

# MARRIED WIDOW



Lucie Milosz Haskins

# The Daisies and The Dandelion

Dear Readers,

My husband Dean picked these flowers for me — the daisies and the dandelion — simply because they looked beautiful to him, and he thought that I would like them.

And he was right. When he came into my home office that morning, with one hand behind his back, and then lovingly revealed that precious gift, whose heart could not melt? Both for the sentiment the flowers expressed and for the look of pure joy on his face?

I'm not a photographer and most of my memories only reside deeply buried within me. But, somehow, I just *knew* that that celebration was too precious not to immortalize in some way.

And I'm so glad that I did because, aside from the poignancy of that moment, those simple flowers serve as a constant reminder of just how much of *Dean* (his inimitable spirit and his essence) has come back to me.

And that's what *Married Widow* is all about.

Dean's horrible fall off that ladder on May 28, 2006, his life and death struggle those first two weeks, his month-long coma, his seven-month hospitalization, his subsequent behavior problems, and his struggles as he strived to regain some semblance of independence, all that fell away when he handed me those flowers and I knew that the important and essential parts of him had come back to me.

This book consists of emails I wrote to about 200 friends and family during those tumultuous times.

At first, I wrote the group emails so I wouldn't have to answer the same questions over and over again.

Later, as Dean's recovery and setbacks unfolded, I wanted to chronicle the specifics of these events. I knew that I would never remember the details of those twists and turns if I didn't capture them while they were still fresh in my mind.

I also found that the outpouring of support and love I received from so many people, who waited so anxiously for more news, and who showed me they *cared* so deeply about what we were going through, strengthened me and charged me with the will and courage to continue one more day. One day at a time.

And, finally, years after Dean's injury, I wrote to discover myself — who I had become through this seven-year forging-by-fire.

I thank God daily that Dean didn't leave me that day and that, while he's not the *same* Dean, he is in every way a miracle of survival and hope and he's still *my* Dean.

Lucie Milosz Haskins

# 2006

**Hi Dean, it's me Lucie,**

I know you can't hear me but I need someone to talk to. And you've always been the one I turn to when I need to talk , so here I am, writing the words that I want to say to you.

You're in Trauma-ICC right now, all hooked up to machines and deep in your coma, and I desperately miss having you around.

You're here, but you're not here.

We almost lost you today.

In fact, when I saw you lying on the ground, so terribly still, I thought we had.

Did you know that the world really stops? It did for me today and it only started up again when I saw your hand wobbling in the air.

I don't know what happened, exactly. I can piece together that you were high up on that ladder and that it buckled and you fell and hit the fence and then hit the back of your head on the flagstone. Hit it several times from what the doctors say.

The damage is severe Dean. The doctors say it's due to the coup contra-coup effect -- your brain bounced back and forth, back and forth, back and forth — against your skull — insulting the brain more each time. (That's a new medical term I learned today: "insult." I hate the sound of it and all that it implies.)

I know it's all familiar territory to you — being a nurse and all — but it's shockingly new to me.

I was SO scared that I was going to let you die. "HE'S the nurse!" I kept telling myself. "It's not fair. HE'S the one who fixes people! Not me!"

I don't think I could have handled that guilt — always wondering if there was something more I could have done — or done more quickly.

The doctor's tell me it's all wait-and-see now. The first three days are critical. You're not out of the woods yet and, until you are, I'm not leaving your side.

It's up to you Dean. I know you have in you. Remember how you wouldn't take no for an answer and you kept asking me to marry you? After a whole year of asking, you finally wore me down and I said yes. The best decision of my life.

Please, Dean, fight with everything you have in you! I'm here fighting with you.

Do you remember how we used to sign our letters?

Я люблю тебя.\*

Lucie

\*I love you.

NOTE to Facebook readers: In 1968/1969, when I was studying Russian at Syracuse University in upstate New York and Dean was stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, we would write each other and scrawl this over the back of the sealed envelope on each letter. My native language was Polish but this "Ja lubię ciebie" (in Russian) is a close equivalent (though its meaning is closer to "I like you" in Polish).

