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The Gift of Friendship

Barbara Stump

In this life time we are told we are fortunate if we have as many true friends as we can count on one hand. A person with MCS is lucky if they have one.

Well... lucky me, I have one. Her name is Zoe. I met Zoe through work. At first we said hi in the hall ways, then we began to share about our passion which is art. She is a potter deep in her heart. I am a painter. We decided to take a clay class at a nearby University. A few classes under our belts and I knew I wouldn't be able to breathe the clay dust. I bought a mask to filter the dust and wore it to class. She never even acted like it phased her for me to be the only one with a mask on. The other adults in the class stared at me. They didn't ask why I wore a mask. They just stared.

On a Saturday before the Christmas holidays we were at the University finishing up a clay project and decided to go into one of the shops near the university. The shop was decorated beautifully and looked like a fairy land. It reeked of scented candles. We quickly left the shop. I began to cough, deep barking coughs. Along with those deep coughs I would pee my pants. I told Zoe and we began to laugh which made me wet my pants all the more. Zoe wasn't laughing at me, she was laughing with me. She told me a story about when she was a young girl if she would get tickled or laugh hard she would pee her pants and the kids called her "pissy Zoey".

As the MCS became worse and I changed my diet, cleaning supplies, and personal items Zoe would go with me to the store and smell products for me to see if she thought I might be able to use them. We were in a health food store

checking out shampoos. I picked up one, squeezed it just a bit so I could get a puff of air to come up out of the bottle. I couldn't smell any thing. I handed the bottle to Zoe. She put the bottle up to her nose, squeezed the bottle and shampoo went up her nose and clung dripping from her hair. Bubbles began to bubble out of her nose. We scurried to the rest room laughing and dripping all the way.



“Love and Kindness Last Forever”

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One time Zoe and I were going on a trip together. When she came to pick me up I could tell she had put gel in her hair. She looked lovely with her waves tamed. I got into the car and knew I would have trouble breathing due to the hair gel. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to make Zoe feel bad. She had changed so much of her life for me already.

It is hard to hide a MCS reaction. My throat began to thicken with mucus and my voice became raspy as we talked about our trip. Zoe took her eyes off the road and looked at me. "It's my hair gel, isn't it? I couldn't smell it when I used it. I'm sorry, Barbie." She pulled the car into a Wal-Mart parking lot. We went to the ladies rest room and there was Zoe with her 5'10" body bent over a short sink with her head under the faucet rinsing her hair out. She rinsed as much of the gel out of her hair as she could get out. There she stood dripping and grinning at me.

At one time I had a large circle of friends. It would take both my hands to count them all. When I got sick they abandoned me. They didn't want to go shopping with someone that had to wear a mask. They didn't want to stop wearing their favorite scent so I could breathe freely. I had asked too much of them.

Zoe is a gift. If any one out here in this big world receives a gift of friendship like I have received from Zoe, you are blessed. Zoe has made this disease easier to bear. She has helped make this 52 year old feel young, normal, and happy due to her love and self sacrifice. Zoe has given the gift that will not fade with time. Love and kindness last forever.

Barbie Stump

