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My better half

By **ROBERT L. BRENNA JR.**
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I sat in front of the computer, with my chin resting on my two hands, contemplating what you are now reading. My wife, Judy, looked at me and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Thinking," I replied.

And within the time it takes my atomic clock to reset (exactly one one-thousandth of a nanosecond for those of you who aren't up on your space-time quantum theory), she said:

"Oh! ... So that's what it looks like."

Now I like to play newlyweds as much as the next guy, but the truth is we've been together for 25 years, so the possibility that she'd never seen my brain cogitate, or perhaps even engaged before, is a little more than troubling.

That might not bother me as much if I didn't have to ask her for help all of the time. She teaches English. If you see mistakes in my column, it's not that she doesn't know, it's because I didn't ask. While writing this column I asked her what she likes most about teaching. "Summer vacations" she jokes, but then she immediately corrects that and states the obvious truth, "my students."

She gets ninth graders to love learning. She gets them to love Shakespeare. Sometimes we are even stopped in line at Wegman's by former students of hers who proudly proclaim that they actually changed their career path because of her classes. What a great accomplishment. What a legacy.

I've seen her refuse to take sick days because "her kids" need her. She will never get paid or even get comp time for those extra days, but she did it anyway. I've seen her spend all of Christmas vacation correcting papers, only to later learn that she is intending to do it all over again after the students see her comments and then re-write the essays. "These are good students, and this is the only way they will really learn this," she explains.

She tells me that because this is her last year teaching, she enjoys things much more, knowing that this is the last "walk-through," so to speak. That's just one more thing she has taught me — to try my best to eschew the never-ending everyday pressures and to more fully appreciate the value of living the moment we are in.

Unfortunately, I'm not the worlds' best student at that. I wrote and often air an editorial on WHAM asking people to contemplate how

they would live their day if they knew it was their last. I should listen to it with the insight she has now given me, seeing how she is maximizing her year, and not merely a day.

In fact last year she asked if I could make sure I got home early for a Friday night Valentine's dinner, if she made the reservations in advance. After I assured her I could, she asked if I was sure I could be home by 7 p.m. I realized immediately that there was something wrong with that picture. She shouldn't have to ask about an early arrival on a Friday night weeks in advance, and consider 7 p.m. to be early. She taught me yet again, but not by nagging, just by a comment that spoke volumes. I've been working on that. I really have.

Despite the best of intentions, over the years I've failed miserably at living up to my goals of being gender neutral at home, and equally available for child rearing, and housework. She's taken the brunt of it. We joke about it — but she doesn't really complain. She just gets it done.

So you see, she didn't just help me get through a rough time starting today's column, over the years she's helped me get through a rough anything and everything. She's the objectivity I lack in preparing a case I'm wrapped up in. She's the last place I can turn when I need comfort or just moral support. She allows me to speak my fears

without reprisal, but with a firm and realistic response. Sometimes she's the confidant that no one else could be. She's helped me think through little dilemmas, and she helped me deal with life's biggest crises. So, while she's been a full time teacher, and full time mother, and home engineering supervisor, she's also had another full time job — taking care of me!

She's just always been there for all of us, and also, in many ways, continually teaching us, as well. So even though she soon retires from teaching school, which she certainly deserves, she'll be getting no gold watch from me — I just plain need her too much.

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