**Date: Saturday, August 19, 2006 9:26 AM**  
**Subject: Sixth week in rehab — holding pattern**

Hi everyone,

The subject line says it all: it seems that Dean was in a holding pattern this week. There were no significant changes in his behavior or accomplishments. Hopefully, this is just a short break he's taking as he meanders down (and refinds) his path toward recovery.

I've spoken with Dr. XXXX and YYYY the case manager a few times this week about Dean's treatment plan. Dr. XXXX has started switching medications around again in an effort to get Dean to an optimum point where he (1) is not heavily sedated during the day and (2) gets a handle on his agitation/combativeness. Right now, it seems to be either one end of the pendulum (striking out at people) or the other (heavy sleeping during the day).

Dr. XXXX continues to fine-tune Dean's medications, trying to get the mix just right. It's a slow process because many of these medications have half-lives that have to be taken into account when dosages are changed. It's excruciating to watch and to experience.

I come in every day between 3pm and 4pm and track down the therapists for a quick report on how Dean's doing that day. Yesterday, ZZZZ (his physical therapist) told me that Dean had taken a swing at her and actually connected with her jaw! She had been trying to wake him up out of a deep sleep. That reminded me all too vividly of the early months of our marriage when I learned to step back smartly when I needed to wake Dean up. He had recently come back from Vietnam and was still in survival mode — coming up swinging from his deep sleep. I wonder if these situations are similar. In any case, I let the therapists and nurses know about my earlier experiences. Who knows how the mind works and how it all ties in together.

Dean's speech therapist made a great observation: she said that maybe some of this survival mode behavior he had suppressed before with his conscious mind is now floating back to the top because there is no *suppression* (filtering) after Dean's brain injury. An Interesting speculation.

Dean and I celebrated 37 years of marriage on Wednesday. He's always gotten me lovely red roses for our anniversary so this year I returned the favor. I bought 42 roses (because they came in bundles of 14 at Safeway) and brought them to his hospital room. I also carried in a big vase and arranged the flowers in it. They are just gorgeous and it makes me feel good that we can both enjoy them. He seemed to have a lucid enough moment when he saw them that showed he understood what they were for.

While he's been talking a lot this past week, it's been mostly perseverating (repeating things incessantly) or confabulating (replacing gaps in his memory by making up events that he believes to be true). It's tough to carry on a conversation and painful to see Dean stuck in a rut repeating the same phrase over and over again and usually louder and louder — as if increasing loudness will bring understanding.

I had Sonja bring in some of our granddaughter Chloe's old picture books for Dean to read. He had been trying to read the newspaper and seemed to get frustrated with the small print for the stories and understanding what he was reading. While the content in Chloe's books might not interest Dean, he seems to enjoy looking at the pictures. I read a barnyard book to him yesterday and we practiced the sounds animals make. Dean got a look on his face that said, "Come on! You've got to be kidding!" but he played along.

Dean's G-J tube had to be removed late in the week because the final tube got clogged and the nurses couldn't get it unclogged. Earlier treatments with Coca-Cola had cleaned up the clog but it didn't do the trick this last time. (It makes you wonder what Coke does to your insides if the medical staff use it like Roto-Rooter.)

The PEG tube insertion was a simple procedure, performed at the bedside. The old apparatus was removed (the balloon had to be deflated first) and then the PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy) tube was inserted in the same opening.

Dean is now wearing mittens (that he is unable to remove by himself) for a while

- to prevent him from pulling out the PEG tube (which he had started doing),
- to prevent him from removing the nose cannula that provides his additional oxygen treatment, and
- to soften the blows if he tries to punch anyone.

Overall, I find these mittens a much more humane solution than the old-fashioned restraints that some places used to use. (My poor father, as he was recovering from a stroke, was tied down with restraints. Horrible to endure both for him and for me when I was visiting him.)

My hopes are that Dean's holding pattern is a mere hiccup in his path toward recovery and that he finds his way again (with the correct mix of medication) soon. If Dean can progress to a state where he is cooperative and alert enough to take his medications, eat for me, and attend to the basics of daily living, I can easily take care of him at home. And he's

almost there.

So I ask all of you to please continue to pray for Dean and his continued progress, for the medical staff who continue to treat him — that they continue to exhibit patience and understanding as he remains agitated and confused, and for Dr. XXXX -- that he comes up with the right mix of medication for Dean.

Love to all, Lucie