



# The Cost of Love

## How a new marriage survives the medical school years

by Kelly and Chantelle (MD) Peter

### *Embracing the blessings of a life of loving sacrifice*

“Happy anniversary,” my husband said to me from across the table in the hospital cafeteria. “Not quite what you expected, being married to a doctor, eh?” I replied, fingering a greasy French fry and sipping my chocolate milk.

We were married ten days before medical school began. My husband and I were quite disillusioned about the realities of me entering into the medical field. Words like CaRMS, call, and clerkship, had not entered our vocabulary. It is a gross understatement to say that the first three years of marriage and medical school were challenging. While I was pushed to the limit mentally and physically, my husband was left with the challenge of learning to support me through this monstrosity called medicine.

Marriage is rooted in mutual sacrificial love; nevertheless, I know my husband gave up more for me than I gave up for him. There were three major sacrifices that we had to make: *time, finances, and living in the shadow*. If not recognized and brought before the Lord, these three things have an enormous destructive power

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on a marriage. Our relationship not only survived the medical school mountain, but was made stronger and more intimate through God's incredible mercy.

As the body of Christ we have the privilege of carrying each others' burdens. Our hope is to encourage you and lighten your load by sharing what we have learned on our journey.

### **The Sacrifice of Time**

Doctors are busy. This fact should not surprise anyone. We did not expect, however, spending great lengths of time apart from each other while on out-of-town rotations and electives. For the newly-wed relationship to survive the time apart, an enormous amount of trust must be built in a short time, which sometimes takes a lifetime to achieve. Christian couples are not immune to physical temptation. In fact, Satan tries his utmost to destroy a couple who is serving the Lord. A wise helicopter pilot once told my husband and me that “absence does not make the heart grow fonder, but makes the pants wander.”

Absence, however, is inevitable in the medical field. The following are a few things that helped us:

- A phone call during a spare moment, while on-call (preferably not at 3 am!) helps the spouse at home



know that you are thinking of them, and gives you a chance to read and pray together.

- When searching for accommodation for out-of-town rotations, pick one where you are surrounded by people and feel safe. Do not give Satan a foot-hold by staying with a student/resident of the opposite sex. It is not fair to your spouse as doubts may creep into his/her mind. Your marriage is worth too much to jeopardize it by allowing even small doubts of infidelity to sneak in. Stay at a B&B, with a host family, or in a motel. It is worth spending the extra money to avoid placing yourself in a compromising situation.
- For the spouse left at home, it is a good idea to have a friend to be accountable to. This is especially true for men. It is very easy to fall into the trap of pornography or lusting with the eyes and mind. Stay busy, work extra hours, make a point to visit with friends...whatever it takes to stay out of sexual sin. Remember the following scripture:

***“He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear...He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Cor. 10:13, NIV)***

Keep your marriage bed pure and God will bless your time together when you reunite...we found it just as good, if not better than our honeymoon, especially after two months apart!

### **The Sacrifice of Finances**

“Honey, I need to buy another textbook...” became an all too often murmured mantra in our household. Medical school proved to be an all-consuming financial fire that landed us over \$40,000 in the red. By the time tuition, books, CaRMS application fees, flights and accommodations for out-of-town rotations and residency interviews were paid for, there was very little left in the bank for my husband's own personal endeavors.

When a man and woman unite in marriage, their resources combine as well, so that what was his or hers is no more, but instead is collectively “theirs.” We all think we learned to share in kindergarten, but it is not until we marry that we realize just how selfish we are. It is easy to share when the other person reciprocates with

something you value or desire. *Sharing* proves to be more difficult when it is largely one-sided. While my modest hospital stipend made a minute contribution to our monthly income, my husband's paycheques carried us through those years. He sacrificed much for me, and as you can imagine, it was a sacrifice that did not come easily at first.

Ultimately, this conflict can only be overcome through transparent communication, and prayer. Thankfully, we have a God who knows all about sacrifice, and if we let Him, He can bring our hearts to the place they need to be to keep money from destroying a marriage. In addition, the following helped us:

- No matter how tight your monthly budget is, always budget for individual spending money; even if it is just \$20 each. This way you will have something to look forward to and be able to spoil yourself.
- Communicate before any large purchases are made. We determined that anything over \$100 required permission from the other person, even for something necessary like a textbook. Giving and receiving permission from your spouse, reinforces the fact that all your resources are shared collectively, not his and hers separately.
- Realize that the financial sacrifice is temporary. In a few years your medical spouse is going to be your *sugar daddy* or *sugar-mama*!



### **The Sacrifice of Living in the Shadow**

“So what do you do for a living?” He said as he handed us each a glass of punch.

“Oh, I'm studying medicine,” I replied shyly.

“Oh, that's wonderful!” turning to my husband, “and, yourself, what do you do?”

“I'm a plumber.”

“Oh...” turning his attention again to me, “Medicine, must be very challenging...I always wanted to be a doctor.”

If this conversation has not happened yet, it soon will; and your non-medical spouse will find him or herself in the shadow of a very large spotlight that now follows you everywhere. Even when I am in the other room, I can hear my husband being questioned about my schooling, as well as the science and art of medicine! Our profession is one that evokes many emotions, opinions and personal experiences, and naturally, we tend to drift into the centre of attention. Without a doubt, this was the greatest sacrifice my husband made for me: choosing to be okay with being in my shadow.

For the first few years we were married, there was an unidentifiable source of tension in our relationship. It was not until a family member pointed out how our roles had changed did we take notice. While on a wintry hike one day, my husband's uncle presented him with this choice: to live in continual jealousy and resentment of my *visible* career or to realize the man that God had gifted him to be, the perfect compliment of my personality, and the unique and significant God-given role as my #1 supporter.

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1 Corinthians 12:12-26 describes the many believers as parts of the body, some more visible than others, some glamorous and showy, while others humble in appearance. Yet Paul writes, “*there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.*” (1 Cor. 12:25-26, NIV) If you wrestle with this issue remember the following:

- Make a point to turn the conversation to your non-medical spouse. Nothing builds up a wife or husband more than heartfelt praise in the company of their peers. In this way you will show your spouse how much you appreciate their support from the shadows.
- Being in the spotlight leaves you wide open to criticism and you may find yourself continually defending the practice of medicine. At times your spouse may act as your defender, other times he or she may just help you not to take things too personally!
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 reads, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business

and to work with your hands, just as we have told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and that you will not be dependent on anybody.” My husband has made this his *life verse*. It encourages him to know that there is *honour* serving from the shadows.

### Your ally, not enemy

Your spouse should be your greatest ally, not your enemy. If he or she seems like an enemy perhaps one of the aforementioned three *sacrifices* is generating tension in your relationship. Communication is the only way to get to the heart of the issue.

God uses marriage to teach us selfish humans sacrificial love so that we'll have a greater understanding of God's love for us. Though He so explicitly displayed His love for us on the cross at Calvary, I think the reality of that love still seems elusive and vague; when we experience being on the giving end of sacrificial love, the meaning in Christ's death becomes tangible and real to us.

As medical trainees, we must not get too used to being on the receiving end of our spouse's mercy. We must realize that our spouses have needs and that we must do our best to meet them. We must acknowledge their sacrifice for us and show appreciation continually.

*May you put the Lord at the centre of your relationship always, seeking wisdom in His glorious word and through prayer, to survive the temptations and struggles during the medical school years. In a world confused about intimacy and the meaning of marriage, may your relationship stand testimony to the sacrificial love of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 

