



The Ultimate Gift

GOOD HEALTH IS ALL THAT MATTERS, BUT GOOD DIAMONDS CAN'T HURT...

BY HANS GSCHLIESSER

For better or worse took on significant meaning this year as I watched the woman I love suffer through a medical crisis. It started when, for some unknown reason, Janet stopped cooking. This was simply unfathomable to me. She loves to cook! And I love to eat.

As if this wasn't bad enough, she also stopped eating, saying that the mere smell of food was making her nauseous. She totally refused to go anywhere near the kitchen. As I am a terrible cook, we were both getting thinner by the day. "I know you want to lose a few pounds, but don't you think this is a bit extreme?" I asked her. No answer. Was this some sort of psychological rebellion against me? It is about *me* isn't it?

Knowing something was very wrong, we called in doctors. There were endless tests with endless specialists but still no answers. In a state of helpless confusion I watched as my wife withered away physically and emotionally. I watched as the ambulance took her to the hospital, as she received more tests from more specialists. Then finally, a diagnosis: "Your wife is anorexic, has a brain hemorrhage and Bacterial Endocarditis, which has destroyed her heart valve. She needs open heart surgery." I sat there white as a ghost as the blood drained from my body. Bacterial what?

By now, Janet was gaunt, exhausted and terrified at the prospect of

surgery, which was to be scheduled after eight weeks of daily IV antibiotics, administered by me, at home. To regain her strength, she needed to eat. Luckily, supportive family and friends precluded the need for my cooking.

Slowly she regained her appetite as the antibiotic killed off the nasty little *Streptococcus viridans* bacteria. But the looming prospect of open heart valve replacement surgery haunted us every minute. Ultimately, the day arrived and we drove to the hospital in a state of disbelief. The surgery was scheduled for Valentine's Day, which felt like a good omen. After five intense hours, the surgeon came out to inform me that all had gone well. I could finally breathe.

And to celebrate the ultimate gift of my wife getting a new heart for Valentines Day, I surprised her with a pair of diamond earrings. The nurse ran into the room in a frenzy when Janet's EKG lit up the monitor, but it was only her heart fluttering as she opened the box and saw the earrings.

"I've always wanted these; I'm never taking them off!" she exclaimed with joy and gratitude. It was just what the doctor ordered to renew the twinkle in her eyes, the radiant smile, the prospect of normalcy. And how we both craved the monotony of normal routine living! Routine living with a little extra sparkle.