

Today is my 31st wedding anniversary. As I mentioned on facebook, I can't believe I am old enough to be married that long. Time really does fly when you are busy living. I am so grateful to have chosen such an amazing life partner. We have been through so much together and have been such a wonderful team. It's easy, after so much time as gone by, to become complacent and take each other for granted. I try not to, but sometimes I do.

Gratitude truly is the sweet spot of life. The more we can partake, the better life is.

In celebration of my anniversary and as a tribute to my husband Neil, I am sharing the first story in *Breathe*.

Appreciation

Who was lying on the floor of the hospital intensive care room with me when Kyle, our six-month-old baby, was seizing uncontrollably?

Who held me as I cried, the night we realized Kyle was most likely autistic?

Who tried so hard to make eye contact with his son he shined a flashlight on his own face while under a sheet, in hopes of creating a tiny connection?

Who dove right in with me as we waded through therapies for Kyle, often to find they did not provide the answers we were seeking?

And who recently got up to care for Kyle when we were both very sick? Who looked at me and said, "I'll do it. I owe you one." I groaned. "Nope," he said, "we're a team. This is what I do for my partner."

Who? My rock, my teammate, my lifeline of support -- my husband, Neil -- who still stands beside me after all these years as we celebrate the baby steps we call progress.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Though *Breathe* is my journey, and Neil would probably have a different story to tell, we always have stood together as a team, supporting each other and working together for the greater good of our family.

Fortunately, we never lost sight of what brought us together in the first place. Our special partnership -- our marriage -- remains strong. Husbands often stand in line behind children, too easily taken for granted and pushed to the sidelines. This is magnified when there is a child with special needs in the family. It's easy to become complacent. In fact, it's so easy I got to the end of this book and discovered a gaping hole in my story. I had not acknowledged the debt of gratitude I owe Neil.

Expressing appreciation is a powerful stepping stone on this path. It is one that can never be revisited too often. Neil didn't sign up to walk this path. Unlike me, he had no preparation or education.

Autism has the power to make even the strongest person feel incompetent as a parent. Rather than crumbling, Neil has risen to the occasion time and again, standing strong and tall in his role as father to Kyle and our daughters. Hand in hand, we have walked this journey together, learning to love and live well in uncharted waters, reinventing ourselves both individually and together as we went along. Neil has become more than I ever could have envisioned.

I believe a heartfelt expression of gratitude is a power booster for loving and living well on our life's journey. So to my husband, Neil, I say thank you. Thank you for taking the high road, the rockier road, when you could have abandoned the ship a long time ago. But, that is not who you are, and I knew that from the very start. In good times and in tough times, for better or for worse, you have been my teammate and my rock. I have never felt alone.

Oxygen-Rich Tool

Who holds your hand? Who is your rock? Look that person in the eye and express your heartfelt appreciation. The more detail, the better. Is there a lump in your throat? Say it anyway. Ultimately, it feels so good.

