

Married with children

I read a series of newspaper stories a couple of years ago about a Cleveland woman dying of cancer.

The 1998 stories in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* portrayed Lisa Hearey as a vivacious, high-energy career woman, mother and wife.

Then she developed a very rare cancer of the appendix that quickly ate away her energy, her body, and, eventually, her life.

As I read the account of her life and death, I kept wondering how she managed to mother her three young sons for as long as she did.

How could she drag herself out of bed in the morning to pack the peanut butter sandwiches? How could she stand in the laundry room to fold the jeans?

How could she sit at the kitchen table to supervise math worksheets? And how, near the end of her life, could she summon the strength, the courage, the will to ease her shrunken body into a wheelchair to meet her boys on the playground after school?

How, after all, can you be the mother when you need to be mothered yourself?

I suspect, I hope, that Lisa

Hearey did what I've learned to do through some bouts with chronic pain: Ask for help. And accept help when it is offered.

Motherhood and pain came almost in tandem for me. Soon after our first child was born in 1995, a case of achy arms and hands turned into a red-hot case of tissue inflammation in all my upper extremities. I stopped working about six months later — keyboard work was the root of the problem to begin with — and the pain finally eased about a year after that.

The pain returned in full force late last summer, this time earning the unsatisfying diagnosis of myofascial pain syndrome. The three-month "flare-up," as doctors called it, threw me into a depression and threw our lives into disarray.

Pain, when it comes, makes me a person I don't want to be. I become short-tempered. I withdraw. I can't sleep and, then, can't function the next day. I neglect household tasks. I neglect my husband.

And I am not at all the mother I want to be.

My husband took a picture of me last summer, sitting in the kitchen

in my bathrobe in the middle of the day, with our youngest child, also in pajamas, laying her head on my chest. We both look forlorn and exhausted. Poor Beatrice probably was wondering where her real mother had gone and why this impostor was slumped at the kitchen table.

Another day, our middle child was being usual middle-like self, goofing off during breakfast. I completely snapped, after another pain-filled sleepless night, screaming at him and sending him to his room as I broke into sobs. The kids were, to put it mildly, confused by my Crazy Mommy Routine.

If there is any good to be found in pain — and I am hard-pressed to find much — it is in its power to humble. Pain has made me less stubbornly independent. Pain has dinked my Super Woman armor. Pain has made me ask for help for myself and for my children.

I have, naturally and repeatedly, turned to my husband when in

Sometimes, even moms must ask for help

About MPS

Myofascial pain syndrome is characterized by chronic muscle tissue pain, similar to that caused by fibromyalgia. MPS is sometimes the result of injury.

A sister did the same in Fran's early months, often substituting her arms and hands for mine to push a swing or stroller or, occasionally, a mop.

Last summer, a good friend checked on me throughout my flare-up, inviting my son for frequent play dates. One morning, when I hadn't slept a wink the night before, she took all three for a couple of hours so I could lay down for a while.

My pain is transient. Other mothers — and fathers — aren't as fortunate. Some, like Lisa Hearey, never recover from their pain. Others just need a helping hand through the rough times.

I have been blessed with ready helpers. Now, in good health, I try to return the favor from time to time.

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