my relationship wasn't going so well. As I walked up behind Joe, I saw that he was on my laptop, corresponding with a woman on a dating site.

I have zero tolerance for cheating. So even though Joe had told me he wanted to marry me, and even though we'd just spent 10 days on a cruise with his family, he had to go. I said he could occupy the couch until daylight, then he had to leave. This would be very inconvenient for him, as he'd just moved in with me and had put most of his belongings into storage. Too bad.

The breakup was heartbreaking. I'd really thought we were headed toward marriage. Aside from this intolerable flaw, Joe had many good qualities and I thought he loved me. I know I loved him.

The next morning, as Joe was leaving, he decided to explain why he was cheating. "I realized we could never be together for the long term," he said. "I would never want a partner in a wheelchair."

That statement stung intensely. Yes, I'd had multiple spine injuries. Yes, I'd just had knee surgery—but I would fully recover from it. Yes, I'd also had arachnoiditis, which is progressive, so there was a real risk I'd need a wheelchair at some point. But not if I could help it.

I'd always been motivated in rehab, but as I tearfully said goodbye to Joe, I acquired a new level of motivation. A couple of months later, Joe acquired a wife who might have been in his life for much of the time that he and I were together.

Twenty years have passed. I stopped dating; the thought of trying again was just too painful. I still don't use a wheelchair, except at the airport—and sometimes not even then. With multiple spine injuries, polyarthrititis, arachnoiditis, and two knees that currently need replacement, I still walk my neighborhood every day.

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